

Volume 3 · 2020-2021

satura



Transmissions from a pandemic

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KULTURFONDS
DER WWU

From the Editors

2020. Our first pandemic year.

Not to be confused with other pandemic years, when diseases ran rampant in parts of the world that perhaps didn't affect us, wherever we happened to be at the time. As I write this, in summer 2021, SARS-CoV-2, also known as Covid-19, is an ongoing pandemic that has affected all corners of the world. It is a virus that has vexed us, both scientists and citizens alike. It has eviscerated economies worldwide. It has separated loved ones from one another. It has impacted travel. It has killed millions of people in its wake.

On March 16, 2020, Germany began its first strict lockdown, shutting down all but essential services, like supermarkets or pharmacies. For university students, this meant the university buildings and libraries were shuttered, and for several weeks, one couldn't even check out or return library books. Student life in many parts of the world was changed forever.

For Volume 3 of *Satura*, we wanted to encapsulate this experience as it was happening. What were students thinking? Feeling? Working on? Did anything inspire them? What were they reading? And so, we released a rather open-ended call for papers. We wanted to open submissions for students to express a range of ideas – from creative writing to book reviews – really anything that was their focus at the time. We also wanted to include submissions from university students around the world.

The volume you are reading now reflects the impact of our pandemic year on university students. We are delighted to present you with a range of creative writing pieces, including the beast fable “Willi's Daisies”, the self-reflective “We Are Handtalkers”, and the emotional “How to Bury a World”. The reviews include Dr. Simon Rosenberg's examination of Troy Bassett's monograph, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Three-Volume Novel*, a topic frequently discussed in book history, which also links to Nina Kroesing's article in Volume 2.

We hope you enjoy this special pandemic issue of *Satura*, with health, happiness, and hope for the future.

Laura Ntoumanis

Natalia Tolstopyat

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LIVING IN THE BARDO

Lincoln in the Bardo • George Saunders

While locked down, I got bored with my monotonous way of life and tried to look for something new and fresh. I decided to step outside my reading comfort zone and picked up *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders, as the book claimed to be an experimental novel. The author had been thinking about writing the novel for a long time and, finally, decided to do this in 2015, saying that he did not want to be the guy whose gravestone would read “Afraid to Embark on Scary Artistic Project He Desperately Longed to Attempt” (Saunders).

In a nutshell, the novel is about Abraham Lincoln’s son, William, who ends up in the Bardo, a space between life and rebirth, after his death. While there, he is surrounded by other spirits, whose conversations construct the major part of the novel. The souls in the Bardo are unable to leave the place and rest in peace because they cannot admit even to themselves that they are dead. President Lincoln refuses to let his son go and, therefore, prevents William from leaving the Bardo.

The cacophony of voices is what pushes you out of your reading comfort zone and even makes you go astray. Reading the novel for the first time, I got lost. Every voice and its story seemed unfamiliar to me. But, all of a sudden, I reached the point where I realized that, side by side with this unusual form, the author brings up universal themes and issues that have been of great concern to humankind, in general,

and America, in particular, for ages.

The novel takes place in 1862 and deals with the issue of the enslavement of Black people, a key catalyst that led to the American Civil War, the bloodiest conflict in the American history. As we can see, even now the issue hasn’t been solved. Through his descriptions of President Lincoln, Saunders touches upon the human side of the issue, focusing on the fear of losing his only son and his soldiers rather than Lincoln’s role as a political leader. The author makes us question the historical facts that obliterate personal qualities and create an image of the politician suitable for certain figures. The author provides real and fake historical materials that describe Lincoln from different points of view. These are words of criticism and approval about Lincoln’s contradictory nature, but we can make one logical conclusion – “No one who has ever done anything worth doing has gone uncriticized” (Saunders 236).

