

# WB

WRITER'S BLOCK

*Students' magazine for  
writing, film & literature*

# 23

# COLOPHON

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## THE FIRST HELLO EDITORIAL

TEXT TESSEL RIJNEVELDSHOEK & YENTL DUDINK

With delight we present you the first Writer's Block Magazine created by our new editorial board. We are thankful for all the great WBs Nora van Arkel and Rob Steltenpool have lead us to and thrilled to take their place as editors-in-chief. Hopefully everybody will enjoy Writer's Block just as much (we're striving for even more!) as you did before.

It is probably two years ago that we, Yentl and Tessel, met at one of the drinks of the study association of English Language and Culture. Would you have told us then that in three years we would be the new editors-in-chief of WB, we would have been a bit more excited about the future!

Now that we've worked on issue #23 for the past two months, we've learned what it takes to make a literary magazine from scratch. And we can tell you, it is a lot of fun and very rewarding, more than we had imagined before we started, or, you know, two years ago. This is partly because of our editorial board and partly because of the exciting amount of submissions we receive. Our board consists of a bunch of kind, goofy, intelligent, and crazy students who are not only great at editing and writing, but also at making elevator selfies.

As for the submissions: this issue is a well-filled one with a great variety of pieces. You will find not one but two short stories, multiple poems, an essay about writer's block in films, a film review, a book review, a special edition of the bookcase interview and a feature with pictures by a photographer who prefers not to be called a photographer.

Now, leave us alone before we get tears in our eyes, and get on with reading this issue. Keep in mind that your submissions are what makes our magazine worth reading, so please do send us more! **WB**



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

## LOVE LETTERS TO THE DEAD REVIEW

TEXT JUDITH KROON

"Write a letter to a dead person" is the assignment for English class that starts it all. Laurel decides to write to Kurt Cobain, but she never turns her letter in. Instead, Laurel discovers that writing to dead people is safe and comforting, and she fills her notebook with stories told only to those who have no choice but to keep them a secret. She writes to Kurt and Janis Joplin, Heath Ledger and Amelia Earhart, Amy Winehouse and Jim Morrison, all people who died too young, people who remind her of her sister May.



*Love Letters to the Dead* by Ava Dellaira

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

April 1, 2014

327 pages

Through the letters, we learn about Laurel's past, filled with happy memories of her sister as well as loneliness and hurt. We also learn about her present, where she is trying to cope with her sister's death, and make some friends as well as reconnect with her estranged family. Laurel's life is out of control, and so are her emotions. She switches from euphoria to depression in mere seconds, and her grief has made her very sheltered and vulnerable. Her thoughts are innocent and awkward, but beautifully phrased. It is difficult to watch her suffer because she sounds so young and childlike.

Much like the people Laurel addresses in the

letters, the side characters have their own story within hers. I was most intrigued by Natalie and Hannah, Laurel's school friends who may or may not be in love with each other. They were all a little bit damaged and a little bit beautiful, attempting to cope with their feelings through drugs and alcohol, hiding away their secrets. We also learn about May, whom Laurel idolized. Even though May dies before the novel starts, we get to know her through Laurel's memories. Starting off a bit manic pixie dream girl-like, May changes and evolves even after her death.

*Love Letters to the Dead* is an impressive debut novel with a misleading title. The term "love letters" suggests a romantic theme, but while there is romance, the description is too blunt. It doesn't do the story justice. Simultaneously, the novel has a dream-like quality that naturally comes with telling a story through letters, but also with Laurel's voice and Ava Dellaira's storytelling. The fluid writing is one of the strongest parts of the story, and the many layers make it even better. The letters are no distraction from Laurel's story, and the people she chooses to address influence her in different ways. Within this beautifully written epistolary novel, there are so many other stories to discover.

Most of all, *Love Letters to the Dead* is an impeccably written coming-of-age novel, marketed as a young adult story that is as bold as Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* as well as Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. It's a poetic story with delicate words, vulnerable characters and haunting memories. It's an honest, raw, realistic depiction of growing up and trying to cope with loss and grief. It's a story from an incredibly talented debut author, and I'm looking forward to whatever Ava Dellaira writes next. **WB**

The aleatoric moon shone, dancing  
from the dead water, upon  
us, blue devils.  
We spoke with diamond cheekbones.  
The lack of melody was  
overwhelming:  
talk always drowns  
song. We used to walk but sat now,  
and let the water pass us by.  
Here's the tale I  
should have told you then:

I know of a musician –  
he kept his piano keys,  
the black from the  
white, in separate rooms.  
He showed me  
around (changing locks as  
we went): a careful  
tiptoe past our differences.  
The floors are made  
of foil, he said, please  
be careful.

