

The MANTELPIECE

Issue 2

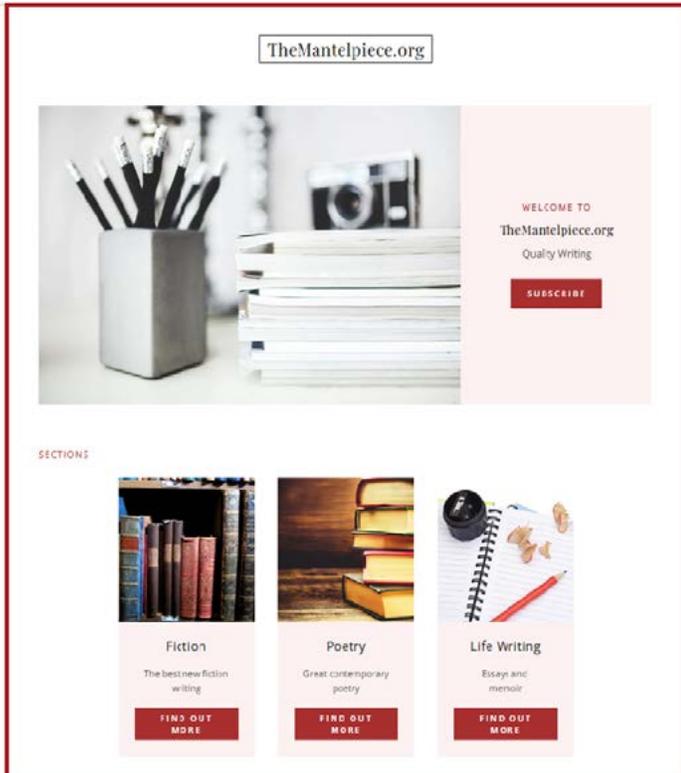
Literary Magazine

August 2023





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Readers as Co-Creators

Enriching the Storytelling Experience

In the vast and intricate world of storytelling, there exists an often-underestimated force that breathes life into the written word—the readers. While authors craft narratives with their imagination and skill, it is the readers who become the active participants, lending their interpretations, emotions, and experiences to complete the storytelling tapestry.

When writers craft a story, readers become the catalysts that bring it to life. With their diverse perspectives and experiences, readers imbue the text with their own unique interpretations, adding depth and complexity to the narrative. They create mental landscapes, visualize characters, and actively engage in the storytelling process.

The role of readers as co-creators is exemplified through their imaginative engagement. As they traverse the pages of a novel or poem, readers conjure vivid images, hear dialogues, and feel the emotions woven into the words. They breathe life into the characters, giving them voices, faces, and backstories. In this symbiotic relationship, readers collaborate with the author, adding depth, complexity, and individuality to the narrative.

Readers also emotionally invest themselves in the story, forging connections with characters and sharing their joys, sorrows, and triumphs. Through this intimate engagement, literature becomes a mirror through which readers explore their own humanity and find echoes of their own lives.

Furthermore, readers inspire and empower authors. Through feedback, reviews, and literary discussions, readers

provide valuable insights, encouragement, and motivation. The relationship between readers and authors is a symbiotic one, as writers draw inspiration and growth from the engagement and reception of their audience. Readers' enthusiasm and support propel authors to continue crafting stories that resonate deeply with the human experience.

In the digital age, readers have even more avenues to connect and engage. Online communities, book clubs, and social media platforms facilitate vibrant literary conversations, where readers can share thoughts, insights, and inspirations. These spaces expand the boundaries of the storytelling experience, fostering a sense of community and collective engagement.

Authors also benefit from readers' involvement. Feedback, reviews, and discussions inspire and motivate writers, shaping their craft and growth. The relationship between readers and authors is symbiotic, with readers propelling writers to continue creating stories that resonate deeply.

In conclusion, readers are active participants and co-creators in the storytelling process. Their interpretations, emotions, and engagement enrich narratives and add depth to the meaning of the text. As they bring stories to life through their imagination and empathy, readers shape the cultural impact of literature and inspire authors to keep crafting captivating tales. Let us celebrate the invaluable role of readers as they contribute to the vibrant tapestry of storytelling. □ LH



四季 Four Seasons

Melissa Ren



Photo: Florian / Adobe Stock

冬天 Winter

Hàorán Wong was in the winter of his life, living in a cookie-cutter room painted in buttercream and outfitted with standard-issued furnishings for ease of efficient turn-over. His only belonging was a carry-on suitcase, which stood upright in the wardrobe, still filled with a few clothes he never bothered to unpack.

Children's giggles echoed in the hallway, causing his chest to ache. Another grandparent's birthday, he assumed. Or maybe it was the weekend when visitors came in troves. If he had the energy to get up from the armchair, he would have closed the door. Instead, he turned off his hearing aids and stared out the window.

The parking lot wasn't much of a view, but it was the only view that mattered to him. He hoped for the day he'd glimpse his daughter among a sea of cars.

Ming-Yue was a grown woman now, barely recognizable, married with children of her own. Two, the last he saw, though it'd been six years since they'd seen one another at his wife's wake. He still called Wen his wife, having never signed the divorce papers in hopes she'd find her way back to him.

She never did.

All of Wen's closest friends, friends he didn't recognize, attended her funeral ceremony. There, Hàorán met his two grandsons for the first time. He never got their ages, but

assumed two and four from their size. The eldest looked just like him: a narrow face with sharp eyes. Named after his grandmother, Warren stood tall by his mother's side as she clutched her youngest in her arms. Warren bowed three times without prompting, to pay his respect to Wen. As he stepped away from the altar, the boy flicked his gaze to meet his grandfather's eyes and smiled.

As if they knew one another.

On one of the saddest days of Hàorán's life, his heart was finally full.

秋天 Autumn

During the Mid-Autumn Festival, when most celebrated a fruitful harvest under the full moon with their loved ones, Hàorán spent the evening with a woman nearly half his age, someone he'd met one night while drinking *báijiǔ* at a bar. Her thin, yet shapely figure first drew him in. But then she spoke, her sultry voice lingered in the air. Smooth, like jazz music. Sexy and full of want. She leaned in, clasping the stem of her glass as her knee brushed against his. A sensation effervesced within him. She smiled with teasing eyes. And that's all it took.

When they were together, he'd felt as young as her. Stronger. Desirous. The man he should have been. Not a husband to a nagging wife. When did he lose sight of who he was?

She'd massage his shoulders in bed like a dà lǎo, a big shot, and he started to believe it. They dined at fancy restaurants he'd never taken Wen. Splurged on jewellery he'd never given Wen. Sipped on cocktails at jazz clubs while Wen and Ming-Yue were sleeping.

That night, as lanterns filled the sky and families gazed at the moon, Hàorán hand-fed his lover the mooncakes he bought for his daughter for the Mid-Autumn Festival. After all, Ming-Yue's name meant 'bright moon' after the auspicious celebration. She was turning eleven in a few days. He'd replace them tomorrow, he thought.

On the cusp of the morning hour, Hàorán left his woman's apartment in the city as he so often did, taking the longer route back to the suburbs. As he drew closer to his home, a heaviness filled his chest. The warmth he'd felt only hours ago evaporated into the crisp night.

The lights to his house were on, brightening the entire street. His heart thrummed against his ribs as he pulled in.

Wen had waited up for him.

The night was long from over. For a moment, he considered turning around, but he'd have to face Wen, eventually.

He took a breath before opening the door. All was quiet inside. Wen wasn't sitting on the couch as he expected.

She wasn't sound asleep in their bed either.

And neither was their daughter. Their closets had emptied. Suitcases with it.

Wen and Ming-Yue were gone.

She'd finally left him.

夏天 Summer

Only days into the season and the summer mugginess flooded the house, suffocating Hàorán and clouding his chest. Everything stuck to his body: the newspaper to his forearm, his thighs to the vinyl chair, the hairs to the back of his neck, the skin-to-skin of his underarms.

His muscles tensed as he glared at the monthly bills scattered across the kitchen table. He dropped his head into his palms and groaned. Hadn't he just paid the bills? Where did the time go between months?

He opened up the cheque book and scribbled the date, amount, signature. Date, amount, signature. Over and over.

When did life become so cyclical? So monotonous? Working a job he hated, paying a mortgage for a house he didn't want, living in a neighbourhood too far from the city, married to a woman he wasn't sure he loved, preparing for a family he didn't have.

Did he even want children? He was in the prime of his life, and yet, responsibilities had aged him. Was this all there was to living? Eat, shit, sleep, repeat.

Repeat.

Repeat.

Repeat.

Not that long ago, Hàorán had dreams of travelling the world and discovering new cuisines. He wanted to read more books, watch foreign films, listen to jazz music. Maybe grow

his hair long and take up surfing or cycling.

He yearned to just be.

Marriage had changed him, that much he knew, and the truth made his insides rot.

Wen entered the kitchen, a small smile touching her lips. She placed a cardboard bakery box knotted with a red string on the table. Inside were six perfectly round mooncakes, its shape a symbol of family unity. He hated those things.

She slid a hand over her belly, her cheeks shaded rose. With wistful eyes, she whispered, "You're going to be a father."

春天 Spring

Spring blossomed the city with buds, colouring the trees with peas and gardens with confetti. Hàorán cut across the quad to enter the campus bookstore to collect reading materials for his last semester. He was passing through the English Literature aisles when a girl caught his eye.

Long black hair, a gentle face, a smile that lit up the entire room. She stood by herself, leaning against the bookshelf as she laughed while reading. Hàorán's chest warmed. He watched her from the gap between two aisles. She flipped the page and giggled once more. The corner of Hàorán's mouth ticked up.

Beautiful.

She snapped the book closed and met Hàorán's eyes. He snatched the first book at arm's length and pretended to read the back cover. He could feel her watching him. His heart rattled in his chest as he counted the passing seconds. Once he hit thirty, he chanced a glimpse.

The girl wiggled her fingers in a wave.

Heat rushed to his cheeks. Hàorán contemplated waving back, but he couldn't feel his arms. Or his legs.

She pulled her backpack over her shoulder and walked straight toward him. A lump in his throat prevented him from speaking. Instead, he managed an awkward grimace. The girl smiled, bright and innocent.

He'd made her smile. And that knowledge sent a thrill through him. He wanted to do it again.

"Do you always come in here and pretend to read so you can stare at girls?" She smelled like a strawberry milkshake.

His eyes rounded.

"I'm just teasing." She tucked her hair behind her ear with a graceful hand. "I've never seen you in this aisle before. I'm usually the only one."

She'd noticed him, too.

With a sudden confidence, he said, "I'm Hàorán. And I wasn't staring at all the girls. Only one."

She bit her lower lip, blushing. "Together, our names could be summer."

