

An Open Source Journal published through the Auspices of the Poison Pie Publishing House, Knoxville, Tennessee

Editor-in-Chief: Hebeloma Crustuliniforme†

Mission Statement: The purpose of An International Journal of Exploratory Meta-Living is to provide a resource for the dissemination of creative works relevant to the subject of meta-living. The journal welcomes both academic and artistic exercises expressed in any medium capable of being transmitted through the physical mechanisms of the journal. Due consideration also will be given to submissions that do not conform to these mechanisms. The journal explicitly forbids the establishment of a regular publication schedule.

Meta-Living: One useful avenue leading toward an understanding of the term meta-living is through analogy, particularly by considering meta-fiction. Wikipedia, the oracle of all contemporary knowledge, defines meta-fiction as “the literary term describing fictional writing that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in posing questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, usually using irony and self-reflection.”¹ By straight-forward analogy, meta-living is the existential term describing a manner of living that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in posing questions about the relationship between existence and reality, using irony and self-reflection among other devices. These other devices include, but are not limited to, scientific inquiry, ontology, various theologisms, sophistry, rhetoric, tomfoolery, transcendental perspectivism and, of course, the omnipresent specter of post-existential relativism.

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metafiction>, accessed 2014 April 16.

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A Note on the Font: This font is Dax Compact Regular, designed by the late Hans Reichel, musician, instrument maker and font designer.

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On the Tenth Anniversary of the Electronic Reincarnation of the Poison Pie Publishing House: An Interview with Hebeloma Crustuliniforme

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Abstract: The Poison Pie Publishing House was electronically reincarnated with a web-based presence in the fall of 2012. As we acknowledge the tenth anniversary of this current manifestation, we interview the editor-in-chief, Ms. Hebeloma Crustuliniforme, who has been with the publishing house since its renewal. She speaks on a variety of topics including her evolving role into workhorse artist at the publishing house.

Mr. Otis Gardener and Ms. Hebeloma Crustuliniforme met for this interview on December 26, 2022 somewhere on the engineering side of campus at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. The temperature never exceeded freezing on that day. Due to the holiday break, campus was vacant so they had their choice of empty classrooms to share the following conversation.

OG: Good to see you again, Hebeloma. It has been five years since we last spoke.¹ Congratulations on your ten-year anniversary.

HC: Thank you, Otis. We hadn't intended to celebrate it but we had a little time on our hands and your invitation arrived at an apropos moment.

OG: Let's get right down to business. What can you tell us about the last two books published by the Poison Pie Publishing House (PPPH)?

HC: "Hebeloma's Swamp Fantasy Overture² and Hebeloma's Abyssal Aria³ were published in 2021 and 2022 respectively on a serial basis. Each day about 100 words were written and uploaded to the PPPH blog. We describe them as being generated through a non-idiomatic improvisational creative process, a term that has been previously defined in various places including the fifth⁴ and sixth⁵ issues of this journal.

OG: If you write a hundred words each day for a year you end up with 36,500 words, which is just about the right length for a novella.

HC: I don't disagree.

OG: But you don't call these last two books novellas. You call them musical scores and your own role not that of author but composer.

HC: For lack of a better term, really. The role of composer is not especially relevant in an improvisational process. The level of influence is significantly and intentionally diluted.

OG: How is a novella a musical score?

HC: That question has been addressed in the forward (online) or afterword (print book) to Hebeloma's Swamp Fantasy Overture.² Here, suffice to say that there is an extensive history of non-traditional musical scores. There are numerous precedents for creative musicians performing music in response to written words, paintings, films and other forms of conduction involving gestures and cards. We make no claim to originality in this regard. To the contrary, we hope these works are identified as part of a tradition.

OG: Every daily passage of these books is written while a different musical recording is played. Can you explain what is happening there?

HC: Again, we don't make any pretense to novelty. We would prefer to explain by quoting others. As our understanding of creativity is heavily indebted to our study of improvisation, each of these four quotes are from improvising musicians. Readers familiar with the Poison Pie Publishing House will have seen these words before.