It was with great hesitancy that I presented my letter to you. It was a Thursday, the eighth of May, approximately a quarter to twelve. You were in a hurry when I sat down on the park bench next to you. In that moment I felt like nothing more than my arm, my hand, my fingertips, the raw touch of the off-white paper envelope and the weight of the sentences I'd written in ink. But when I offered the letter to you, you didn't take it. For just a second, as you reached for your purse, you brushed past my nails with your skin. "I have a class in five minutes," you said standing up.

"Okay," I replied, and I got up as well, pretending I had somewhere to go. I didn't.

I fled into the darkness of the cinema like I'd done countless times before in my life. I found something there, a veil of unawareness that came over me and put my mind at ease. I could disappear there, even if it was for just an hour or two. But not today.

I couldn't keep from wiggling my feet, tapping up and down, from clenching my fists until I couldn't feel my fingers. Fifteen minutes in I noticed I bit my lip by the sweet taste of blood that ran into my mouth and the stinging sensation the salted popcorn caused. I put the bag aside, spat in it and left the auditorium, almost tripping on my way down the stairs.

In the restroom I splashed water onto my face, ran my wet hands through my hair and held them under the steady stream again. The gel residue on my hands left bubbles in the sink and I looked at myself in the mirror. My blue eyes and nostrils were red, my ginger hair messy, my lips dry and flat. "You

look like shit," I whispered and closed the tap. "You're pathetic." I dried my hands and took the letter out of my backpack to tear it up and drop it in the bin in the corner.

But then there was that feeling again. Like this piece of paper wasn't just a collection of words, like giving or throwing it away wasn't a simple act or gesture, but something terrible and definitive. It would mean defeat. In that moment my mind was clear enough to notice the tense grasp with which I held on to the off-white, almost creasing it. I sighed, loosened my grip and put the letter back in my backpack, between the history books and the novel you had given me after we had had sex on the floor a month ago. You had reached for it with my head resting in your lap and my gaze fixed on your black hair dangling above my face. I hadn't been able to finish the book before you told me we were over. I hadn't been able to finish it after.

From the fence I watched the kids run around, playing ball games and laughing. The little girl on the swing didn't look a bit like you, but I knew she was yours because I had seen her in the pictures you kept in your wallet, the pictures you had shown me when she was ill around Christmas and you were worried. "Why are you here with me?" I had asked. "Because that's what I want," you answered. Now apparently that had changed.

"Fiona," I yelled. Startled your young girl looked at me. One of her teachers did too, a frail lady with a pair of glasses so large it seemed she would collapse under the weight. I wrapped my fingers around the green steel I was leaning on, tighter and tighter.

"How are you?" the woman inquired as I did my best to crack a smile. She seemed

apprehensive, her eyes squinting from behind her seeing aid.

"Fine," I replied, followed by: "Hi Fiona," when the girl stopped dead in her tracks. "I'm here to give her something," I continued as I pointed at the small child.

"Is that so?" the teacher asked and I showed her the envelope, my letter.

"It's for Fiona's mother, actually, but I missed her today so I was wondering if Fiona would take it home with her instead."

The big auburn eyes looked up at me, at my makeshift grin, and she dug one of her small red shoes into the dirt.

"I'm a friend of your mom's," I added. "Her student, in fact."

"We can't help you," said the hag, "but I'd like to know your name."

Quickly I turned around and started running, the baggage bouncing of my back with each hurried step down the street.

I was waiting under the hazel tree in your front yard when your car pulled up next to the sidewalk. I knew Fiona wouldn't be here, and neither would your husband. On Thursdays they'd be out at the swimming lessons after school.

I waved at you once you exited the car and looked in my general direction. Stunned at first, you dropped your keys. Immediately after, your cheeks ran red and your eyes caught fire.

"Get out," you hissed coming closer, but I didn't. Instead I put my hand on the wooden bench and gently rubbed the spot next to me.

"Come sit with me," I said.

"You can't be here," you whispered as you reluctantly did what I asked. "Why are you here?"

"To try again." I reached for the envelope in my pack and held it in front of you.

"You should have taken this the first time."

"Why? I made up my mind," you said smiling, or faking a smile; it was always hard to tell with you.

"I haven't."

"It's not your decision though, is it?"

"What happens next is," I said, looking straight into your eyes while I tried to put everything I felt into that stare. "Take it. Read it. It didn't come easy."

"And then you'll leave?"

"Maybe."

You cried after. The quiet sort, just tears sliding down your flustered cheeks before hitting the brown blouse you wore. No tears for me, tears for you, for what I could do.

"I told you it didn't come easy," I said.

"But I'm not willing to let you go."

"Don't tell Mark and Fiona," you snivelled. You never snivelled before. "If you love me like you've always said, then please don't."

"You threw me away," I said calmly, "without telling me why. Did you think I would just... accept that?"

"I'm sorry," you cried. Silence then, only the wind through the hazel leaves, before I nodded.