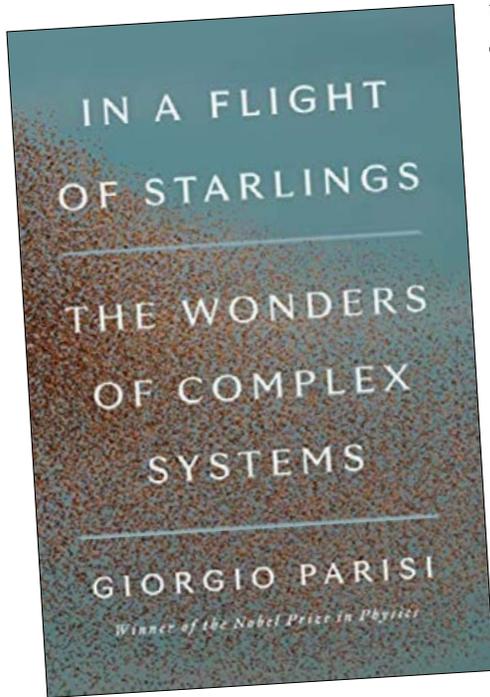
Hàorán tilted his head.

"My name is Wen." Warm.

His name meant 'overwhelming' and in that moment, he wanted nothing more but to spend a summer with her. And every summer after.

Hàorán's entire life was ahead of him. □

New Nonfiction Books



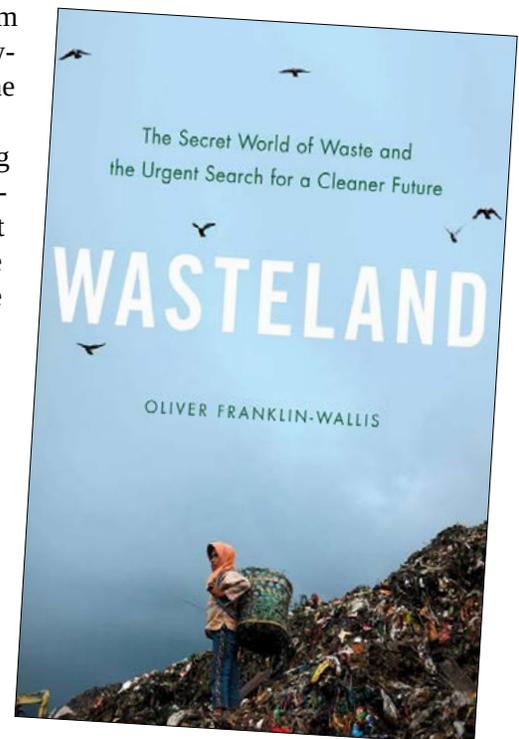
In a Flight of Starlings - The Wonders of Complex Systems by *Giorgio Parisi, with Anna Parisi, translation from the Italian by Simon Carnell (Penguin Press)*. Parisi, a theoretical physicist who bagged the 2021 Nobel Prize in Physics for his outstanding research on how components structure themselves within larger entities, presents a compelling first book for the lay reader. It mirrors his scientific journey and reflects on the scientific process. Parisi stresses that it's imperative for the public to grasp basic scientific principles, particularly in light of existential threats such as climate change and Covid-19, where science comprehension can enable proactive actions and effective responses.

Moving beyond just the hard science, Parisi also ventures into the philosophical realm. He provides thoughtful insights on how groundbreaking scientific innovations come into being. He provides glimpses of his scientific career to demystify how researchers work, with highlights that include his exploration of spin glasses - metal alloys characterized by spinning particles that lend them characteristics of molten glass, and his study of molecular behavior during phase transitions. Recounting his research on how starlings fly en masse without colliding, Parisi narrates how he captured 3D images of airborne birds and unearthed that usually, it's the small factions on the edge of a flock that instigate turns, with every bird mimicking its immediate counterparts. Parisi also delves into the mechanisms of scientific innovation, suggesting the role of unconscious thought in sparking breakthroughs. His attempt to simplify complex areas like particle physics is commendable, and his personal experiences shed light on his journey. His tribute to the scientific method is engaging and insightful. □

Wasteland - The Secret World of Waste and the Urgent Search for a Cleaner Future by *Oliver Franklin-Wallis (Hachette)*. Oliver Franklin-Wallis, a British journalist, was once meticulous about washing his plastics before placing them into the color-coded waste bins he and his wife maintained at their residence. However, his curiosity led him to investigate what really happened to his trash, and the discovery was far from satisfying.

During a visit to a recycling facility in New Delhi, he witnessed workers stuffing shredded waste into an extruder that churned out small gray microplastic pellets referred to as nurdles. He also toured another plant in northern England, learning that almost half of the bales of plastic they received were unprocessable due to excessive contamination. Franklin-Wallis ultimately concluded that plastic recycling was more illusion than reality. He observed and wrote about a worrying trend that had emerged over the years among corporations. A typical company, especially those in industries producing high volumes of plastic waste, often pledges publicly to guarantee the recyclability of its product packaging. However, once the wave of public scrutiny dies down, the company typically retracts its commitment behind closed doors. Worse yet, these same companies often lobby vehemently against the introduction or enforcement of legislation that aims to curb the usage of single-use plastics.

This disillusioning revelation is underscored by a comment from Larry Thomas, the former president of the Society of the Plastics Industry, who stated: "If the public thinks recycling is working, then they are not going to be as concerned about the environment." The statement encapsulates the hidden cynicism of an industry that appears more interested in public perception than genuine environmental stewardship. □



Wreckage

Sydney Lea

Driving a wire-thin road
on my way back home from a local trout stream,
I braked, no traffic behind me,
in fact not a car in sight.
Backlit by lamplight, her shadow
showed on her cabin's window blind.
O Lord, how stooped.
O Lord, how ungainly.

A miracle some twenty years since,
it was as if she'd dropped from a cloud
to her place in these back woods,
well after few remembered
—if they ever knew, that is—
what a legend she'd been. I remembered.
I instantly summoned her face
from my red-lacquer LP's jacket.

*Through the winds of December
And the magic of May
Through a million tomorrows
I'll remember today.*

I played that one song again and again
so often that one winter morning
my mother, hoarse and hung-over,
threw the record down and smashed it.

I've long forgiven her
for that and for other random explosions
as I strive to pardon my own.
My rage, to be sure, matched the moment.
And so did hers.
But that silhouette on the blind,
no matter how quickly gone,
sent me back to those scattered red shards.

O Lord, what a trail of ruin.

An American Sandwich

Simone Martel

The view from Aunt Carol's row house took in streets of more row houses and, in the high distance, a nuclear power plant looming over a cow field.

"I don't mind," Aunt Carol said. "You get used to it."

But Susan heard the power plant ticking in her restless, jetlagged sleep and startled awake in the attic bedroom next door to her cousin Emily's room. At daybreak, she got out of bed, still tired, and stood on the bare floor at the dormer window, worrying about the miniature cows grazing in its shadow.

To Susan, the tall cooling tower with its concave curves looked like a clay pot thrown on a giant's pottery wheel, but that was her seeing it with a Berkeley kid's eyes. In reality, the power plant was dan-

gerous. One meltdown in England could poison the entire island, her dad, Jack, had told her. "And then where would you go? In America, you could always keep driving." Of course, Jack would say that, safe in California.

On their daytrip to Hadrian's Wall, Susan had seen other cows scratching their rumps on rough Roman stones. Cows had been in England forever.

"Seems wrong they plunked down that creepy nuclear thing so close to the cows," she said over cornflakes at breakfast.

"The cows don't know the difference," Emily replied.

After breakfast, Susan's mother, Kate, told Susan to grab her boots. They would go for a walk, excusing themselves from telly-watching with Aunt Carol and Emily. Aunt Carol's favorite soap opera,

Where the Hat Is, was hard to sit through, Kate and Susan agreed: Arrogant Clive was cheating on his sweet wife Pansy, and Aunt Carol made sad little noises while she watched.

"We're fitness freaks," Kate explained, lacing up her hiking boots. "Still stuck in that California mentality. We'll drop it in time."

"I hope not!" Susan said, following her mother out through the French doors.

"Shall we walk into town?" Kate asked. That meant skirting the field where the cows idled below the cooling tower.

"Let's not," Susan said.

"Suit yourself." Kate unlatched the gate, and the two of them stepped out into the back lane. "You looked like you could use some air," Kate said, walking fast over the cobblestones.



Susan didn't reply, out of breath already. If Kate were honest, she'd admit she was the one who needed to escape the English relatives.

For the first time, more people came to Susan's mother to give advice than to ask for it. They treated Kate as an abandoned wife, not a newly promoted professor. Sunday, lunchtime, Aunt Sarah and Aunt Thelma had turned up uninvited. In the kitchen that smelled of boiled cabbage and starchy-steamy Birds custard, they'd folded their arms under their breasts. Aunt Thelma had shaken her head. "Such a shame, love."

Susan pulled up her parka's hood and trotted after her mother, out of the back lane and onto the common. "Does it rain all summer?" she asked, jumping over a puddle.

"Yep. What a place. This is my roots, kid. The hypodermic needles jutting out of the mud are as much a part of it as the flowerbed in front of the vicar's cottage. Metaphorically speaking."

Kate had morphed into Professor McPhee, but at least she was talking to Susan now. Back at Aunt Carol's she'd sink unspooking into an overstuffed chair and stretch her legs toward the electric fire.

"Brrr." Kate zipped up her parka. "Still, only another week."

"And then..." Across lawns, across oceans, Susan followed her mother, trying not to mind, though often tired.

As they munched their way through the wet grass, the mud-stained Susan's hiking boots with dark thumbprints. Susan raised her head, and with a tourist's eyes sought the beauty her relatives claimed was there: the grass sloping to a pond where, behind purple heather, a black swan glided over dark water, the sky pressing down, low and gray, as water-stained as her hiking boots. Susan tried to describe her claustrophobia as though to a friend back home: "England is a dark country. I keep thinking I've forgotten to take off my sunglasses." And she went blind to the scenery, seeing another country where people wore sunglasses.

"I miss California."

"Tough," Kate said and mumbled more words lost to the wind.

"You're acting more like a teenager than a mum," Susan wanted to say. She almost looked forward to Nairobi, be-

cause there, at the University, her mother would regain her power.

"We won't live in a hut," Susan said.

"I told you, the University of Nairobi is quite modern. The housing is good. And wait till we get out of the city. The birds, Susan!" They were passing a trio of pigeons sheltering from the drizzle beneath a park bench. "The plumage, the electric colors."

"Isn't it wrong to admire wildlife and scenery in a country with hungry people?" Kate was getting soft. She criticized the "safari mentality" in others.

"True, some people live in appalling conditions. You'll see beauty but you'll also see things that will hurt." As though nothing had hurt Susan before. "You'll witness the eternal struggle of humans fighting to dominate nature, fighting for food, fighting to assert themselves against disease and drought."

Susan and Kate had marched beyond the common to the local dump, or "tilt," and now walked along the crest of the hill, the pond below them on one side, a sea of garbage on the other. Here was nature dominated. Was this what Kate wanted?

"I'm sorry you miss California, kiddo."

"I miss Dad, too."

"I think the divorce was inevitable. Where there's love there's often hate. In time. Peace is nice, but more often life's a war. Speaking of eternal battles."