All the themes the author dwells on resonate with my point of view, but the theme of regret particularly impressed me as I am one of those people for whom it is difficult to let bygones be bygones. Regrets can haunt my thoughts and prevent me from moving on and living life to the fullest. Lingering in my own ‘Bardo’, I’ve forgotten how to love my present life and feel happy about having everything that I need. My ‘Bardo’ is an intermediate space between my past life and present one. The novel made me realize that I don’t want to

end up like one of the characters of the book, Roger Bevins III, who, after breaking up with his boyfriend, committed suicide but dying changed his mind. Unfortunately, it was too late:

Having come so close to losing everything, I am freed now of all fear, hesitation, and timidity, and, once revived, intend to devoutly wander the earth, imbibing, smelling, sampling, loving whomever I please; touching, tasting, standing very still among the beautiful things of this world (Saunders 27).

This quote is a reminder for all of us who think that they can change things later on. Being engulfed by our desires, vengeance, unfulfilled dreams, and regrets, we keep our eyes closed and miss the opportunity to notice important things happening around us. In the Bardo, Bevins III turned into a monster with multiple sets of hands, eyes and noses as if experiencing retribution for his “blindness” and indifference to the surrounding world. I don’t think that anybody wants to end up like this.

Saunders focuses on personal loss and grief, life and death, love and empathy. It is what makes the novel worth reading, especially in this time of global struggle, in which people have lost their loved ones during the pandemic, are no longer able to see their friends and family, and have regrets about not having done what they wanted before being isolated.

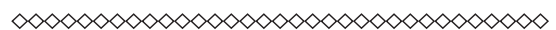
George Saunders wrote a successful experimental novel. This is the kind of a book I want to re-read, and I have done so twice in order to take in the entire message. Every time I come to a new conclusion because something, I have missed appears on the surface later. The book leaves you in tears, with your mind exhausted but satisfied. Being locked down, I managed to experience something

unknown to me before: to go outside of the traditional novel and expand my world and imagination to new horizons.

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Saunders, George. *Lincoln in the Bardo*, 2017.

Saunders, George. “George Saunders: What Writers Really Do When They Write”. *The Guardian*, 4 March 2017, <https://www.google.ru/amp/s/amp.theguardian.com/books/2017/mar/04/what-writers-really-do-when-they-write> Accessed 15 August 2020.



Tanya Levagina is a fifth-year student of the Ryazan State University named for S. Yesenin, who is majoring in English and Chinese. She is writing a graduation paper devoted to the technique of stream of consciousness in Modernist and Postmodernist works. Being interested in unusual forms of narrative, she couldn’t help but analyse the experimental novel “Lincoln in the Bardo” by George Saunders.

SAINT JOAN

George Bernard Shaw

The Covid-19 pandemic is a real trial for the entire world. But do not despair, as there are many opportunities available that were previously not possible. For me, such an opportunity is to spend more time reading. I have recently read *Saint Joan* by George Bernard Shaw. I was so impressed by this magnificent play and I have been contemplating on it for several days, analyzing all its details. I would like to reveal my own concept of the symbolic image of Joan herself. My interpretation was a result of the lockdown experience when more time for reading formed my personal ideas about life and attitude to others.

Saint Joan is a historical play written by G.B. Shaw in 1923. It is about the endless wars in France which destroyed people's lives. The main character, Joan, is trying to save her land from enemies and wants people to believe in a better world but her intentions and desires lead to a tragic outcome – she is burnt at the stake as a witch. The play was first staged in New York and later ran in London. It is written to make the readers see the world as it is, but not to idealize it from one's point of view. In my opinion, people should appreciate their history in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past. The play is filled with expressive imagery that gives it colour. The changing scenes and the gradual development of the plot lines lead to a tense moment in the story – the climax.

In the play, *Saint Joan*, or *Joan of Arc*, is an exalted and remarkable person, as her character is not affected by the sins which otherwise affect all people. Despite all the cruelty and injustice this girl has faced, she perceives others as people who are not to blame for their stupidity and ignorance. I can clearly imagine the heavy burden that is put on her in the play, the burden to get rid of human misfortune. Her aim is to save France and the king's crown from any enemies who want to take it. The social conflicts between France and England give rise to disagreements and contradictions, causing wars which break the destinies of people and devastate their inner world; in the end, people cannot preserve their identity and remain themselves in such difficult conditions. Shaw emphasizes how power and fear, creating such "dirty" conflicts, destroy the world as a whole. Living among other people, her flesh is tormented by their sins, but her soul is full of holy voices and images that lead this girl to her true purpose – to protect her land from enemies and save this world from human sins.