"I gave you your options. I believe I've made myself clear."

You swallowed and inhaled when I put my hand on your knee and I felt your leg's reaction. Your first reflex was to pull back, but you didn't. Instead you looked at me, smirked despite your tears and took hold of my hand.

"Do you want to come inside?" you asked standing up.

"Okay," I replied, and I got up as well. Now I had somewhere to go. **WB**

Her little pumps went clickety-clack

As all the other girls came running back.

Back to their soft mothers and warm homes

But she opened her little legs and faked some moans.

They weren't put off by her bruises, her age or her dead eyes.

All they chose to see were her itty-bitty lies.

The way she called their names and made them feel a man.

The way she earns her money in any way she can.

She inhaled too much pixie dust and was floating on cloud nine.

She glided and drifted into space until she saw a sign.

A sharp and swift blade came running for her head.

She could have jumped and lived but stayed put instead.

No flowers on her funeral, no warm and soft goodbye.

Alone from all that wounded her, nobody left to cry.



# LIESL OLIVER'S BOOKSHOP INTERVIEW

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY YENTL DUDINK & ISADORA GOUDSBLOM

Since 2005, Liesl Oliver has been the owner of the wonderful English Bookshop located in the centre of old Amsterdam. The shop sells new, old, and e-books, and hosts book clubs, creative writing and poetry groups, as well as classes, literary quiz nights, author readings and literary walking tours. There are also regular events for children to stimulate young readers. We spoke to Liesl about her personal interest in books and authors, and about the status of her bookshop and view on the current book market.



## What was the first book that made you really appreciate literature?

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. I think it was the time and place where I grew up that drew me towards it. I'm from South Africa and the racism, the injustice that was present there really made me think about the inequality of my own circumstances. These notions are portrayed, of course, in the novel. I also like the style, and the characters and their names are so intriguing.

## Why did you open a bookshop?

It started by accident. My former husband came home one evening. I used to be a banker and so did he. He came home with a set of keys and said: "What do you want to do for a living?" to which I replied, "Well, anything that isn't banking." So that's how it started: we owned a space and I decided on a bookshop. I wasn't entirely sure about it, though. Amazon was getting stronger and stronger then, this was about ten years ago, and the book industry was not doing great. I decided to structure the shop in a way that is different from other bookshops. The income stream is based upon three categories. You've got the books, the events and the cof-

fee and scones. In addition, there are e-books. The big idea, this is my *pièce de résistance*, is something I'm working on called "Oculus Rift," a 3D game coming out next year. But I'm still really working on the funding of this. It's basically an equivalent to "Google Glass." You put on a pair of glasses and you peddle towards the bookshop. It's a classic Dutch scene. There's a little dog, Piko, sitting in the basket, there are tulips and Albert Heijn bags. You cycle up to the Lauriersgracht and see an old Jordanese woman looking out of the window, with curlers in her hair. Then you open up the shop and the integrated e-book shopping begins! This initiative is about my idea of bookshops. My message is that I want to stimulate reading and selling books. It's about staying alive here.

**The debate between paper books and e-readers has been vicious since the first Kindle came out in 2007. Most arguments have been about the sentimental versus the practical.**

## Where do you stand on this?

I can see there is a place for Kindle, or e-readers in general. For travel, for people who have trouble with their eyesight, or for people who live in remote parts of a country. But I don't think that having a thousand books on your reader will

stimulate reading. I think it will rather put you off because of the volume. It would be better to just take two books that are really good and read those. The game will be all about books we find good, maybe like fifty or sixty books. It will be limited but selected. Because I do think that is the future of everything: it has to be selected.

## How do you choose which books you stock?

Right. What happens is that there's a particular format. It's a literary selection, so we select book-prize winners, Pulitzer Prize winners, and books we review for our book groups. Of course there are the classics, and my own selection. It's not commercial. I mean, of course we've got things like Dan Brown – you have to have that too. But there's no *real* trash. Although, we did have *Fifty Shades of Grey*! But I don't see that as a problem. Back to my own selection, I recently read and really liked Damon Galgut. His writing has a simple, clear style. I feel cleansed after I've read him. Complete. Such a great author. David Mitchell is so great as well. I've just finished reading a novel by Meg Wolitzer, which is also really interesting and an easy book. She got a lot of rave reviews in America.

## If you were to meet an author, who would it be and what would you want to ask or talk about?

That's a great question. Paul Auster. Yes, he's amazing, truly excellent. [Dog barking viciously in background] I like *Brooklyn Follies*, I really enjoyed that, and I liked *Oracle Night* in particular. I did actually hear him give a presentation a long time ago and I did enjoy listening to his speech, but he didn't actually answer any questions. He just read from his book and then got up and left. You know, he has that sort of atmosphere around him – he might have an old fashioned typewriter and a pile of cigarettes. Anyway, I would enjoy meeting him.