For Kate to pretend she had chosen to fight was a lie, though. "He left you, Mummy. It's his problem. Not yours. Not your war." If only Susan could say that.

"I do want you to have some fun on your holiday." Kate and Susan trudged down the back lane again until they came to Aunt Carol's gate.

"Please not the stinky indoor swimming pool again."

"Right." Kate pinched her eyebrows together. "Don't suppose the sheepdog trials would grab you?"

"Give it up."

They pulled off their boots at the French doors. Inside, the soap opera's credits were rolling off. Susan went to the window and pushed aside the gauzy white curtain. Homesickness for Berkeley, for her American dad, clutched at her throat. She swallowed, squeezing tears into her eyes. Why did she have to travel around the world because her parents' love had turned to hate? Why couldn't

they just get on? According to Kate, the Kenyans fought an eternal struggle for their survival. What did Jack and Kate fight for?

Low clouds scuttled over the field, and the cows drew closer together. Half a dozen calves lounged on the ground, while their mothers stood over them, protecting the calves from what? The wind, maybe. Fat lot of good they'd be in case of nuclear disaster. Emily was right, though, the cows and their calves didn't know the difference.

"That's what makes you human," Kate would say. "You are aware of your struggle."

"What struggle? I am being dominated," Susan could have replied. "All I can do is stick it out until I'm old enough to be on my own."

Behind Susan, Kate said, "Susan and I were discussing what to do with the rest of our holiday."

Susan turned back to the room. "We could have a picnic. Out there on the grass."

Emily was setting empty teacups on a tray. "Under the 'creepy nuclear thing' No thanks."

"Too damp," Kate said.

"I'll go on my own then."

Kate glanced down at the newspaper on the coffee table, her brown eyes scanning the headlines, not much of a listener, though she liked the sound of her own voice.

"What shall you have for this picnic?" Aunt Carol asked. "Shall I whip you up some egg and cress sandwiches?"

"No. An American sandwich," Susan said, though she'd have to walk into town past the cows to pick up the groceries. "Turkey. With mustard and mayo. And—"

Aunt Carol's hands went to her hips. "And?"

"Tomato and lettuce." Susan counted the ingredients on her fingers. She finished on the first finger of her second hand. "And pickles."

Aunt Carol shook her head, then smiled. "I'll give you my rubber-backed blanket so you won't mind the damp."

"Watch out for cow pies," Emily said.

Would they all peek out of the window at Susan sitting in the drizzle? Too late to back out of it now. She would picnic alone in the field with the cows: nature dominated, but also nature enduring. □

Back to Abu Shukri

Revisiting the Best Falafel Stand in the Universe

Mira Dessy

I knew Jerusalem would be hot in the summer. I was completely unprepared for the relentless arid heat and the wavy shimmer in the air as if a mirage might appear vertically in front of me at any time.

My husband and I have brought our three girls to visit my aunt Haya. She's been to visit us a number of times over the years, however this is our first visit to Israel. We arrive at her second-story walk-up apartment in Ramat Gan to a hand-drawn welcome note on the door. Haya ushers us into her light-filled and much cooler apartment. We're introduced to Frankie, her cat, who instantly bonds with our youngest daughter. After unpacking our suitcases we wander out onto the patio and gaze out at the hills. In one direction there are buildings and rolling hills with trees and greenery. In the other direction there are fields and goats. We can hear their bells clinking as they wander and forage. There's something peaceful about the setting which feels almost as if we've stepped into the past.

A couple of days later, after we've managed to shake off the jet lag induced by the seven-hour time difference, we decide to wander into the Old City. Approaching the limestone walls it again feels as if we're stepping into a different time. As soon as we walk through the gate we're greeted by the sight of a tea vendor walking slowly down the street holding a tray with small cups of mint and a teapot of hot water. The sharp piquant scent of mint catches our noses as he wanders by. Haya laughingly tells us that the shopkeepers will provide cups of tea for free. However she warns us that if they invite us to come in and sit down and they serve us tea we'd better be prepared to bargain pretty hard because they're about to sell us something.

As we wander the streets of the Old City we notice an electric feel to the air. Surrounded by a variety of languages there's a different energy and pace to the city. It's blisteringly hot making it easy to understand why people are moving so slowly. The heat is so intense no one wants to rush. In fact, some of them don't seem to want to move at all. We walk past a shopkeeper sitting on a bench fanning himself outside his emporium. "Want to come in and let me rip you off?" He asks. We laugh, shake our heads, and continue on.

As we walk down one alleyway there's a delicious smell emanating from somewhere. Haya says it's the ovens where the sesame seeds are being roasted for tahini and guides us there. We stop for a bit to watch the workers with their huge wooden paddles deftly shifting enormous piles of sesame

seeds inside what looks like an oversize pizza oven. As we stand there we realize we've been assaulted on all sides by delectable smells, hints of spices, baked goods, and more. And we're hungry. Haya announces that she's taking us to the best falafel stand in the universe, we'll get lunch.

Wandering away from the sesame seed ovens we wend our way through twisty alleyways, up and down stone steps, and through stone archways, until we arrive at a tiny out-of-the-way, hole-in-the-wall restaurant called Abu Shukri. The five of us look at it in disbelief. This is the best falafel stand in the universe? Really? Haya assures us it is and gently shepherds us inside where we are greeted with a tantalizing aroma that has us all salivating. She places our order at the counter and we find a place to sit.

A short while later our food arrives looking beautiful and smelling mouthwateringly delicious. It turns out to be a revelation of how amazing a simple meal can be. We start with fresh hummus that includes whole chickpeas generously drizzled with a peppery delicious olive oil and fresh parsley, a plate of falafel hot and freshly made. They have a wonderful



Photo Mira Dessy

The author with her aunt Haya and daughter during her first visit.

crunchy outside and a tasty crumbly inside, plus there's soft, warm, freshly baked pita breads that relegates any other pita I've ever had to the cardboard category. The meal is accompanied by an Israeli salad made with intensely flavorful tomatoes, crisp cucumbers, and aromatically sharp red onions. The six of us dive into the contents of the platter, chatting and laughing as we devour the meal.

Satiated to that point of two bites past full, a deeply satisfied contentment emanates from all of us. There is nothing so wonderful as a meal that is delicious enough to nourish you on many levels. Quite frankly this meal spoiled me for falafel, hummus, and pita for years to come. It took a very long time for the memory to fade to the point where I was able to eat these things again and not mourn that it wasn't from Abu Shukri.

* * * * *

Fifteen years later I return to Jerusalem on a solo visit, unencumbered by children. I'm taking a break from a full life to spend time with my beloved aunt. My previous visit was an energetic adventure to an exciting new place with activities every day leading us all over the country. I realize this visit is a slower, more mindful visit. It is also the first time in my entire life I will have an extended period of just-us-time with my aunt. Since my last visit, Haya has moved into Jerusalem proper. Walking from the bus stop to her apartment, I note a greengrocer down the street with an abundance of colorful produce spilling over the trays by the door. There's also a sweet-looking little restaurant and a grocery store across the street from her building. I'm a little sad not to see the hills and the goats, yet also delighted with this walkable neighborhood that seems to have what she needs very close to hand.

After I get settled, Haya asks me what's on my list of things to do while I'm in Jerusalem. I share that my most important thing is to simply spend time with her. After that, I'd very much like to go to the Kotel, The Western Wall. And then I tell her I must go back to, "the best falafel stand in the universe". All these years later I've forgotten the name but not the taste. She laughs and says, "Do you mean Abu Shukri? I haven't been there in years. That would be lovely."

Three days later, we make our way to the Old City. We decide to go to the Kotel first. Making my way over to the wall, my hair covered in a borrowed scarf that's been shared at the entrance, I stand in front of the wall. I can feel the energy of those who have stood there before me. I've already written my prayers and carefully folded them. Reaching into my pocket, I pull out these tiny white pieces of paper, gently pushing them into the cracks in the wall along with the countless others. Putting my hand on the wall, I bow my head and let the energy of this place wash over me. I'm surprised to find tears welling up in my eyes. Although I'm Jewish and have a spiritual practice, I'm not highly observant and rarely go to temple. Yet somehow being here, now, in this place stirs some forgotten whisper of spiritual resonance and seems to connect me to those who have come before. Eventually, I feel a sense of peace settle over me and a few moments later. I release my hand from the wall and walk back over to Haya.



Photo Mira Dessy

The author at the Western Wall during her second visit to Jerusalem.

Leaving the plaza, we head out to find Abu Shukri. We get lost. With all the twisty turns and not well-marked alleyways all over the Old City, if you don't know where you're going it can be difficult to find specific destinations. We ask directions three times. I'm reminded again of how Israelis don't seem to like to admit they don't know where something is. The directions go something like this, "Walk that way, take two rights and a left, then ask someone else." We're getting pretty hungry at this point, so luckily we do eventually find the restaurant.

To my delight, the place still looks just as much of a hole-in-the-wall as it did the first time I saw it. I'm amused by the difference in my reaction. The first time I was dubious and somewhat leery; this time I'm all in and grinning at the prospect of the meal ahead. The entrance is tucked into the alley and sits halfway between sunlight and shadow. The walls are hung with an assortment of art all in a line while the front counter is loaded with containers and a collection of pictures fills the wall behind it. The intervening years have done absolutely nothing for the décor. Their reputation, as evidenced by online recommendations in *the New York Times*, *Trip Advisor*, and more, has apparently not encouraged the owners to "fluff it up" and try to make the space more appealing to tourists. They have a good thing going and surely know it. It even smells just as I remembered, although the memory of it didn't come back until I was confronted with the scent again at entering the place. I'm salivating before we even get to the counter to place our order.

The meal does not disappoint. Haya and I once again indulge in hummus, falafel, pita, and fresh salad, enjoying the food, each other's company, and a delightful wide-ranging conversation. And once again, we rise from the table with a full stomach, a delighted mind, and a contented heart.

Abu Shukri is thousands of miles from where I live. I do plan to one day get back there. For now, I remember it fondly and have to content myself with making my own hummus. □

Making your own Hummus

Mira Dessy

Hummus is actually very easy to make at home. There are two strategies for making your own. The first is to start from scratch and begin with dry chickpeas, also called garbanzo beans. Rehydrating chickpeas is not difficult however it does take some time. One of the benefits

of rehydrating chickpeas is that there are no added preservatives, it's just the chickpeas. Another benefit is that you can make extra and freeze them. If you're not into the idea of rehydrating chickpeas you can always use the canned variety.



