
Summer
2025

DRINKS
MENU

Your Summer
Literary Happy Hour

#2

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Cheers to us, we meet again!

Anna Loi

Lovely seeing you again, fellow writers and readers! Bring out a chair and join us on the terrace.

Can I offer you a refresher, before we start sipping on the second issue of Drinks Menu? Welcome to the literary magazine served by the Amsterdam crowd of Writing Under the Influence.

Even during the sunny summer months, our writers find no break to their literary pursuits. Every Tuesday, our international group, from all over the world, meets up at the lovely De Pijp location of Vice Versa, to sip on beers and liquors and pretend to write between one drink and the other - blurring the lines between a book club and a wine tasting. We're excited to share our giddy energy in print, beyond the usual doors of our space.

Between the pages of this edition you can find something for all sorts of tastes; poetry, fiction, and everything in between and beyond. Some of our writers prefer expressing themselves in their native language, while others choose English to appeal to a wider audience. There is something for any preference, from classical to experimental. This year I have arranged the contributions like a swing; in an attempt to find a balance

starting with a shorter read, followed by a longer piece, and back to something brief, moving on to something that requires more commitment, and so on... This is inspired by the rhythm of the summer, where people often finally find space for spontaneity and have the time to let themselves roll, accepting drinks, snacks, unexpected novels, and anything that comes their way; perhaps taking breaks for a swim (maybe in the canal, for the braver ones), and then coming back to lay down on the grass.

Whether you are here to try something new or to just sit back and enjoy the familiar tone of your peers, this literary menu is designed to delight every kind of palate. In this issue we want to celebrate the summer, Aperol Spritzes on *terrassen* and the company of friends. So, take a sip, flip a page, lay down on your sun lounger (don't forget to apply sun block), and get ready to be intoxicated, not only by your spritzers, but from the words on display.

Cin-cin,

Your seasonal bartender of Drinks Menu.

Empathy?

François Du Plessis

There was always a brief period of a few billion years between the birth of a universe and its eventual heat death when life existed within the little science experiment that was simultaneously vaster than the human imagination can fathom and the equivalent of an ant farm forgotten under a kid's bed, that he really enjoyed.

There was also usually an even briefer period when intelligent life developed that he enjoyed even more. Although, to be fair, he did very much enjoy watching the universe implode at the end of a cycle until it was a quintillion times smaller than an ant and explode again in a symphony of pre-colour and pre-sound to start the next cycle in the unbroken chain that he started from a tiny seed eons ago. In fact, that pulsing breath was enough to make the times that life didn't develop still worth it. But in almost every cycle there is an even briefer period that he enjoys above all. One that he savours like a kid who spends the better part of his allowance on one of those giant Gobstopper candies at the beginning of the month and carefully rations every lick to make it last until he can get his fix again. Even so, no matter how determinedly he throws himself into this period, it always feels as brief as the one between when you scrunch up your face and

when the sneeze arrives. This brief period that he so enjoys is when he goes to live amongst the creatures down there just to feel what it feels like. Of course he knows what it feels like - he knows everything, but to experience it firsthand is different somehow even if it invariably leaves him feeling like he just watched a mindfuck movie where he knew all the spoilers beforehand. In fact the experience usually left him somewhere in between contentment and craving - just like a wonderful sneeze that dislodges a grain of rice that made it all the way to your nasal cavity to be expelled through your nostril leaves you tingling with satisfaction and simultaneously that another one is due immediately.

And so hungrily, as hungrily as one omniscient, omnipotent and unbound by time can be, he scrunched up his face to sneeze and opened his eyes in a manger in a stable on a tiny speck of dust floating through a beam of light around a yellow sun roughly 14 billion years after the start of the current cycle. He let out a soft cooing noise as the birth of the current universe slowly faded from his memory. One by one the previous cycles followed suit until all that set him apart from the other creatures currently alive on the speck of dust was the fact that when this sneeze was done he would go back to where he came from and they will go wherever they go. His mother gazed down at him lovingly and rubbed her nose against his. His tiny body flooded with oxytocin and in the warm glow he truly relaxed for the first time in a trillion years and drifted off to sleep.

A short decade later he opened his eyes in anticipation. Today was the day he had been looking forward to with anxious excitement for what must have been forever. He was finally going to be allowed to go on a fishing trip! Not a silly little fishing trip like the ones amongst the rocks that his dad would take him on in-between teaching him how to get lost in the shaping of wood until it resembles something that only previously existed in their minds, and from which they would come home with a few foraged fish, but a real fishing trip! An overnight fishing trip like the one that his uncle and the other fishermen of the village go on almost every night. One where it will be only him, his uncle and his weathered fishermen friends, their tiny boat, and the sea. A fishing expedition where there would be a chance to catch a glimpse of a live sea monster like the ones that he would find in the market most mornings and that he would wonder at when their scales refracted the light into a multitude of different colours as he curiously prodded their slimy bellies.