## Have you ever met any famous authors?

Yes, I have! I had lunch with Michael Palin! I was invited by one of the suppliers from Van Ditmar. He called me up and said: "Would you like to have lunch with Michael Palin?" Well, definitely! All the big bookshops are going to be there so I thought I'd just sneak in through the back door and go and take a chair at the back of the hall. Then I walked in and I was just two minutes late and there was only one chair left, the interview chair [laughs]. I wanted to sit anywhere but the interview chair. So I sat there and he turned around and said: "So, what is your question?" And I mean, Michael Palin, you've got to be skilled, you know, to interview him. He's so well read and he's done so much. The only thing I could think about was being South-African and I said: "Well, what is your opinion about Zimbabwe?" He swallowed and went: "... haven't been there for a while." Then we had lunch and chatted; it was a very nice afternoon.







### Do you write yourself?

No. But, if the shop does continue, and it's not to say it will, only if all these plans I've touched upon come through, then I'll write a story about the Jack Russell who saved my bookshop, which is actually a true story.

### Do tell.

Well, the shop was supposed to close down on January 1st of this year, due to legal reasons. On December 23rd, a man and his dog walked into the shop. He bought books and left the bookshop. He came running back and asked me if I would like to look after his Jack Russell. I told this strange man that I would like to look after his dog but that the bookshop was closing down in 7 days time. He asked me what the problem was and I told him. He said: "Call the lawyers and get an extension on the sale date." He explained that he details in special financing and could help.

### Finally, what distinguishes your bookshop from all the other bookshops?

This is a *classic* bookshop. It has an old-fashioned approach and I think that in addition to this, there are few bookshops that look into the future as strongly as I do. I'm surprised that some of them have not put into place the kind of events that they need to be doing and that I am doing as well, like serving coffee and tea and such. It's a classic bookshop that looks into the future. Although, it is important to stress this is *not* to say that the bookshop will stay. Financing needs to be reinforced. **WB**



## JHAVIEN KRISTOHBEL: THE CHEETAH, THE LOVER, THE LOST ONE SHORT STORY TEXT C.G. HUFF

Day 42: The Muffin Cage

My beloved Phanta,

I have survived another day of the hell that is my life trapped inside this mind. The walls are coated with glitter, and I haven't seen the purple sun since, well... ever. I don't even know how I got here. I'm not even quite sure where I was before (but I feel like it was somewhere with a better soundtrack: Nickelback is over). All I can remember is this bloody little, glitter-walled muffin. There's even a lanky guard who returns every ten minutes to make sure I'm here.

"Hello, Jhavien Kristohbel," she says. "My, my, you look like you didn't even try today."

I want to reply that her bellbottoms are way too '70s, but I've learned one can only do so much as a cheetah. And, deep down, I know she's right. Natural spots went out in the '90s, but I am trapped in this muffin wearing my natural coat. Despite my solitude and dreadful fashion faux pas, I have managed to obtain a few droppings of information. They are as follows:

1) I am trapped inside the mind of Tim Gunn. Why, I do not know.

2) I really only have the first one, but a list of one seemed pathetic.

Since acquiring this plethora of knowledge, I have ceaselessly plotted a way out. I've saved up extra rations of gazelle meat for the past two weeks in order to build up strength for my quest (my veganism has really taken a hit). As the lightning strikes midnight, I will begin my ordeal. If I do not make it out, remember that I love you, Phanta. We may never have met, but I sense our love will never die.

With love,  
your dearest Jhavien

Day 46: The Jungle Speaks to Me

My beloved Phanta,

Forgive me, Phanta, for I have sinned. I am weak, and this letter may not find you if I do not move from the chocolate rains of this candy cane jungle soon. My cheetah eyes were too big for my imaginary stomach, and I may have eaten a bit too much frosting.

As the lightning strike rang, I began to munch on the glittery muffin walls of my cage. Hours and hours I ate, pausing only for brief respites of my daily yoga and meditation. After four hours of solid feasting, I reached Tim's occipital lobe and started wreaking havoc. Fantastical images began flooding into the muffin: griffins without wings, myself stark naked in the mirror smoking Cheetos, mothers breastfeeding stray pigeons, you know... the usual. Yet it soon became too much for me, and I fainted from existential confusion.

I awoke in a fuzzy panic of wine-drenched sweat with a gurgle in my stomach that spelled disaster. After depositing the contents of my entrails into an occipital tube labeled "fashion," I finally felt able to renew my journey with fresh vigor.

It was on my quest's second day that everything went to hell.