Rehydrating Chickpeas

2 cups dried chickpeas
6 cups water
1 teaspoon salt

Pick out stones or foreign matter from chickpeas
Rinse well and drain
Put into a crockpot with water and salt
Cook on high for 3 hours
Remove the crock from the cooking element and pour the chickpeas into a colander to drain
Rinse well, scrubbing to remove as many of the waxy skins as possible for a smoother, more silky hummus
The chickpeas are now ready to use

The rehydrated chickpeas will keep in the refrigerator for 2-3 days. If you'd like you can pat them dry and freeze them. Frozen chickpeas will keep for up to 6 months

Homemade Hummus

2 cups cooked, or canned, chickpeas
1/4 cup water or whey
2-3 tablespoons lemon juice (depending on your preference)
1 1/2 tablespoons tahini
2 cloves garlic, crushed
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Garnish: extra olive oil, paprika, and fresh chopped parsley

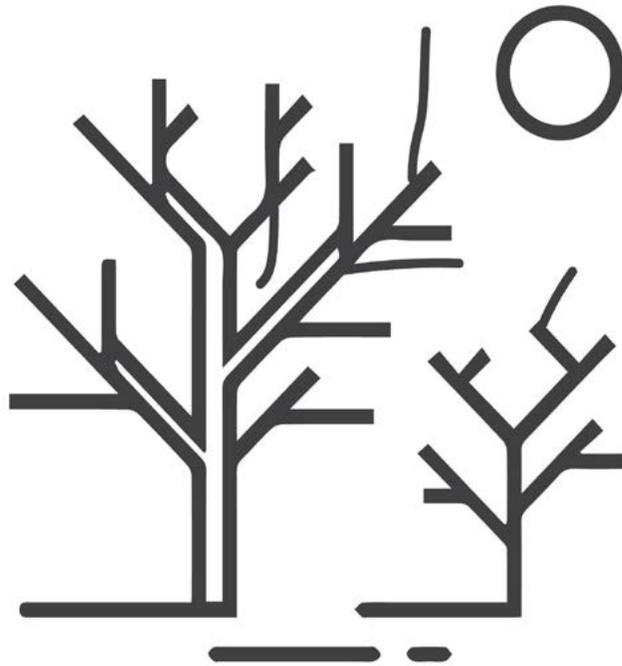
Combine chickpeas, water/whey, and lemon juice in a food processor
Blend together, slowly adding olive oil to the mixture until it starts to stick together
Add remaining ingredients
If needed add a little more olive oil to make it smooth
Spoon hummus into a serving bowl or dish
Drizzle with olive oil, garnish with a dusting of paprika, and a sprinkle of fresh chopped parsley

Eternal Winter

Erin Jamieson

I trace your chapped lips
in the center of a town square
snow blanketing streets
& naked branches
reaching towards us
like the ghosts of lovers
who now live in eternal winter

you pull away
so our last moments
will be forever distilled
in sepia: shadows, misty streetlamps
homes burdened with the weight
of endless snowfall



Exploring Nature and Perception

Olafur Eliasson's Influence on Modern Art

Eric N. Patel

In the realm of contemporary art, few names shine as brightly as Olafur Eliasson. This Danish-Icelandic artist has carved a unique path in the art world, captivating audiences with his immersive installations and thought-provoking creations that blend the boundaries of art, nature, and perception. Through his unparalleled vision and ingenuity, Eliasson has left an indelible mark on modern art, reshaping the way we experience and interact with artistic expressions.

A Fusion of Art and Environment: Immersive Installations

Eliasson's artistic journey began with a fascination for the natural world. He sought to harness the raw power of nature and weave it into his artworks to evoke emotions and provoke deep contemplation. Eliasson's installations often feature elemental components such as light, water, and air, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in a sensory journey that tran-

scends the traditional confines of art galleries.

One of his most celebrated works, . This colossal installation featured a massive artificial sun that illuminated the Turbine Hall, while a mist enveloped the space, creating an illusion of being in a surreal, otherworldly atmosphere. The piece invited viewers to reconsider their relationship with the environment and how human actions impact the climate.

In another captivating installation, "Ice Watch" (2014), Eliasson trans-



Your Rainbow Panorama on the rooftop of the AROS Museum in Aarhus in 2011.

Photo Mozzihh/Wikimedia Commons

ported colossal blocks of ice from Greenland to the streets of Copenhagen and later to Paris during the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference. This powerful display of melting ice acted as a poignant reminder of the urgency of climate change, urging viewers to confront the consequences of global warming on our planet.

A Catalyst for Perception: Altering Reality

Olafur Eliasson's mastery of manipulating perception and perspective is a hallmark of his artistic prowess. By skillfully utilizing mirrors, light, and innovative spatial arrangements, he has the uncanny ability to transform ordinary spaces into mesmerizing optical illusions that challenge our notions of reality and expand our understanding of the world.

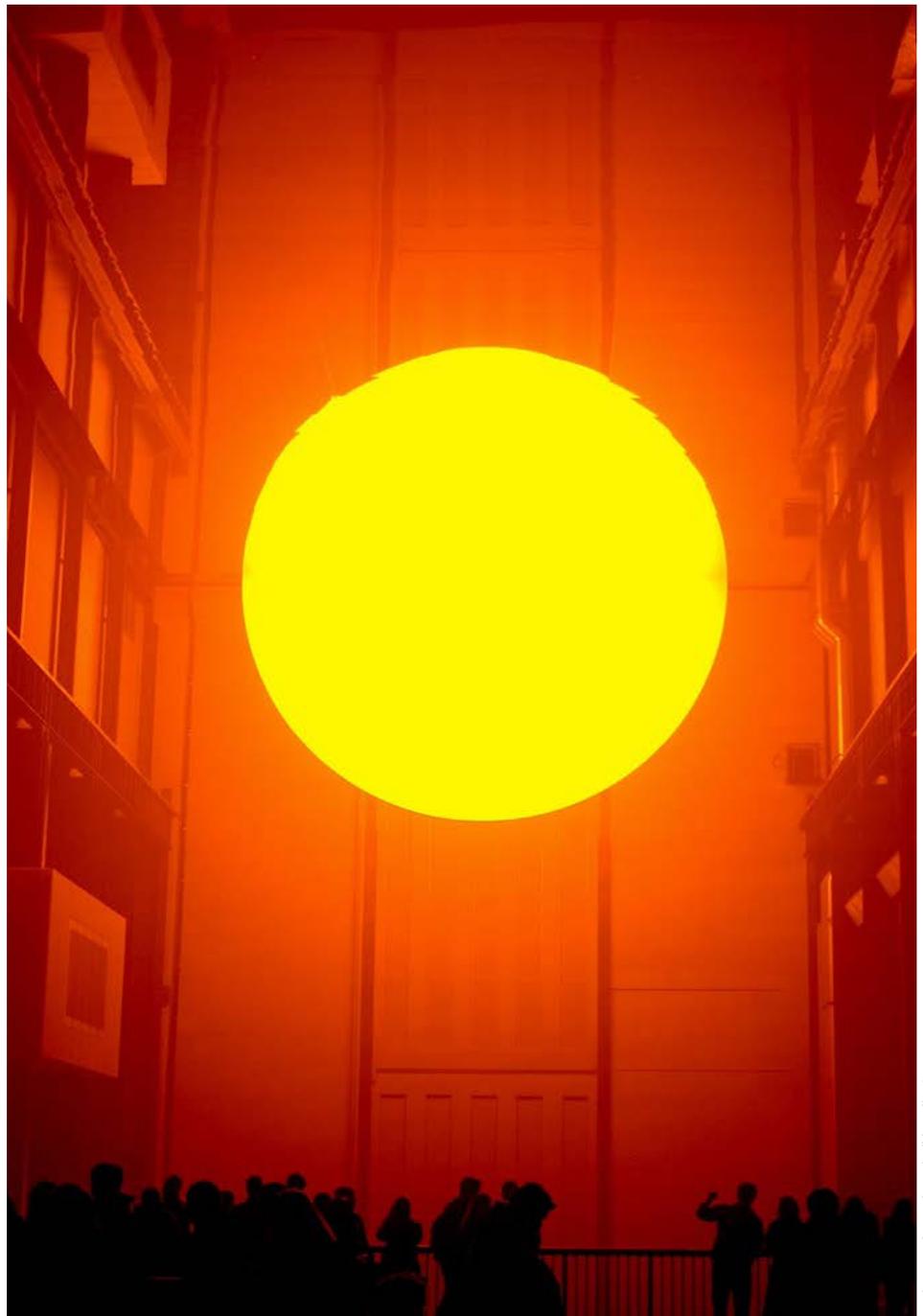
In his iconic work "Your Rainbow Panorama" (2011), perched on the rooftop of the ARoS Museum in Aarhus, Denmark, Eliasson takes visitors on a captivating journey of color and light. Encircling a circular walkway, enveloped in glass panels that showcase a spectrum of vivid hues, the installation immerses viewers in a sensory kaleidoscope. As they stroll along the pathway, the colors blend harmoniously with the horizon and the sky, blurring the boundaries between art and nature, and offering a truly transformative experience.

Beyond just captivating visual trickery, Eliasson's art often invites audience participation, making viewers active participants rather than passive observers. His series "Beauty" exemplifies this concept perfectly. Comprising geometric mirrored sculptures that reflect and refract their surroundings, these multifaceted works create a dynamic interplay between art and space. As viewers interact with the sculptures, they become part of the ever-changing artwork, their movements altering the appearance and experience of the piece. This

interaction compels viewers to reflect on their relationship with the artwork and their surroundings, leading to a profound exploration of the nature of perception and self-awareness.

In the realm of contemporary art, few artists have managed to challenge perception and reality as effectively as Olafur Eliasson. Through his ingenious use of light, mirrors, and spatial manipulation, he creates spaces that blur the lines between the physical and the imagined, inspiring viewers to question

the very fabric of their existence. Eliasson's installations are not mere spectacles but profound catalysts for introspection and contemplation, urging us to reevaluate our understanding of space, the environment, and ourselves as active participants in the grand canvas of life. With every installation, he continues to push the boundaries of art, leaving an indelible mark on modern art and inspiring artists and audiences alike to explore the boundless possibilities of perception and reality.



Eliasson's emblematic work The Weather Project at London's Tate Modern in 2003

Photo Robert Dimov/Wikimedia Commons

Beyond the Gallery Walls: Engaging the Public

Eliasson's impact goes beyond the confines of art institutions. His projects often extend into public spaces, bringing art closer to people's everyday lives. For instance, "Waterfall" (2006) graced New York City's East River, seemingly defying gravity as water cascaded from a small platform beneath the Brooklyn Bridge. This spectacular display of nature within an urban setting sparked conversations about the coexistence of urbanity and the environment.

Eliasson's 2008 project, "The New York City Waterfalls," featured four large-scale artificial waterfalls in different locations along the waterfront. This ambitious undertaking not only delighted and intrigued passersby but also raised awareness about water as a precious resource and the need to preserve it sustainably.

A Voice for Climate Change and Sustainability

Olafur Eliasson's work has always been intertwined with his concern for environmental issues. By blending art with environmental activism, he has managed to reach a broader audience and spark dialogue about climate change and sustainability. His installations often serve as a poignant reminder of humanity's impact on the natural world, urging viewers to take action and foster a more profound connection with the environment.

Eliasson co-founded the social and environmental sustainability studio "Studio Other Spaces" with architect Sebastian Behmann in 2014. The studio focuses on projects that emphasize social and ecological responsibility while fostering creativity and innovation.