The first quote comes from the American pianist, Vijay Iyer. In his PhD dissertation, Iyer posits that the triggering of neural pathways by auditory stimuli alters in real time the dynamic activity, if not transient configuration, of the relevant portions of the brain. "One could say that the animals' temporal acuity exists "in" these long neural pathways in the physical structure of the perceptual apparatus."⁶ That any process, including writing, should be affected by the temporal fluctuations in the network induced by music is probable, almost to the point of inevitability. Much that is written in these books would not have been generated in any other way.

The second quote comes from American trombonist and scholar, George Lewis, in an interview

conducted by Lloyd Peterson.⁷ "I feel that there is an essence of creativity that is a human birthright that doesn't go away, and that we are all basically born with... I feel that when people are listening to music, they can do it because of the sense of empathy that allows them to respond to the creativity of other people by feeling their own creativity. In other words, those neurons start firing and those experiences, those bodily feelings, start to resonate with the creativity that's coming from outside, because they've got it within them."

The third quote comes from the British guitarist, Derek Bailey and is transcribed from a live solo recording in which he converses with the audience as he plays. "Good Evening. I hope you don't mind if I say a few words. If you can't hear them or you can hear them but you don't understand them, it's alright. They don't really mean anything. Their purpose is to occupy the left-hand side of the brain while I'm playing. Some people smoke. Some drink. I talk to myself."⁸ To some extent, we feel that we are emulating Bailey in reverse. He added words to his playing, while we add music to our words.

For the last quote, we return to an interview with Vijay Iyer on the subject of American saxophonist, Roscoe Mitchell. "It was also made clear in this exchange that music can be viewed as a consequence of active listening; it is, at some level, through informed listening that music is constructed. Placing the skillful listener in such an active role explodes the category of experiences that we call listening to music, because it allows the listener the improvisatory freedom to frame any moment or any experience as a musical one. The improviser is always listening; the listener is always improvising."⁹

OG: Thank you for that expansive answer. If the novellas are actually musical scores, have they been performed or do you have plans for them to be performed?

HC: By no means are we keeping close tabs on such things but, to our knowledge, none of the scores of the PPPH have yet been performed. We do hope

that some adventurous musicians will stumble upon them and be moved to interpret them. We have not yet made an explicit attempt to reach out to someone and commission a performance.

However, your question, does give us the opportunity to share our thoughts on the relationship between the writing of the score and the eventual performance of the piece. These notes first appeared in the afterword to *Hebeloma's Abyssal Aria*.³

"We feel compelled to append to this score a peripherally-related, explanatory note on the various asynchronous processes present in *Hebeloma's Abyssal Aria*. As we perceive it, there are at least five time elements, in which the musical, literary, artistic and various interpretative actions of the *Abyssal Aria* take place.

- On one day, some times many decades in the past, one or more musicians played the music, to which each daily passage in the *Abyssal Aria* was written.
- The writing of a passage of the *Abyssal Aria* occurred on a second, different day.
- The artwork for the *Abyssal Aria* was created on a third day.
- The reading of the passages and viewing of the artwork in the *Abyssal Aria* occurred on fourth day, different for each visitor.
- On a fifth day, perhaps many decades in the future, the musical performance of the *Abyssal Aria* takes place.

Some of the processes in this cycle have already concluded, while others remain underway and still others have not yet begun. The notion that all these actions should have transpired on the same day is, of course, absurd and contrary to the fundamental manner in which human beings experience time."

OG: I see that you are using this interview as a repository of thoughts scattered across various publications.

HC: Collected here, they may provide readers with a train of logic that meandered across a mental countryside from one station to another over a journey spanning years.

OG: Let me get to the main purpose, at least from my point of view, in holding this interview. Since we last spoke, you have shifted from your exclusive role as editor-in-chief at the PPPH to the author/composer of four recent books. Can you describe how that transition occurred?

HC: Certainly, but the route was circuitous so you will have to forgive me if my answer is somewhat oblique at first. I assure you, your question will eventually be answered.

The PPPH had previously been focused on publishing the works of David Keffer. Among the many works published, there was a collection of books about a fictitious family, called the Horties. The first book, *The Horties*, published in 2010, described the family of four as a whole.¹⁰ At some point, it became clear that Keffer intended to write four more books, each focusing on one member of the family. In the next few years, a book about the father,¹¹ son¹² and daughter¹³ followed. To varying extents in these books, there were elements that could be deemed auto-biographical. The author was warned by his father-in-law to tread carefully in writing the last book about the mother in the family. It proved a difficult book to write.