The main conflict of the play is the great hero's role in this unknown world and its degradation. The very image of Joan conveys the power of the spirit, which performs its service in the conditions of earthly existence and overcomes the cruel and universal destruction of human nature. This irresistible symbol

of freedom and faith directs us against these miserable people in power and their protest to accept some changes in life. Despite all the banality and comedy of the plot, the author manages to drive home the long sought idea of equality.

The play symbolizes the heavenly creation which embodies human image and spiritual ideal. All the events and objects are created to convey a specific meaning: the crown represents power and vanity, the soldier is a symbol of protection and courage, the church is a place of deep contemplation, the court is a place for gossip and hatred of those people who are far from holy thoughts. Each part of the play is based on a number of conflicts, from which further events arise. For example, in one of the scenes, Joan together with the soldiers rushes to save Orleans. Dunois, ready to submit to her, liberates Orleans from the English with his army. However, this victory turns into a further conflict with England. In France, Joan is greeted as a saviour but the courtiers despise her, the same courtiers who were on the battlefield with Joan and worshipped the French king, among them the main figure of Dunois, who secretly hated her as well. From these events, we see that the main character is completely confused, she should decide: to return home or to continue her way as a soldier and liberate Paris. Such a consistent chain of events constructs the main plot of this story. The whole play consists of several scenes whose events contain the inner conviction of the protagonist to fulfill her purpose and get closer to God.

The characteristic of the play is how it logically describes the whole dynamics of the historical events and their comicality. Comparing it with the works of other writers, this work has a gradual disclosure of events, a logical transition from one conflict to another

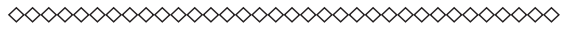
(since they are interconnected); there are no long descriptions of how strong the protagonist's faith is and her desire to overcome existing obstacles. Shaw wants the readers to imagine the greatness and piety of Joan. The play presents the most vivid feature of religious tolerance to others, although the idea of this play is based on the historical aspect and it is close to our reality. The merit of Shaw is in his banal representation of reality, through which we notice the shades of new illusions.

This way, the atmosphere of the whole play is quite tense and exciting. Experiencing every moment with the protagonist, the reader delves more deeply into the story.

These historical events and their significance in the world make me think about the circumstances we are facing now, circumstances that no one would have imagined earlier. I do appreciate our efforts to stay strong and safe; after all, we can live without these "dirty" conflicts with others and continue to do the most impactful things which may change the system and our attitude to life. We should notice any spiritual glimpses in every sinful soul because I, like Joan, am convinced that everyone can be saved! I feel a strong urge to share the play with others, since the spiritual idea and overall mood of this work may affect people and change their vision of life. I do believe that it would help them to become better and live in peace and harmony in these trying times. The readers perceive the play through the dynamics of time, which is so fleeting that one can get lost in it immediately. I am convinced that the story of Saint Joan is a small but important part of our current reality, in which people suffer from external circumstances as well, and are victims of their own desires. This work exemplifies the greatness of human thought, where the heroine believes in a

bright outcome of events despite all the obstacles and adversities. I also encourage people to seek

their salvation in the spiritual side of life, overcoming their vices.



Alexandra Bulganina was born in Kostroma, a small Russian town located on the banks of the Volga River. As a child, she was very creative and drew portraits of people and various landscapes. Her paintings have been exhibited in a few museums, one of them being Pavlov's Museum. However, she wanted to devote herself to another activity. She got deeply involved in studying two foreign languages – English and French, and tried to write her own small reviews of various writers' works in these languages. This became the very impetus for Alexandra to continue her creative work in writing short essays.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE VICTORIAN THREE-VOLUME NOVEL