I found myself in an octopus's garden with biscuits growing everywhere: biscuits upon biscuits as far as the eye could see. In the distance, a horse and a decrepit octopus were watering the biscuits by a gingerbread house. I ran to this mystical stranger, and, while I did want a biscuit, I knew there was work to be done; and yet, that finny was the most glorious horse I had ever seen. Granted, she was the *only* horse I had ever seen, but you have to understand, my dear Phanta, that I believed she was *the one*. While

I politely inquired of the mollusk as to where I could find the closest metro stop, my eyes never left that horse's mane.

"Oi, ya bleeding git," the eight-limbed one replied, "ya think ya can just accost me like this in me own garden? Why the 'ell are you staring at Penélope like that? Ya don't even know her. She's Penélope the Diamond Horse and she doesn't need another old geezer like you mounting her day and night. I met her long ago when her glittering frame shot kaleidoscopic rays of Plastiscine light at my face, blinding me with wonder and confusion. She ran away with fright at first, but she came back as I always knew she would, which means she's mine. Now get out of here, ya tomcat, before I sic an obsidian gorilla with firecracker nipples after ya!"

I didn't know what to do. Very little of that made any sense, then or now. I had to make a choice, though: run away, or grab Penélope and run away. While the latter would give the mollusk a chance to beat me with its De Stijl gardening hoe, that was a chance I needed to take. Hopping onto Penélope's back, we escaped towards the lilac sunset in a flurry of shredded biscuits while my artistically abstract wounds bled upon the ground.

On and on we rode, caught up in the ecstasy of our first voyage, but all the while searching for a way out. It wasn't until we reached the candy cane jungle that we stopped making love long enough to realize we were lost, so very lost. We knew being lost in this jungle only meant two things: death and shrinkage. I knew it, Penélope knew it, and the creepy, wingless griffins stalking us knew it.

It was after the griffins had fled that the love of my life (besides you, of course, Phanta) left me as well. She mentioned something about twenty quid and a driving lesson she had to get to, but I knew it was a lie: driving lessons are way more expensive.

Thus, here I am, writing you from an abandoned

tree house not knowing how on earth FedEx will reach me. My dear, sweet Phanta, I know you have never been as well dressed as me, but I'm willing to overlook that in my final days. I hope you remember me as you met me: hot-blooded and semi-nude on a public street, wearing nothing but Ray-Bans, a leather jacket (my cousin Stephaan's), a white button-up, boots, tight black jeans, headphones, and an ascot: only the essentials. And, even as fabulous as I looked then, you still look nearly half as good.

As Mr. Rogers said: "Remember me in the biscuit garden of your mind or I'll fucking murder your ass." He had a way with words I was always smitten with, and I hope you were smitten when you were with me.

With love,  
your dearest Jhavien

Day 47: Be Home Soon

Phanta,

Well, this is awkward. Turns out Mr. Rogers was in the tree house next to me watching old reruns of his show, which explains why I could hear his quote so well, and I was just in the Amazon for a week. I really need to cool it with the psychedelics. Anyways, I'll see you in a day or so. On a side note, I'm not sure whether Penélope was real or just a frog with a great hairdo; I hope you're not mad either way.

Cheers,  
Jhavien **WB**

I'm very fortunate to live in a place where there is night.  
I know of some cities  
where you can't ever shut your eyes and open them again and  
not know the difference.  
Where you can't ever dip your forehead in  
quiet oblivion  
because the air never stops flashing with noise.  
At home, on a lucky night,  
I see slanted shadows sleeping on the kitchen floor  
spreading thinly between sheets of window glass  
as the moon finally pierces its liquid gaze  
straight into my palm  
without being diffused by streetlights.  
You can taste shadows,  
and moon shadows taste  
a melancholy sweet.  
Like wild strawberries: striking but  
harder and harder to come by.  
They're warming, a salve for frozen toes  
like a sweet after-midnight liquor  
for those seeking sleep in the carpets.  
I wish I could bottle my kitchen floor moon shadows  
and slip them into an air vent  
or a stranger's plate of pasta just so  
someone else could taste darkness' perfume and let  
something holy  
penetrate their skin.



# APPARENTLY NOT EVERYONE LIKES CAKE REVIEW

TEXT ISADORA GOUDSBLOM

Going to see Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013) was perhaps the strangest cinematic experience I have undergone to date. After having seen the film I was told it was an adaptation of (Dutch-born) Michael Faber's novel of the same name. Seeing that the film was so elusive and incorporeal, I wonder how on earth such a book would play out.