Several years passed and, in November, 2016, a threat to the fabric of democracy was elected as president in the United States of America. Beginning January 1, 2017, the PPPH began serially publishing passages of improvisational works on a daily basis. It was an attempt to channel the anger and anxiety caused by the reckless words and actions of the president in a constructive way. The first book written a passage each day of the year, 2017: *The Year of the Every-Day Magician* was

subtitled, *A Second-Hand Account of the Rise and Fall of the Renegades of the American Muslim Registry*.¹⁴ This book constituted a direct response to the president's inflammatory promise on the campaign trail.

In 2018, Keffer's thoughts returned to the unfinished Hortie Pentalogy. He wrote a novel, one passage each day of the year, titled Proceedings of the International Congress on Exploratory Meta-Living,¹⁵ in which he created five fictional characters and charged them with the task of writing this last book.

OG: He gave one of those characters your name!

HC: Yes, he did. It has caused continuous confusion ever since. To this day, some people still regard me as a figment of Keffer's literary imagination.

In any case, we completed the task assigned to us. From the Proceedings of the International Congress on Exploratory Meta-Living, the novella, A Fractured Portrait of Iris,¹⁶ was extracted in its entirety. Thus was the Hortie Pentalogy¹⁷ completed. The authorship of this last book is not attributed to Keffer but to the five individuals responsible for creating each part of the resulting portrait. Again, there is some confusion, since Keffer is the author of the Proceedings of the International Congress on Exploratory Meta-Living, but not A Fractured Portrait of Iris, contained wholly therein. In the afterword, he explained the apparent discrepancy with an analogy.

"When the author of a murder mystery describes a murder in her work, most readers would readily agree that it was the villain in the novel who committed the murder, rather than the author. Certainly, to our knowledge, no author of a murder mystery has ever been charged with, much less convicted of, a murder, which took place strictly in a book she wrote. Only a reader with a very liberal interpretation of reality would argue that the author was, by creation of the narrative in which the murder took place, responsible for the commission of murder.

Our argument requires merely that we substitute 'writing' for 'murder'. When the author of a meta-fiction describes the composition of a text by a character within a literary work, who can we say wrote the text, the character or the author? It must be the character, of course. There is no basis for distinguishing between 'murder' and 'writing', attributing one act to a character but the other to the author. Given this reasoning, the authorship of this present work is accurately attributed to those five individuals who generated it. That some of them exist in our physics-based reality only as ideas in one book or another is irrelevant."

OG: Oh dear, Hebeloma! It seems your claim to reality becomes increasingly tenuous.

HC: I was not immune to these words. To complicate matters, my contribution to A Fractured Portrait of Iris was in the form of back stories to five of the fourteen youths offered as sacrifice by King Minos to the Minotaur. Keffer was taken by this idea and, in 2019, I ended up writing a collection of 364 daily horoscopes based on pairwise permutations of these fourteen young people. This book, A Practicum on Divination via Cleromancy,¹⁸ appropriately lists me as sole author.

A Practicum on Divination via Cleromancy proved to be quite popular. The hardcover edition came with a complete cleromancy kit¹⁹ to randomly access horoscopes. (See Figure 1.) There is also an electronic implementation²⁰ on the PPPH blog that can be used to randomly select a horoscope.

In 2020, Keffer again took over the daily blog for what we all hoped was the final year of a one-term president. This last book was written,²¹ as well as a short epilogue,²² and a daily journal titled, A Tetralogy: How I Survived the Presidency of Douchebag J. Troglodyte: A Daily Account,²³ was completed.

With brighter horizons ahead of us, the PPPH was ready to engage in some new creative activities. The prospect of generating musical scores arose and carried the day. As the discussions ensued, it

became clear that the high interest in A Practicum on Divination via Cleromancy persisted. Thus the first musical score, written each day in 2021, Hebeloma's Swamp Fantasy Overture, describes the adventures of Periboea, one of the fourteen offered to the Minotaur, immediately after she escaped from the labyrinth.