Olafur Eliasson's influence on modern art is undeniable. His innova-

tive approach to merging art and nature, altering perception, and raising awareness about environmental challenges has inspired a new generation of artists to explore similar themes. Through his interactive installations and thought-provoking creations, he has redefined the role of the artist as a catalyst for change, challenging viewers to rethink their place in the world and the impact they have on it.

As the art world continues to evolve, one thing remains certain: Olafur Eliasson's enduring influence will resonate through the ages, leaving an indelible mark on modern art and inspiring generations to come to reimagine the intersection of art, nature, and perception. Through his boundary-pushing artistic endeavors, Eliasson encourages us all to embrace our collective responsibility as stewards of the planet and reminds us that the connection between art and the environment is a powerful force for positive change. □

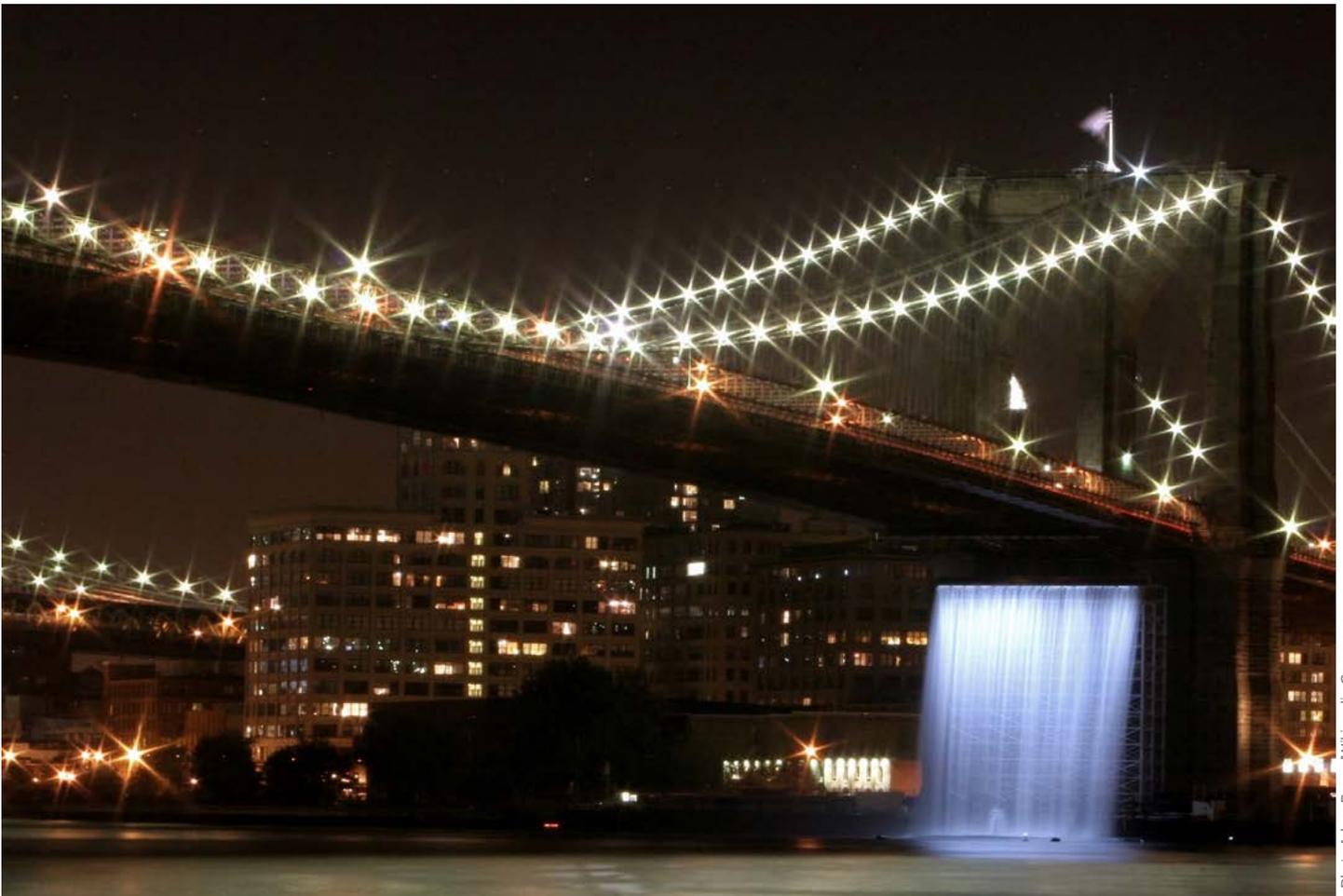


Photo Adam Brown/Wikimedia Commons

Olafur Eliasson's *The Waterfall* under the Brooklyn Bridge in September 2008.

What's Love Got to Do with It?

Erik N. Patel

Ah, love! That enigmatic, elusive, inexplicably potent four-letter word that has proven responsible for more unbridled ecstasy and abysmal sorrow, more soaring passion and crushing despair, more heartrending ballads and syrupy pop songs than any other concept in the dazzlingly varied human experience. It has been hailed as the driving force behind some of the most awe-inspiring feats and spectacular blunders in our collective history. It has given birth to works of art that have left us breathless with their stunning beauty and torn asunder by their poignant resonance. Not to mention its bewildering ability to transform otherwise intelligent, rational beings into lovestruck simpletons, babbling incomprehensibly and making grandiose gestures of affection. Indeed, it is an enigma that impels us to ask: what, in the grand scheme of things, does love have to do with it all?

When we gaze at the daily grind of our existences, love—for all its vaunted stature, theatrical grandeur, and highfalutin splendor—often finds itself relegated to the backseat, a forgotten passenger amidst more “practical” concerns. Pause for a moment and introspect: how many of us, with absolute sincerity and conviction, can declare that we have followed the Bard’s immortal advice, allowing love to guide our way when we selected our vocation, when we deliberated over insurance providers or mortgage plans? How frequently, while pondering the potential benefits and drawbacks of a job proposal or a house relocation, have we stopped to consider, “Yes, but will this move enable me to maximize my capacity for discovering and nurturing romantic love?”

My bet is, not often. Despite our insistent portrayal of love as an omnipotent force, a deity reigning supreme over human emotions, it seems more akin to an irksome hitchhiker, incessantly voicing unsolicited opinions as we try our best to steer through the tricky turns and slippery slopes of life’s journey.

What’s more, the immense weight of expectations and societal pressure that accompanies this colossal concept of love is enough to send even the staunchest heart into a tailspin. From our tender years, we are indoctrinated with a belief system that positions love as the ultimate destination, the elusive pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, the magical potion that promises to heal all our wounds and deliver us our ‘happily ever after.’ “Fall in love,” they entreat, “and you will finally feel whole. Fall in love, and you will ascend to a euphoria hitherto unknown.”

The pillaging doesn’t stop there. Love, in its insidious cunning, often manages to rob us of our cherished pastimes, our individualistic pursuits, our very identities. It’s an artful burglar that slips away with our time, our interests, and our sense of self. Remember those halcyon Sunday afternoons spent immersed in a riveting novel, or those tranquil evenings spent strumming your guitar? Bid them adieu. Now, your leisure time will be filled with moonlit strolls and sunset picnics, your social media feeds will overflow with lovestruck selfies and declarations of affection, and your friends—those unwavering pillars of support who have weathered countless storms by your side—will probably begin to question your existence.

The glorification of love permeates our literature and art. We have countless sonnets, novels, films, and songs dedicated to extolling its virtues and magnifying its pivotal role in our lives. “Love is all you need,” crooned the Beatles, and this sentiment has been echoed down the annals of time. But permit me to ask this: can love negotiate with your cantankerous landlord? Can love alleviate the symptoms of a particularly nasty flu or magically clear your overflowing inbox? If anyone ever manages to craft a sonnet about love’s remarkable ability to tackle the mundane hurdles of everyday life, I’d eagerly sign up for a reading.

The real irony, though, lies in this: even if, against all odds, love does live up

to its glamorous billing, even if it delivers on every fantastical promise and turns out to be everything that poets, lyricists, and Hollywood scriptwriters would have us believe, it is inevitably transient. All that fervor, all those fluttering butterflies, they’re as fleeting as a summer squall. One day you’re soaring on the wings of bliss, and the next, the wings have been clipped, leaving you in a free fall back to the stark reality of dirty laundry and overdue bills.

However, before we lose ourselves in cynicism and skepticism, let’s remember one thing: love, despite its confusing nature and frustrating complications, remains one of the most profound human experiences. It opens us up to the joy of companionship, the comfort of deep connection, and the thrill of shared dreams and ambitions. Love is a journey, and like all journeys, it comes with its fair share of potholes, detours, and traffic jams. But it also offers scenic routes, breathtaking views, and the invigorating thrill of discovery.

Yes, it can be messy, unpredictable, and utterly baffling, but isn’t life itself so? Perhaps instead of asking, “What’s love got to do with it?” we should be asking, “What’s life without it?” Love, in all its complicated glory, teaches us patience, resilience, forgiveness, and empathy. It allows us to experience vulnerability and strength simultaneously. It has a unique way of both grounding us and setting us free.

So, the next time you find yourself contemplating the chaotic circus of love, remember this: love, despite its countless imperfections and inevitable frustrations, remains the heart’s sweetest melody. So what does love have to do with it, really? Everything, it seems. It is the soundtrack of our lives, the rhythm that drives us, the pulse that gives life its vibrant color and depth. It may not be perfect, but perhaps that’s what makes it such an essential part of the human experience. So embrace it, for all its madness, and let it add to the symphony of your life. □

A Dangerous Dance with Nature

Volcano Tourism at Fagradalsfjall

Lillian Heimisdottir

Sitting in the heart of the Reykjanes Peninsula, Iceland's geological playground, the Fagradalsfjall volcano paints a vivid portrait of nature's untamed might. This fresh volcanic marvel, an addition to the nation's already rich catalogue of over 130 volcanic mountains, stands out as a fiery exclamation mark on Iceland's icy landscape. The crimson glow of its eruptions pierce through the cool Icelandic sky, unfurl-

ing an astounding spectacle of fiery brilliance.

Since its recent awakening, Fagradalsfjall has proven to be a powerful magnet, pulling in legions of tourists and locals alike. The lure of witnessing this raw, destructive, yet strangely captivating spectacle has proved irresistible to many. As awe-inspiring as it is, however, the sight of the burgeoning crowds around the volatile site stirs a sense of deep

concern. From the adrenaline-fuelled thrill-seekers to tourists ill-prepared for the harsh and unpredictable conditions, it is clear that many underestimate the potential danger lying beneath the volcano's mesmerising facade.

The Reykjanes Peninsula, a region famous for its geothermal springs and rugged, lava-strewn terrain, is no stranger to the vagaries of volcanic activity. This is a land carved



Eruption of Fagradalsfjall volcano

Photo Mateusz/stock.adobe.com



and moulded by the fiery temper of the Earth's core, but the eruption at Fagradalsfjall, with its increasing volatility, presents a novel and complex set of challenges. The region's dedicated rescue teams, despite their renowned courage and expertise, now face an unprecedented situation as they navigate the harsh, ever-changing terrain and manage the influx of intrepid yet often foolhardy visitors.