Troy J. Bassett

One of the most fascinating elements about the publishing industry during the Victorian Age is the publication format “three-decker”. Despite being contested by many people and outrageously expensive, novels produced (and sold) in three volumes vitally influenced the British book market for decades. There is no shortage of articles that discuss the relevance of Britain’s commercial lending libraries for the success of this publication format. (See, for example, Nina Kroesing’s article “Mudie’s Select Library and the Three-Decker Novel – A Mutual Failure?” in *Satura* 2.) Only a few articles, however, analyse the three-volume novel itself. Troy J. Bassett’s *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Three-Volume Novel* wants to fill that gap. Published in 2020 by Palgrave Macmillan within their series “New Directions in Book History,” it is indeed the first monograph that has the “three-volume novel” at its centre. The overarching incentive for the creation of the book is summarised on the first page:

Yet, the publication format itself remains curiously underexamined. Even relatively basic questions are still unanswered, such as: how many three-volume novels were published, who wrote and published them, what were the economics of the format for both publishers and circulating libraries, why did the format last so long, and why did it end when it did? (Bassett, 1)

To be clear: most of these questions have

been asked for a long time, and hypotheses were formulated and educated guesses offered. But most articles, though offering convincing arguments, often lacked empirical data to back their claims and some conclusions might be labelled circumstantial. *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Three-Volume Novel* consequently offers a quantitative approach with manifold figures and statistics that closes some of the gaps in research, confirms several hypotheses and even contradicts some.

Troy J. Bassett is of course no newcomer to the topic. He specialised in nineteenth-century British literature during his MA and PhD studies (University of Kansas, 1996 and 2002 respectively). Since 2007 he has been teaching at Purdue University Fort Wayne, Indiana, first as an Assistant and Associate Professor, and since 2019 as a full professor. He has published widely on Victorian literature, and he was recently elected as a board member for the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals. Researchers of the Victorian Age may know Bassett, at least indirectly, because of his website “At the Circulating Library: A Database of Victorian Fiction, 1837–1901” (<http://www.victorianresearch.org/atcl>). Started in 2007, this extremely helpful database offers biographical data about Victorian authors as well as bibliographical information about novels, authors, genres, illustrations and serialisations. In fact, this database was of vital importance for his recent publication.

Bassett is clear in his Acknowledgements that he is not the first researcher focussing on three-volume novels but is rather, quoting Isaac Newton, “standing on the shoulders of giants” (vii). Indeed, he offers a helpful contribution by recapping the previous work done on the topic in the Introduction. Important contributions (mainly in chronological order) from scholars like Simon Eliot, David Finkelstein, Guinevere Griest or John Sutherland are briefly summarised along with their main arguments as well as possible gaps and flaws. This alone is a vital read for anyone interested in this topic as it offers a succinct overview of research done on the triple-decker format. Chapter 2 is arguably the most valuable part of the whole publication. Using data that has been collected via the “At the Circulating Library” database, Bassett offers a quantitative approach to answer the most pressing (and basic) questions (backed by empirical data) regarding who wrote and published the format, and how production figures developed over the decades. One major finding is the rather surprising coordination between periodical serialisation and book publication. The chapter itself presents manifold insights, but it also functions as the foundation for the next chapters: Chapter 3 looks closely at the publishing accounts of Richard Bentley between 1865 and 1890. Bentley was the second largest producer of multi-volume novels and his business records reveal much about the financial incentives for focussing on this format. Chapter 4 offers a financial history of W. H. Smith and Son’s Subscription Library as a representative to provide the perspective of the triple-decker’s strongest ally: the circulating library. Bassett is especially interested in the correlation, and possible causality, of the demise of the triple-decker and cheap reprints. He suggests “other motivating factors at play in calling for the end of the three-volume

novel” (Bassett, 14). Chapter 5 finally looks at several challengers to the multi-volume format in the closing years of the nineteenth century. It elaborates on the upcoming genre of “New Romance” that was allegedly used “to attack the domestic realism of library fiction” (Bassett, 14). Bassett further elaborates on George Moore’s infamous feud with Charles Edward Mudie and his Select Library that ultimately led to a short-lived attempt to establish cheap one-volume fiction. Finally, the chapter sheds light on the pioneering work of publishers J. W. Arrowsmith and T. Fisher Unwin who both produced book series that proved readers were willing to buy cheap books from unknown writers.