Figure 1. Physical edition of A Practicum on Divination via Cleromancy with casting kit, including mat, fourteen stones, moon coin, stone pouch and carrying bag.

With Hebeloma's Swamp Fantasy Overture, for the first time, an artist was engaged to create monthly chapter heading illustrations. Ms. Julia K. Keffer of Bus Stop Art Show created twelve amazing artworks. The works appear in color on the electronic version and in black and white in the print version. A growing gallery of this work and other activities by Julia Keffer appears on the PPPH site.²⁴ (There are also a couple examples of her work in the two advertising flyers appended to the digital version of this document.)

As 2022 draws to a close, the second score, Hebeloma's Abyssal Aria, is nearly complete. This tale recounts the adventures of Eurymedusa, another of the fourteen after her escape from the labyrinth. Julia Keffer again provided illustrations,

albeit this time in a completely different medium. It is our intention to continue this series into 2023 and thereafter as long as it holds our interest.

Earlier in the year, the staff of the Poison Pie Publishing House received a request to provide a short statement regarding the differences between the musical scores, the *Swamp Fantasy Overture* and the *Abyssal Aria*. This was a simple request to grant since the primary difference was already well documented on the site. The *Swamp Fantasy Overture* follows Periboea while the *Abyssal Aria* follows Eurymedusa, both of whom were ostensibly sacrificial victims offered by King Minos to the Minotaur. The respective scores relate the distinct adventures of these two young women, after their escapes from the labyrinth. That their experiences should be different is a result of their unique personalities. The primary trait that distinguishes Periboea and Eurymedusa can be found with a brief perusal of the electronic implementation of Horoscopes from the Oracle of Hebeloma.²⁰ In these horoscopes, each of the fourteen youths is assigned a spectrum ranging from virtue to vice. Periboea represents a struggle between courage and cowardice. Eurymedusa spans an axis from integrity to dishonesty. These themes pervade the respective works.

OG: Is that the end of your story for how you came to create these musical scores?

HC: For now.

OG: Thank you for taking the time to sit down with me and share your thoughts.

HC: It was my pleasure. I hope we cross paths again before another five years have passed.

OG: As do I. I always enjoy your company. I hope you have a restful last few days of 2022 and an exciting year to follow.

HC: I wish the same for you.



About The Poison Pie Publishing House

The Poison Pie Publishing House²⁵ is an independent publisher specializing in post-existential fantasy generated through a non-idiomatic improvisational writing process. In addition to serving as a publishing house, PPPH hosts an arts blog²⁵ and "An International Journal of Exploratory Meta-Living".²⁶

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Hebeloma's Swamp Fantasy Overture

"Hebeloma's Swamp Fantasy Overture" is a post-existential musical score generated through a non-idiomatic, improvisational creative process.

The tale recounts the adventure of Periboea, one of 14 youths offered to the minotaur by King Minos, immediately after she escaped from the labyrinth.

"Hebeloma's Swamp Fantasy Overture" is a musical score taking the modestly unconventional form of a novella. The score is intended for an ensemble of nine improvising musicians, each assuming the role of a character within the narrative. The indeterminacy in the score is an essential element, which reflects an inherent collaboration between composer, illustrator and performers.



About the Composer

Hebeloma Crustuliniforme suggests that there is a great joy in what others might refer to as a deep self-delusion. She asks the readers' indulgence to allow her to share that joy. This is her third work with the Poison Pie Publishing House.



About the Illustrator

Julia K. Keffer is the creative force behind the Bus Stop Art Show of Phoenix, Arizona, in which the ephemerality of art and its unknowable impacts are embraced through its unsanctioned placement in public spaces.



Hebeloma's Swamp Fantasy Overture was serially published on a daily basis in approximately 100 words/day from January 1, 2021 - December 31, 2021 exclusively at the blog of the Poison Pie Publishing House Knoxville, Tennessee



Poison Pie Publishing House
www.poisonpie.com

Hebeloma's Abyssal Aria

"Hebeloma's Abyssal Aria" is a post-existential musical score generated through a non-idiomatic, improvisational creative process.

The tale recounts the adventure of Eurymedusa, one of 14 youths offered to the minotaur by King Minos, immediately after she escaped from the labyrinth.

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