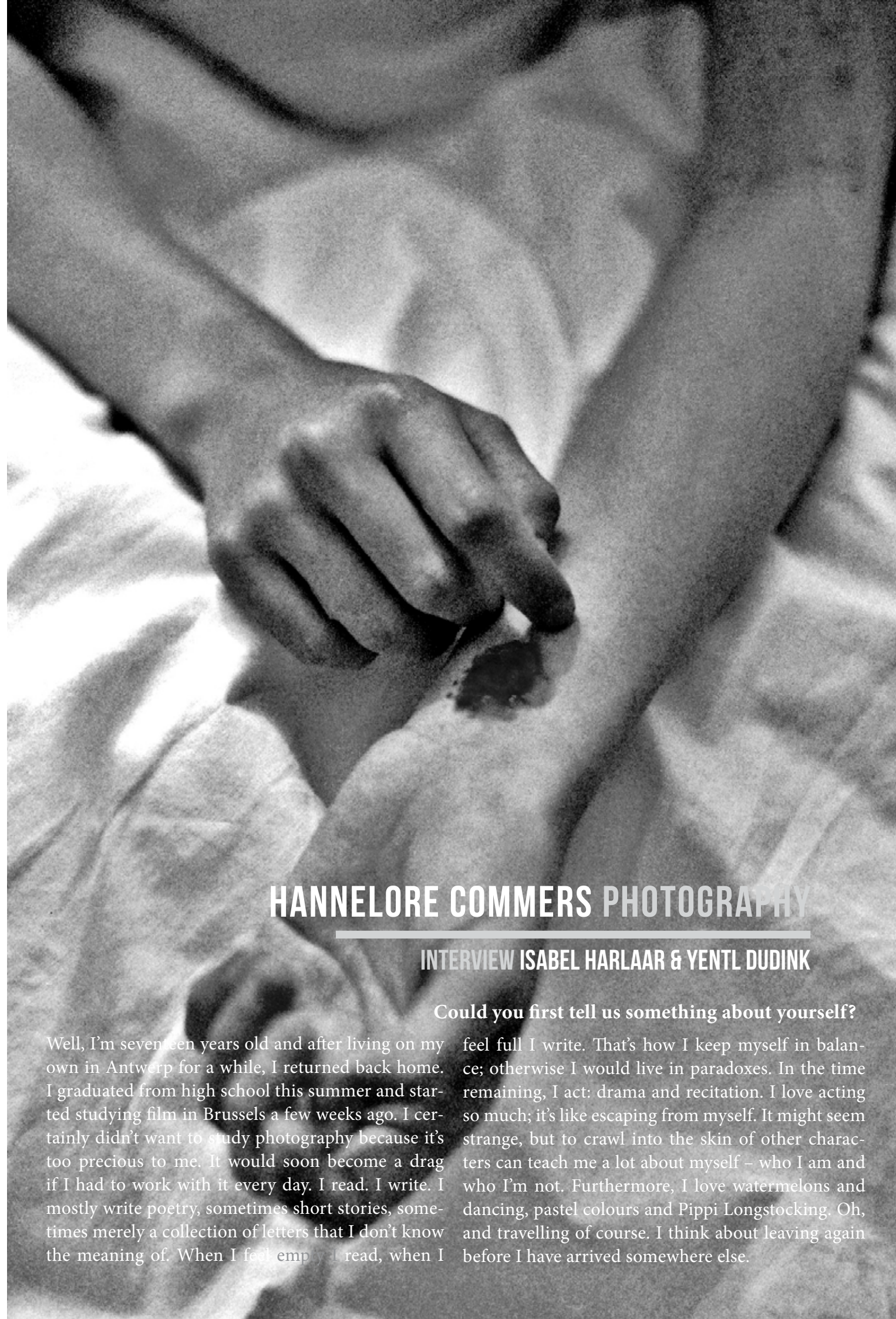
Scarlett Johansson plays the lead: a most hypnotic young woman with short black hair and deep-red lipstick, a femme fatale in the most literal sense. She drives around Scotland in a van, picking up men from the streets. These men are instantaneously spellbound and follow her into a non-representational house, where they slowly fall into an abyss of black liquid. Their bodies vanish, leaving empty skins behind.

During the course of these "missions," we intermittently see shots of the Scottish Highlands and of "regular folks" eating in fast food restaurants and walking down the streets. These shots serve as likable supplements to the rest of the film, where nothing is really "real," all is hauntingly dreamlike, often even crudely horrific.

When we see Johansson attempting to eat a piece of cake in a diner, we realise something is truly off. She can't consume it



and ends up gagging. Does this mean she wants out? Out of whatever it is she is pursuing? Out of this skin? I'll leave the rest up to you, but brace yourself for some esoteric story lines, images, and characters. The cluelessness of the film is tiring, I tell you that. But it goes to show that there *are no answers*. Much exceeds the realm of the conventional, but I'd say, relish this visually stunning gem, this artefact of the known *and* the unknown. **WB**



## HANNELORE COMMERS PHOTOGRAPHY

INTERVIEW ISABEL HARLAAR & YENTL DUDINK

Could you first tell us something about yourself?