The Fagradalsfjall eruption site is approximately an hour's drive from Reykjavík, the nation's capital, making it more accessible than many of Iceland's other volcanoes. This ease of access undoubtedly plays a significant role in the escalating visitor numbers. The anticipation of the approaching spectacle is palpable amongst the travellers as they wind their way through the country's scenic routes towards the volcanic site. However, the accessibility of the site also exacerbates the inherent risks associated with such volatile natural phenomena. The unpredictability of volcanic eruptions,

combined with the escalating number of visitors, has created a situation fraught with potential danger.

The words of the brave rescue workers who are stationed at the site provide a chilling insight into the grim reality of the situation. Extracting individuals who become trapped in the fiery flow of lava is an incredibly complex and perilous task. Such rescue attempts typically necessitate aerial evacuation, a high-risk operation that isn't always feasible given the capricious weather conditions and the volcanic ash plumes. The stark truth is that the chances of successfully rescuing individuals trapped by the relentless, molten lava flows are precariously low.

Another alarming aspect of this natural spectacle is the wildfires ignited by the volcanic eruption. The once frost-kissed terrain, now scorched by the blistering heat, has given rise to wildfires that are relentlessly spreading across the landscape. Firefighters labour against these flames day

and night, their valiant efforts often masked by the dense, choking smoke billowing from the fires. This smoky shroud has swallowed the hiking trails leading to the eruption site, obscuring visibility and further heightening the risks for the visitors.

The grandeur of Iceland's Fagradalsfjall is both a beauty and a beast. Its jaw-dropping spectacle is offset by the potential danger it represents. Every billowing smoke plume, every erupting fountain of lava, while a sight to behold, also serves as a sobering reminder of the perils inherent in volcano tourism. As the fiery display continues to mesmerise and draw in crowds, it is crucial for each individual to remember the volatility and unpredictability of this grand spectacle. The allure of such awe-inspiring natural wonders is undeniably compelling, but safety should never be compromised for the thrill of adventure. In the face of such raw power, caution, respect and preparedness are paramount. □

Narrating Reality

A Journey into Creative Nonfiction

Eleanor Jiménez

In the chill stillness of the early morning, the university campus lays out like a canvas, waiting for the brushstrokes of cerebral fervor to bring it to life. The calm before the storm of intellectual exploration is palpable. As an instructor, I stand at the precipice of a remarkable journey, ready to guide a battalion of curious minds through the winding labyrinth of a genre that is both delightful and perplexing – creative nonfiction.

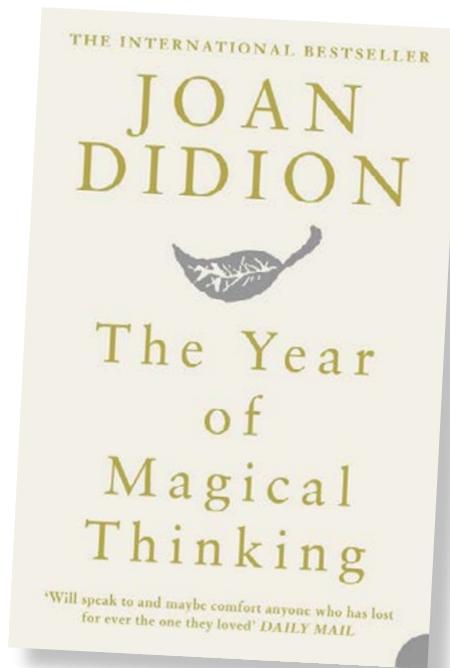
As I step into the threshold of the lecture hall, a silent symphony of anticipation greets me. The rustling of paper, the hushed whispers of early conversations, the soft laughs that punctuate the room's quietness – all create a vibrant living portrait of intellectual curiosity. The first gentle rays of dawn make their way through the tall windows, casting spectral shadows across the polished wooden panels. I step onto the stage, a beacon amidst the sea of inquisitive minds.

The expedition begins with the insightful words of Lee Gutkind, the mind behind the Creative Nonfiction magazine: “Ultimately, the primary goal of the creative nonfiction writer is to communicate information, just like a reporter, but to shape it in a way that reads like fiction.” I allow the profundity of these words to seep into the room before I add, “This, my dear students, is the very marrow of creative nonfiction. Our mission today is to uncover its layers and decode its complexities.”

Our first point of exploration is Joan Didion's heartrending work, “The Year of Magical Thinking”. This memoir, a raw, intimate exploration of grief, serves as our initial doorway into the realm of creative nonfiction. In this work, Didion transcends the conventions of

journalistic writing, merging cold, stark facts with a compelling, deeply personal narrative of her own grief and loss.

“The Year of Magical Thinking” is not just a record of events that happened in the aftermath of her husband's sudden death. Instead, it's a window into Didion's psyche, her emotional landscape. Here, we're not merely observers but invited guests, allowed into her most pri-



ivate moments of sorrow and confusion. This depth of emotional honesty creates an intimate connection between the author and the reader, making the memoir a transformative reading experience.

One aspect that stands out in our analysis is Didion's masterful portrayal of loss. She doesn't just tell us about her husband's absence; she lets us feel the profound emptiness that fills her life in his absence. We delve into the poignant

passages where Didion describes her attempts to maintain normalcy amidst the consuming sorrow, the desperate attempts to hold onto remnants of their shared life, and the guilt-ridden moments of realizations of her husband's irreversible absence. Her profound introspection and emotional vulnerability transform the simple recounting of events into a narrative that is hauntingly evocative.

We study how Didion uses language to express the inexpressible. She captures the disorientation and the irrationality of grief with powerful imagery and raw honesty. In one passage, she describes a moment where she is unable to give away her husband's shoes because he would need them when he returns, an irrational thought stemming from the disbelief of loss. This exploration of her 'magical thinking' strikes a deep emotional chord, embodying the paradoxical nature of grief that is both universally human yet deeply personal.

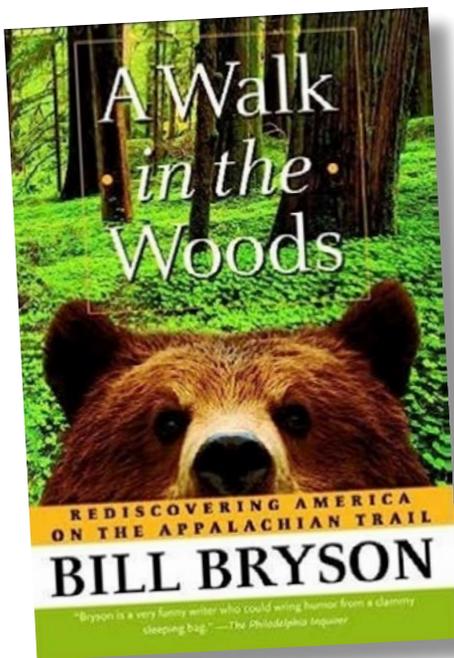
Our discussion also focuses on how Didion embeds facts into her narrative. She recounts the details of her husband's death – the dinner they were having, his collapse, the rush to the hospital – all in the clinical language one might find in a medical report or a news piece. Yet, intertwined with these factual details, she layers her personal reactions – her disbelief, her panic, and later, her overwhelming grief. This technique – the merger of objective facts and subjective experience – is what sets her work apart from a journalistic report of a death and elevates it to a poignant exploration of the human experience of loss.

As we sift through Didion's work, we see how she lends universality to her personal tragedy. Readers might not have experienced the same loss, but through

her honest depiction, they understand the experience, they feel the rawness of her pain, and they empathize. This ability to evoke empathy and to turn personal experience into shared understanding is a distinctive feature of creative nonfiction.

“The Year of Magical Thinking,” through its searing honesty, beautiful language, and deeply personal yet universal exploration of grief, sets a precedent for what creative nonfiction can achieve. It goes beyond a factual account of a year in Didion’s life and transforms into a narrative that resonates with emotional depth, engaging readers not just intellectually, but also emotionally – a definitive hallmark of creative nonfiction.

Shifting gears, we embark on an adventure with Bill Bryson’s “A Walk in the Woods”. This exceptional example of creative travel writing intertwines geographical information, personal anecdotes, and humorous commentary, resulting in a narrative that extends beyond a simple travel log. We dissect a passage where Bryson brings to life a nerve-wracking encounter with a bear on



the Appalachian Trail, skillfully blending factual reporting with a storytelling approach that invites readers to live the adventure alongside him.

We discuss Bryson’s gift for seamlessly incorporating scientific and historical data into his narrative. He details the geological history of the Appalachian Trail,

delving into the formation of the mountains, the evolution of flora and fauna, and the trail’s socio-cultural impact. It’s more than a story about a long hike; it becomes an exploration of the intricate ties between humans and nature, interlaced with captivating snippets about the characters he meets along the trail and the deepening bond with his hiking partner, Katz.

Equally significant is Bryson’s deft use of humor. His writing is peppered with wit, and we often find ourselves chuckling at his humorous commentary on everything from his “comic ineptitude” at wilderness survival to his tongue-in-cheek observations about his fellow hikers. His humour isn’t just a device for entertainment; it’s a lens through which we are made to view the more significant trials, tribulations, and joys of his journey.

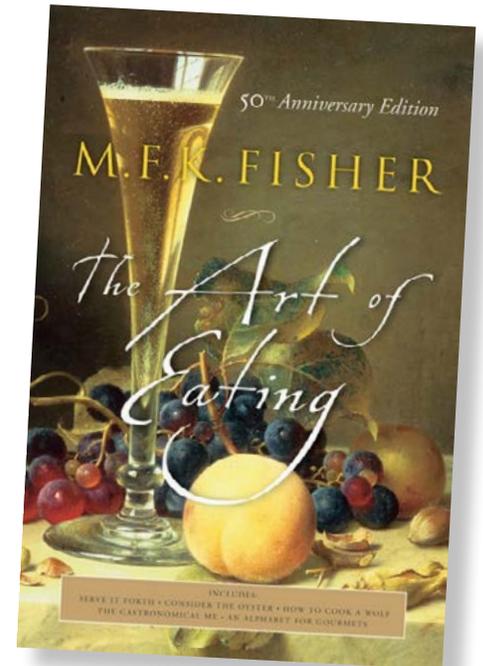
Through Bryson’s “A Walk in the Woods,” we learn that creative nonfiction is not just about presenting the truth. It’s about painting a vivid, multifaceted picture that enriches the reader’s understanding of that truth. His work invites readers to immerse themselves in his experiences, live his adventures, laugh at his jokes, share his awe, and ultimately gain a deeper appreciation for the incredible natural beauty of the Appalachian Trail.

Our journey through the expanse of creative nonfiction takes a delectable turn as we step into the world of food writing, guided by M.F.K. Fisher in her renowned collection, “The Art of Eating”. Known for her sublime gastronomic essays, Fisher provides an exquisite example of how a typical topic such as food can be elevated into an art form that is as nourishing to the soul as it is to the body.