By the time was setting sun gloriously behind the bank of clouds on the horizon he could barely make out the little village they had set out from. They still had some distance to go to the spot right in the middle of the lake where his uncle said there were fish so big that they could swallow a man whole. His back was tired from the rhythmic rowing that got them to where they needed to be after the wind had lost its vigour and he was glad when his uncle told him to pull in his oar. He basked in the sun's last rays as the boat drifted to a halt. It was however only a brief

respite as the tiny boat bustled with the activity of the three seasoned fishermen rushing to get the nets in the water before the last light faded. His uncle barked instructions at him that he suspected were aimed more at keeping him from underfoot the men working on the tiny boat than contributing to their end goal. By the time they were done, the evening breeze had died down completely and a calmness had descended onto the boat. He made himself comfortable on the bunched-up sail. As he listened to the soft chatter of the men and the gentle sloshing of the waves against the hull, his eye-lids grew heavier and heavier. He gazed up at the stars shimmering in the infinite void like the droplets caught on the net he used to trap small fish in the rock pools glistened in the last rays of sun, and drifted off to a place among them.

A rough hand shook him awake. Groggily he looked around. The men had already pulled in the nets and put them away. Disappointedly he looked around to see where the sea monsters were but only saw a handful of fish barely larger than the ones he normally hunted. The men were already impatiently waiting in their seats. As he grabbed his oar to join them he glanced up at the low full-moon making a brief appearance from behind a bank of roiling clouds that the fresh breeze was pushing towards them. They had barely begun rowing when he sensed a change in the air. The wind was picking up and with every stroke it was getting harder and harder to keep up with the men who were speeding up their rhythm accordingly. Gone were the easy chatter and light-hearted joking. Something else had settled in

its place. Something that no-one was saying but everyone knew. Driven by a knowledge that there was nothing else in the world except their tiny little boat and the waves now menacingly baring their white teeth, four oars desperately clawed at the water. As the expressions on the men's faces hardened and they whipped their bodies beyond breaking point he pushed down the fear and let the adrenaline surge forward to provide a strength that not even he knew he had.

It was only when they had pulled the boat onto the shore and secured it properly, safely stowed away the oars and nets, and his uncle had pulled him through the driving rain to the tiny home where his parents were sitting at the small table, his mother nursing his baby sister and his dad listlessly whittling at a piece of wood way after he normally would have been asleep on the mat in the corner, that he finally released the tension built up inside him. Before he knew it he was on his dad's lap sobbing tears of relief and elation. It wasn't long until he drifted off to sleep once more with his body safely nestled between his parents'.

Two decades later, when the day finally came for the sneeze to be over, he could still remember that moment as if it had just happened. As he opened his eyes from his desperate, pleading prayers to a seemingly indifferent god, not only the bushes and rocks around him came into focus, but also the sound of his friends' gentle snoring. He wiped his cheeks with the back of his calloused hands to rid them of the blood, sweat and tears and

longed for that same release he had experienced so many years ago, but all he could feel was alone. Yet, his friends' failure to hold vigil with him in his darkest hour was only the beginning of his final ordeal.

About a day, or an eternity, later, depending on your point of view, the release finally came. The time in-between was a marathon of suffering done at a sprinting pace. The painful punishment his body received by the brutal beating and flogging was mirrored in the damage to his psyche inflicted by the betrayal of friends, mockery by the authorities and the crowd baying for his blood. The crowning touch was one of thorns, shoved onto his head to make his claim of king known to all. Then it all culminated in a slow asphyxiation nailed to a cross.

When the moment that comes right after the one where he could release his final breath along with the earthly agony that it was filled with, finally came, he found himself back where he came from. As the afterglow of a sneeze more glorious than any orgasm ever experienced by man or woman faded away, he settled back in to enjoy watching the movie that he not only knew the ending to, but wrote, directed and produced, and now had also made a cameo in.

I was here

Beverly Rose

I was always here, among the canals and riding my bike.

Objectively, the sun shines here. I am grounded at a sloth's pace.

Slow air, soft trees. The people are friendly. But also quite strange.

I was here, packing my notes of suffering and questionable hope

Sweating *lachootz* and resting on the sabbath

everything is blue, bright turquoise blue. Connected here, there,
and everywhere

I was here, making *knadelach* from *knoedel*

with my great grandmother in the kitchen, a glass of this a
decagram of that

mine is heavy as a rock and falls deep to the pit of my stomach

I was here at the changing of the guard.

Quarter notes and shouts through the window

Reading stories in the soft light

The dog park is filled with children.

I was here, in the small golden stones on the pavement.

In the endless sea of sand.

Here for the night of glass and the days of smoke.

My reflection is in the crystal and in the rain, the pouring rain.

I was here in the desert when the stones were split, and the borders drawn.

I was here for the displacement. The life that equals death.

Isolated and integrated.

Ambidextrously, I wear my life around my neck.