Well, I'm seventeen years old and after living on my own in Antwerp for a while, I returned back home. I graduated from high school this summer and started studying film in Brussels a few weeks ago. I certainly didn't want to study photography because it's too precious to me. It would soon become a drag if I had to work with it every day. I read. I write. I mostly write poetry, sometimes short stories, sometimes merely a collection of letters that I don't know the meaning of. When I feel empty, I read, when I

feel full I write. That's how I keep myself in balance; otherwise I would live in paradoxes. In the time remaining, I act: drama and recitation. I love acting so much; it's like escaping from myself. It might seem strange, but to crawl into the skin of other characters can teach me a lot about myself – who I am and who I'm not. Furthermore, I love watermelons and dancing, pastel colours and Pippi Longstocking. Oh, and travelling of course. I think about leaving again before I have arrived somewhere else.



**Could you tell us the story of how and why you became a photographer?**

First off, I don't think I'm a *photographer*. I think the term photography is heavily charged, even though it comes close to what I do. Still it doesn't make me a photographer and being called one sort of scares me. It all simply started out with having a beautiful sister. I loved taking pictures of her, because any way you would turn it, she had this pure beauty in her. I keep growing bored with things, so I don't understand what it is that makes taking photographs still interesting to me. Sometimes I think it's imagination or fantasy. Sometimes I think it's the fear of forgetting. Taking pictures helps me a lot to escape monotone days and helps me to experience my environment differently every day.

**What are your main sources of inspiration?**

Imperfection and ugliness. What we often forget is that when you look at ugly things, they get beautiful in their own way. It is a challenge to discover beauty in all that is ugly. Inspiration can be found everywhere: not only in the bigger things of life, but also in the everyday dullness.

**It seems like youth is one of the main themes in your photographs. Could you tell us more about this theme?**

Youth certainly is an important theme in my images.

I am seventeen years old and many of my friends are too. One's teenage years are interesting and rather difficult at the same time. It's fascinating to see how a teenager is balancing on a thin line between being a child and being all grown up. Adulthood is continually looming somewhere in the background, but it cannot touch you yet. We are so vulnerable at that age and it's exactly that vulnerability that I try to capture in my photographs.

**We've noticed that you like photographing people, but often don't put their faces on show. Is there a reason behind this?**

A lot of my photographs capture personal moments. I like to catch intimate moments because they have such an interesting atmosphere. Oftentimes the atmosphere of a space is powerful enough, which renders showing a person's facial expression unnecessary. If that's the case, I let the space, the lighting, and the intimacy do the work.

**What are your ambitions for the next five years?**

Five years is a long time. It's scary to look forward; the future is still such a blank space. I would love to work as a clown doctor someday, but I haven't a clue whether that's going to happen within five years or twenty. I also want to learn how to love someone properly. It's something that I find difficult at the moment. I now often love people so fervently that it hurts. **WB**





# BEATING AROUND THE BLOCK ESSAY

TEXT JULES SCHLICHER

Every writer needs inspiration of some sort. A spark, an idea to fuel an article, poem, essay or story, is always necessary. If there is no spark, whether that's because it fell dead to the floor or because it simply had no cause, the writing is blocked. You know what I'm talking about: writer's block. It's the Sith Lord of writing, the guillotine of creativity, and the bringer of haemorrhoids on the fingers. This foul fiend of blocking can be beaten, though. You need only read a good book, listen to some music, or see some films. More specifically, you need to watch *Adaptation.* (2002) and *Stranger than Fiction* (2006) right after you've finished reading this article.

Let me begin by explaining what kind of a film *Adaptation.* is. To define it would be impossible, let alone shove it into a genre-box. To furnish it a description, I would say that it is a film about writing that explores its art, process, success and failure, and much more. It stars Nicholas Cage in the double role of Charlie Kaufman, which is the name of the actual scriptwriter of the feature, as well as his brother, Donald. Charlie is not a very sociable or confident person. He would much rather let his writing and characters talk for him, as he is prone to anxiety and nervous sweating. His twin brother is a hyper-enthusiastic guy full of life and libido, convinced that whatever he wants to do, he'll succeed in.

We meet Charlie when he is on the set of *Being John Malkovich*, a film written by the real Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze, who also di-

rected *Adaptation.*. As the flick is garnering attention for Charlie, he gets an offer to write a film about an orchid poacher, John Laroche. This is to be the adaptation of a book written by a journalist, played by none other than Meryl Streep. The problem is that Charlie cannot make flowers interesting, and he doesn't know how to make the film interesting without resorting to clichés. His writer's block grows when his brother attends a scriptwriting seminar and starts to write his own script with spectacular zeal. To eventually overcome his problems, Charlie goes to considerable lengths that stretch both his principles and style, as well as the "rules of scriptwriting." First and foremost: he puts himself in his own story.