Unlike a straightforward journalistic account that might confine itself to reviewing or describing food, Fisher takes a path less treaded. She employs evocative language, rich personal anecdotes, and her unique narrative style to craft stories around food that satiate more than just a reader’s intellectual hunger. Her work is not just about food; it’s about the memories, the experiences, the cultural influences that food invokes.

In our analysis, we savor Fisher’s memorable essay on her first taste of an

oyster. This is not a mere recounting of an event. Fisher uses her experience to paint a vivid picture of the setting, her feelings, the anticipation, the apprehension, and finally, the surprising burst of flavors. The simple act of eating an oyster transforms into a significant personal moment under Fisher’s pen, offering a sensory feast that engages the reader’s imagination, memory, and yes, their palate.



Fisher’s narrative style, too, stands out in our discussion. Her sentences, whether they’re about a memorable meal she shared with friends in France or a simple dish prepared by her grandmother, are layered with emotion, wit, and sometimes, a touch of melancholy. Her writing creates an atmosphere where the readers can taste the food, smell the aromas, feel the texture, and be a part of the conversations that took place around the food. This ability to stir emotions, evoke nostalgia, and create a multi-sensory experience through words is a striking feature of her creative nonfiction.

Fisher also weaves in historical, cultural, and even philosophical insights, which add depth to her writing. A description of a dish becomes a gateway into the socio-cultural context of the cuisine, a critique of a restaurant transforms into a commentary on society. In “The Art of Eating,” Fisher makes a profound statement about the interconnectedness of food, memory, and our lives.

In sum, Fisher's "The Art of Eating" serves as a delicious example of how creative nonfiction can transform a seemingly mundane topic into a rich narrative experience. As we close the book, we're left not only with the lingering taste of her prose but also a deeper appreciation of the craft of creative nonfiction.

Our journey through the myriad forms of creative nonfiction reaches a powerful culmination with Frank McCourt's stark and compelling memoir, "Angela's Ashes". A sharp departure from the conventional style of reporting, McCourt's portrayal of his poverty-stricken childhood in Limerick, Ireland, resonates with an authenticity and emotional intensity that transcend mere facts.

At first glance, the world McCourt unveils is one of deprivation, hardship, and relentless suffering. The grim streets of Limerick, the damp and near-uninhabitable homes, the daily struggle for food and dignity -- all these might have served as mere statistics or impersonal reports in the hands of a traditional journalist. McCourt, however, presents them through the eyes of a child, with a raw honesty that leaves the reader aching with compassion.

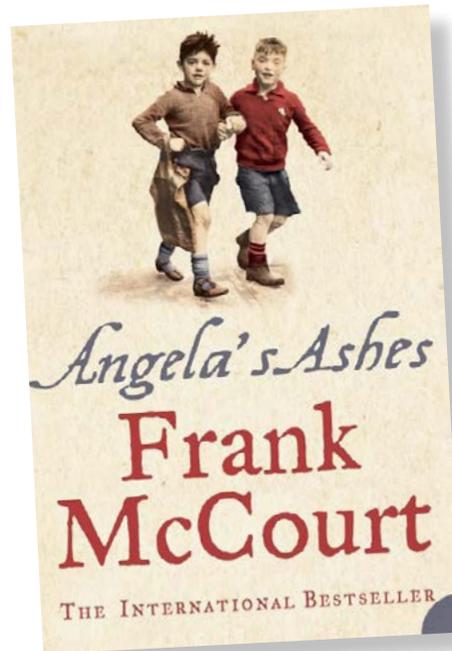
We take the time to explore specific passages where McCourt's narrative prowess shines. His recounting of Christmas Day in a damp, cold room, the eager anticipation of a father's unfulfilled promises, or the tragic loss of siblings -- each episode is narrated with a haunting simplicity that belies the profound impact they leave.

What sets McCourt's work apart from standard journalistic accounts is not just the vivid imagery and brutal honesty but also the uniquely personal voice that narrates the tale. The language is unpretentious, the tone often conversational, and yet it paints a picture so vivid and moving that it connects with readers across different walks of life. It's a child's voice, innocent yet wise beyond years, a voice that questions, observes, and feels without filters.

McCourt's "Angela's Ashes" also exhibits a mastery of storytelling technique. The narrative isn't linear but ebbs and flows with the recollections, dreams, and harsh realities of a young boy growing up in a world that seems perpetually grey. This non-linear storytelling, com-

bined with sharp character sketches and dialogue, gives life to the people and the community, making the reader a part of that world, feeling its pulse, its despair, its fleeting joys.

Furthermore, McCourt doesn't shy away from depicting the dark and sometimes uncomfortable truths of his life. Whether it's the strained relationship with his father, the complex emotions towards his mother, or the grim reality of death and despair that shadowed his childhood, McCourt's account is unflinching. This ability to delve into complex emotions, to lay bare the soul, is what distinguishes his work from ordinary journalism.



In conclusion, Frank McCourt's "Angela's Ashes" is more than a memoir; it's an epitome of creative nonfiction. It takes the stark reality of a poverty-stricken childhood and elevates it into a universal tale of struggle, resilience, and the indomitable human spirit. The transformation of objective facts into a narrative that not only informs but moves, that not only describes but resonates, encapsulates what creative nonfiction strives to achieve. McCourt's work leaves us not just with the echoes of a hauntingly beautiful prose but with a deeper understanding of the essence and potential of creative nonfiction. It's a fitting end to our exploration, a poignant reminder that creative nonfiction's power lies in its ability to touch the very core of our shared human experience.

As the lecture concludes, the once quiet hall is enlivened by a rising chorus of voices. Questions punctuate the air, debates are ignited, and a series of lively discussions unfold. The multifaceted world of creative nonfiction has sparked a curiosity among the attendees, inspiring them to further explore this unique realm where the real and the imagined exist in harmony.

Once the hall empties, the echoes of intellectual discourse slowly receding, I gather my notes, walking into the soft afternoon light. The satisfaction of a successful lecture mingles with the soothing warmth of the sun, a perfect ending to a day steeped in academia.

Over a cup of coffee that steams into the cooling air, I muse over the lecture and the spirited discussions that followed. Reflections on the blend of factual reporting and emotional depth in the works of Didion, Bryson, Fisher, and McCourt surface. The distinctive traits of creative nonfiction that set it apart from traditional journalism become even more evident in this quiet introspection.

The essence of creative nonfiction can be captured in a single phrase: "The art of telling real stories that read like fiction." This concise summary, a distillation of today's lecture, effectively captures the equilibrium of fact and fiction, the dual forces that drive the genre of creative nonfiction.

As the day draws to a close, the campus slowly darkens, creating a backdrop of tranquil twilight. I leave with a sense of anticipation for the journey that awaits the next day, another excursion into the fascinating world of creative nonfiction. This genre that elegantly straddles the line between fact and fiction, transforming colorless data into vibrant narratives, continually offers fresh insights and perspectives.

Another day of intellectual exploration lies ahead. I look forward to the opportunity to fuel the flames of curiosity, to shed light on the intricate interplay of reality and imagination that defines creative nonfiction. The prospect of unearthing new insights and opportunities not only invigorates my students' learning journey, but also fuels my own passion for this ever-evolving literary landscape. □

Degrees of Discomfort

The Office Heatwave Experience

Heimir Steinarsson

Picture this: you're in an office, barricaded within towering stacks of paperwork and the glow of fluorescent lights. Now, crank up the thermostat to, say, the temperature of the Sahara. Welcome to the inferno – the office during a heatwave, where Dante's circles have nothing on the circles under our eyes.

Our beloved air conditioning, the mightiest soldier against the heat onslaught, has been reduced to a pitiful wheeze. We watch it struggle against the thermal adversary, a sweating David against an incandescent Goliath, and its impending surrender hangs in the air, hot and heavy. Will it prevail, or will it buckle under the desert winds blowing in from the window? The tension is enough to make one sweat - if they weren't already, that is.

We quickly discover a novel way to promote office camaraderie. Nothing brings together a team quite like shared adversity, and in this case, the collective irritability turns the air hotter than the weather outside. The office transforms into a gladiatorial arena, where the stakes are high and tempers are even higher. Exchanges in the meeting room resemble a dramatic courtroom showdown, complete with clammy palms and flushed faces. Climate-induced emotions, the latest trend in team building, ladies and gentlemen. The heatwave brings with it an intriguing consequence - the great productivity meltdown, an all-encompassing torpor that descends upon the office like a stifling, invisible fog. Concentration, that fickle beast, evaporates quicker than a puddle under the midday sun, taking with it the noble intentions and lofty goals of a once-promising workday.

Ambitions and KPIs, those benchmarks of corporate success, begin to wilt and wither. They droop like forgotten houseplants, starved of sustenance, their once vibrant leaves curling into the sad embrace of defeat. The glare of the sun through the windows takes on a mocking glow, as if to say, "You thought you'd achieve something today? How quaint."

Progress charts, the visual representation of our toil, hang limply on the walls. They droop like wilting flowers, their lines and bars sagging under the weight of the heat. The once crisp delineation between success and failure becomes a smeared blur, like makeup on a sweltering day.

Complex tasks, those intellectual mountains we once scaled with ease, now appear as mirages. They shimmer tantalizingly in the searing landscape of our minds, growing more elusive with each attempt to grasp them. The finer points of analysis and critical thinking melt into a pool of confusion, leaving behind only the vaguest impressions of what once was.

Deadlines, previously clear and immutable, take on a surreal quality. They stretch and distort, like horizons in a heat haze, their urgent demands reduced to a faint echo. The once intimidating specter of the ticking clock becomes a languid, unhurried tick-tock, as though time itself has succumbed to the languor.



Communication, the lifeblood of any thriving office, becomes a sluggish flow of misinterpreted messages and misunderstood instructions. Words lose their crispness, sentences become tangled webs, and emails languish in inboxes, too weary to fulfill their purpose.

The entire office space seems to heave under the thermal oppression, a collective sigh of exhaustion. Phones ring with less urgency, computers process data with a lethargic hum, and even the buzz of the overhead lights seems to dim, as if joining in the general malaise.

As the day wears on, the promise of a productive workday drifts away like sand in a hot breeze, leaving behind a scorched desert of half-finished tasks, unanswered emails, and unmet expectations. Colleagues stare at screens, their eyes glazed, thoughts adrift in a sea of lethargy.

But fear not, for all is not lost. The annual reports, those thick tomes of facts and figures, can surely wait another day. The conference call, a heated debate under normal circumstances, can now be a leisurely chat, punctuated by the shared commiseration of the heat. In this tropical office climate, the tyranny of productivity has been temporarily dethroned, replaced by the reign of relaxation and a shared sense of human frailty. It's a pause, a momentary respite in the relentless march of corporate life, courtesy of Mother Nature's furnace. Enjoy it, for the ice-cold efficiency of air-conditioned normality will soon return, and the desert mirages of the heatwave will be but a warm memory.