Now, as I have already told you, the actual scriptwriter of *Adaptation.* is Charlie Kaufman. The entire story is based on his experience of trying to turn the book *The Orchid Thief* into a film over a painful period of years. Nicholas Cage portrays Charlie's plight wonderfully, showing just how gifted an actor he actually is. His voice, his mannerisms, his body language – all of it makes Charlie Kaufman an unbelievably compelling character in an extraordinary film. It is a film about writing and everything that goes with it. Utterly brilliant.

Next to *Adaptation.* there is *Stranger than Fiction.* The main character is Harold Crick (Will Ferrell), a dull man with a dull life that is seemingly controlled by his wristwatch and numbers. Everything he does is calculated, from the amount of brushstrokes of his toothbrush on

his teeth up to the number of steps he has to take in order to catch the bus to work. His life is narrated peacefully by the lovely voice of Emma Thompson, until he notices that it actually is narrated. He hears someone narrating his life. From now on, he seemingly cannot do a single thing without hearing that he is doing it, albeit described more poetically than it actually is.

Harold tries to go about his business and ignore the voice as much as possible, but when the narrator reveals that "little did he know that this . . . would result in his imminent death" he decides to do something about the voice. He ends up consulting Jules Hilbert, a professor of literature played by Dustin Hoffman. Initially, he thinks Howard to be a loon and does not want to help him. Then, however, Harold repeats the phrase that prophesized his death. The words "little did he know" change Jules' opinion. "I've written papers about 'little did he know,' I used to teach a class based on 'little did he know,' " he says, which is a familiar idea to anyone who has ever studied literature. The professor tries to find out what kind of a story Harold is in – a comedy or a tragedy – and he searches for the writer of his story.

This writer, played by the aforementioned Emma Thompson, is struggling with a writer's block. She does not know how she must kill Harold Black. In any case, she has to, because that is how her stories go. Her publisher sends her someone to help her with her problem, but alleviating a writer's block is easier said than done. Especially when, after a long search (and this is a major spoiler so if you don't want to know what is going to happen next you should start reading the next paragraph...), Harold tracks

his writer down, phones her up, comes to her apartment and asks her not to kill him. Imagine the experience of a character you made up showing up at your doorstep with such a request. Heart-stopping.

Like *Adaptation.*, *Stranger than Fiction* plays with its narrative and gives us funny little nuggets of the writing craft to think about. And, as in *Adaptation.*, there is a wonderful performance at the heart of the film that both is both comedic and tragic.

The great thing about both of these movies is that they have their own logic in which their respective plots and characters function perfectly and flawlessly. Anything that could be criticised is meant to be criticisable, as they are deliberate flaws that reveal the struggles of the writers behind them. Why anyone would want to criticise these films, though, is beyond me. Not only are they brilliant in their own right, but they also are extremely thought-provoking, especially for an audience that is familiar with literature and writing.

So, are you feeling inspired? Has your writer's block been beaten or dented in the slightest manner? No? Then why are your eyes still glued to this paper? Go and find a screen to see these films and beat your writer's block and have a brilliant time doing it! Now! **WB**

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Tessel Rijneveldshoek. I like rhetoric and grammar. A ginger who's planning on publishing your work, not on stealing your soul. Yet. I can be bribed with sour candy.

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Yentl Dudink, but what's in a name? I'm not quite as scary as my height would suggest, but I would love you to tremble before my boundless enthusiasm for language and literature.

**YENTL DUDINK**  
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I'm Isabel Harlaar, devourer of books and film fanatic extraordinaire. I love drinking cubalibres and listening to David Bowie. Please don't feed me too much sugar or I'll become as fidgety as SpongeBob SquarePants.

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Jules Schlicher. Me in thirty words? Oh, 26 now. No, damn, just fifteen little words left, actually. Reader, writer, musician, gamer, student, baker, mediaphile, joker, sportsman, eater. Basically: a lover of everything.

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Paul Hofma. I love writing, but love writing poetry more. I'm just a normal human like the rest of you, except I'm in physics. So trust me; I'm an engineer.

**PAUL HOFMA**  
Editor, Twitter Manager & Website Manager

I am Ines Severino, a meowing lefthanded Portuguese appreciator of comic books and sci-fi movies. I love editing so the writing style of a piece is consistent in its beautiful uniqueness.

**INES SEVERINO**  
Editor & PR Representative

I'm Isadora Goudsblom. Fervent lover of reading, poetry, weird films (hence my job in one of the last remaining video-stores, yes REALLY) and finally, and I'm sorry for this, correcting your English.

**SADORA GOUDSBLOM**  
Editor & Treasurer

Ilona Roesli, cultural adventurer. In a perfect world I would live in a museum, write, read magazines, newspapers, books and make a hell of a living out of it.

**ILONA ROESLI**  
Editor & Secretary

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