Dehydration lurks around every corner, ready to pounce on the unsuspecting worker. Watercooler chats have morphed into strategic hydration summits, and the journey from desk to water dispenser has become an intrepid adventure, fraught with dizziness and fatigue. Water bottles, previously mere office accessories, now gleam like chalices of life. Toast to survival, everyone!

The heatwave also brings about a sartorial revolution. Suits, those symbols of corporate grandeur, are now akin to portable ovens. The pencil skirt becomes a leg griddle, while ties morph into heated, silken ropes of discomfort. Heels? They're now twin towers of pain. But don't worry, your discomfort comes swathed in the most exquisite threads. A fresh dilemma for our corporate custodians surfaces – the battle between their wallets and our well-being. To cool or not to cool? That is the question. The remorseless march of energy costs threatens to eat into the profits, forming a new line in the budget – 'climate control.' The irony of warming the bottom line while we stew in our sweat isn't lost on us.



As the sun takes its bow and twilight falls, one might expect relief to follow. Alas, the relief proves elusive as our nights are no longer a sanctuary of rest. Instead, they have been transformed into an extension of the torrid torture endured throughout the day.

The heat, like an unwelcome guest, infiltrates our homes, slipping through cracks, seeping under doors, replacing the cool relief of night with a restless, simmering discomfort. It prowls through our hallways, sprawls across our beds, wraps itself around our bodies like an inescapable shroud, reducing sleep to a fleeting, whimsical dream.

Our bedrooms, once the realm of peace and tranquility, become arenas of an endless nocturnal battle against the all-encompassing heat. We toss and turn, our bed sheets entwined around us like a serpent, our pillows transformed into heated stones. The gentle hum of the fan provides a rhythmic soundtrack to the symphony of discomfort that plays out night after agonizing night.

Dreams, those delightful sojourns into fantasy, are mercilessly evicted, replaced by a restless delirium. Nightmares of being stranded in sun-scorched deserts, or floating adrift on a boiling ocean, play out behind our closed eyes. Each attempt to drift off into slumber is thwarted by the relentless pressure of the heat, a fevered insomnia that holds us in its ruthless grasp.





As dawn breaks, a cruel mockery of the relief we yearn for, we pry ourselves from our sweat-soaked beds. Eyes swollen and bloodshot, we face our reflections in the mirror. A specter of exhaustion stares back, the mark of this nocturnal torment etched in the dark circles under our eyes – the latest corporate badge of honor, worn with a weary pride.

We report to work, our bodies running on fumes, minds in a fog. Every movement feels like a trek through dense, humid jungle, every task a mountain to be scaled. Our fingers stumble over the keyboard; our gazes struggle to focus on the glaring screens. We clutch our lukewarm coffee like a lifeline, a sacred elixir to keep us tethered to reality, each sip a plea to the gods of alertness.

In our stupor, we share sympathetic glances with colleagues, each bearing the telltale signs of the same struggle. No words are needed; the shared suffering communicates volumes. Every yawn, every sagging shoulder, every sigh narrates a tale of a night spent wrestling with the unyielding heat.

But with each passing hour, we endure. We trudge forward in the haze, fortified by camaraderie born of shared adversity. We persevere, driven by a strange blend of resignation and stubbornness. After all, this is but another challenge, another test of our mettle. And if anything, we are survivors, forged in the furnace of the corporate world, tempered by the relentless heat of a thousand heatwaves.

The office machinery, our loyal comrades in the corporate battlefield, begin to falter under the thermal assault. Computers start their impression of vintage locomotives, chugging along at a glacial pace. Printers spit out documents as though they're fighting a fever, while the server room glows like a reactor core, threatening to initiate a meltdown at any moment.

Getting to work morphs into an epic adventure. Public transport feels like cattle transportation to the slaughterhouse, while private vehicles turn into mobile greenhouses. Attendance? Well, that becomes a distant dream.

“Working from home due to the heat” joins the list of popular excuses, right next to “the dog ate my homework.”

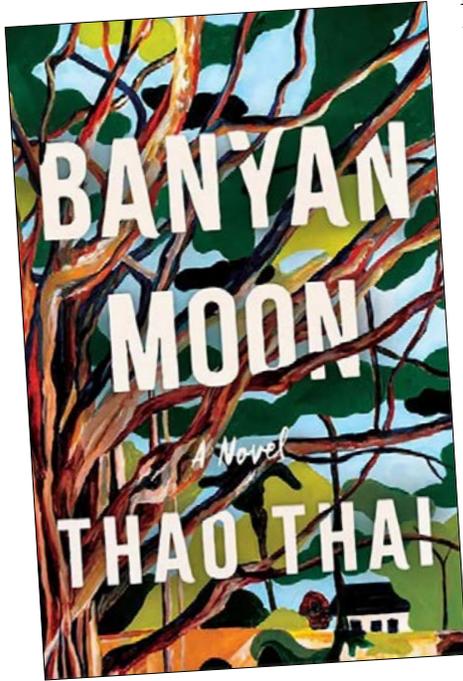
And finally, the ghost of health risks haunts the office corridors. The heatwave becomes a malevolent entity, not merely an inconvenient weather pattern. Hearts falter under the onslaught; lungs gasp for cool air. We find ourselves teetering on the edge, caught between our tasks and the thermometer.

So, here's to the office during a heatwave, that veritable inferno of corporate life. It transforms into a simmering pot of absurdities, paradoxes, and perspiration, bubbling over with tales that oscillate between the tragic and the comic. Its denizens, once cool-headed business warriors, are now wilting soldiers in the face of an unwavering adversary – the relentless sun. This workplace is a veritable petri dish where the ordinary compounds of corporate life incubate under the intense heat, giving birth to a brew of peculiar behaviors and comical adaptations. Dress codes are relaxed, and the icy veneer of professionalism melts away, revealing the all-too-human struggle beneath.

The office, under the tyrannical rule of the sun, becomes a stage for an epic drama. It's a story of struggle against the elements, of the human spirit waging a war against the rising mercury. Every moment, every act is imbued with a heightened sense of urgency, a heightened sense of life. In this unanticipated twist of the corporate narrative, who knew we had unwittingly signed up for a hot yoga retreat? But do not fret, for in this trial by fire, we'll emerge, not just as employees clocking in their nine-to-five, but as warriors who braved the heat and lived to tell the tale. Here's to the office during a heatwave – the hottest ticket to the most extraordinary show in town. □



New Fiction Books



Banyan Moon by Thao Thai (Mariner Books). Thao Thai’s debut novel, “Banyan Moon,” is a poignant multi-perspective family saga that spans generations and explores the lives of three Vietnamese women. The story follows Huong Tran, one of the main protagonists, who yearns for liberation from her mother’s restrictive nature and limited affection.

The novel opens with a flashback to a beach outing in 1998, where tensions simmer among Huong, her mother Minh, and her daughter Ann. Huong harbors envy as she witnesses the deep bond between Minh and Ann, grappling with reconciling the nurturing Minh before her with the distant figure of her youth. Huong feels threatened by her mother’s newfound role as a loving grandmother, as it challenges her own position as a mother. This dynamic sets the stage for a complex exploration of their relationship.

In the present day, Ann resides in Michigan with her wealthy boyfriend, keeping her distance from her mother while idealizing her grandmother. Seeking autonomy, Ann constructs a life far from home, reaching out to Huong only for family recipes. However, a series of painful revelations, including Ann’s unexpected pregnancy, her boyfriend’s infidelity, and Minh’s passing, compels her to seek solace from the very person she distanced herself from—Huong.

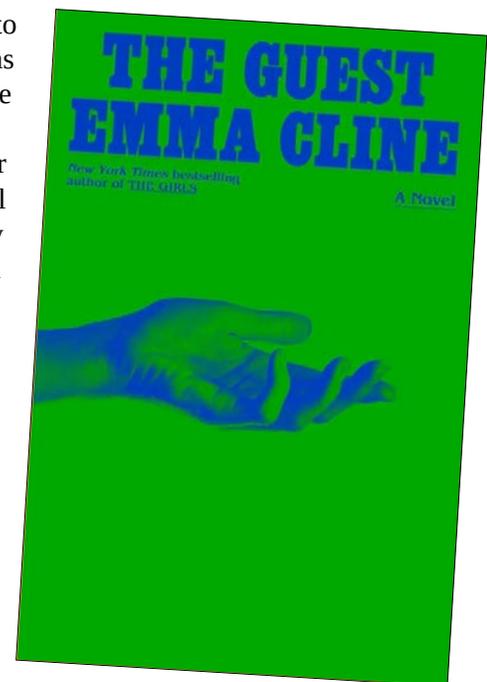
Ann and Huong inherit the Banyan House, a decaying Florida mansion that shapes their lives. Their relationship is marked by misunderstandings and a struggle to understand each other. Ann uncovers a secret that could break Huong’s heart while Huong guards her own concealed truth. “Banyan Moon” prompts reflection on hidden truths and the role of deceit, questioning if some truths are best kept hidden and if deception can be an act of love. The novel portrays vivid family dynamics, highlighting the interconnectedness of lives across generations. □

The Guest by Emma Cline (Random House). Emma Cline’s latest novel, “The Guest,” follows the five-day ordeal of Alex, a 22-year-old woman who has been kicked out of her rich lover’s beach house. Despite an impending Labor Day party, Alex is forced to bide her time after a relationship faux pas, transforming herself into various personas to survive in the interim. As she navigates the world of the elite, her actions disrupt the upper class’s tranquil summer.

Alex’s history reveals a streak of cunning survival instincts; she was evicted from her NYC apartment for stealing and non-payment of rent. We learn of her increasing social alienation and her debt to an ominous character named Dom. Throughout her temporary exile, she keeps up appearances while remaining invisible, knowing her role is to be an “inert piece of social furniture.”

Cline portrays Alex’s survival strategy as a masterclass in adaptability. Alex shifts between different personas – party girl, family friend, sex kitten – using manipulative tactics to gain acceptance. However, this survival strategy results in trouble and personal erosion. She becomes a blank canvas, unable to pursue self-realization due to her circumstances.

Cline presents Alex’s story as a modern-day odyssey. Alex, a reflection of the societal treatment of women as replaceable commodities, navigates a world of power imbalance. “The Guest” showcases the complexity of female performance, with Alex’s narration highlighting the price of selling a narrative. As her own sense of self fades away, Alex contemplates her own ghost-like existence, revealing the cost of survival within a society that sees women as disposable. □



Some Thoughts on Hate and Love

Heimir Steinarsson

Let's talk about the Roman poet Catullus,
who wrote some famous poems on love and hate.

When asked why he was writing this way,
he simply said that it was his fate.

He was tormented by his volatile feelings.

Odi et amo – Meaning I hate and love.

He felt excruciated and torn
and prayed for help from the gods above.

Today we call such strange behaviour bipolar,
and lock these people up in the loony bin.

Nobody writes like this anymore,
which is a shame and a bloody sin.

Well, I am smitten by the lovesick Catullus,
and I will keep on reading his poetry
until I feel I'm losing control
and start to question my sanity.





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