There are a few criticisms to be made. The cover design of *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Three-Volume Novel* uses an illustration labelled “A Visit to Mudie’s” depicting a (predominantly female) crowd carrying books in front of Mudie’s Select Library. Bassett’s monograph, however, mostly avoids Britain’s biggest subscription library of the Victorian Age. When Mudie is mentioned, he is mainly compared to W. H. Smith and Son’s or addressed in his role in the case study of George Bentley’s case against Mudie’s alleged censorship. But Bassett has good reasons not to focus on Mudie’s circulating library: 1) the monograph by Guinevere Griest is still a good account of Mudie’s Select Library, albeit somewhat outdated by now, and, more importantly, 2) the fact that business records of Mudie’s library do not exist. And this is precisely the flaw of previous three-decker research that Bassett wants to rectify. However, the choice of the cover illustration is somewhat misleading and proves the adage “do not judge a book by its cover.”

A less superficial criticism is the fact that Bassett’s monograph does not

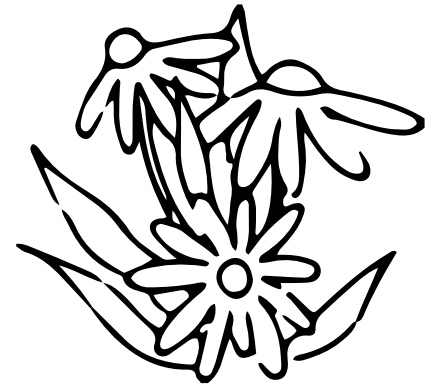
offer a concluding chapter. And this is directly connected to the major point of this review: Strictly speaking, this is not a full-fledged monograph with a specific research question and concluding arguments. Rather, it is a compilation of Bassett's fifteen-year research on the topic encompassing previously published articles and chapters (one dating back to 2004). All parts, however, have been revised to differing degrees for this publication. Even though the overarching topic for all chapters is the triple-decker publication format, one cannot ignore the somewhat eclectic quality of the overall work. Readers familiar with Bassett's work who are looking forward to new arguments and conclusions should be aware of that. This is, overall, a rather minor complaint, especially juxtaposed to the overall content that *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Three-Volume Novel* offers. Bassett is very clear about this in his Acknowledgements. (Unfortunately though, references to the specific chapters in the Acknowledgements within the book are all incorrect, most probably because the Introduction is counted as a chapter, too, something the author or editors did not take into account.) The book offers a coherent structure as it starts with empirical data offering groundwork for further arguments from the perspectives of publishers, circulating libraries and, finally, challengers of the publication format. Bringing together all discoveries of the chapters in a concluding chapter would have been a great added value for this publication. The impressive research and the results that Bassett has offered over the years are still valid and important. His writing style is excellent: precise and easy to follow. Researchers working in the field of Victorian Studies owe him a great debt for establishing his "At the Circulating Library" database. At the very least, it is very handy to have his major discoveries backed and updated by

growing empirical data together in one volume.



Simon Rosenberg is a German and Cultural Integration teacher for refugees, a freelance translator and an independent scholar focusing on book studies. He is co-founder of the community "Indy Scholars" (<https://independentscholars.hcommons.org/>) and author of *Book Value Categories and the Acceptance of Technological Changes in English Book Production*. His current research focusses on book prizes and the representation of books and bookish spaces in video games.

WILLI'S DAISIES



This sucks. I want everything back to normal," sighs Willi the wolf. It is a hard time for the wolves in 1433. Willi and his wolf buddies, Bobby and Sheila, rest by the outskirts of the woods, reminiscing over the past few weeks. "For weeks, I haven't been able to get close to Tilda. We are only allowed to wave at each other from afar. While the others are playing together, singing, and having fun, Tilda is forced to stay at home. It's so unfair!" At this point, Willi expects some sort of agreement and empathy from Bobby and Sheila. But the two of them just lie in silence, hiding their snouts under their paws. Disheartened, Willi turns away: "You guys just don't understand me" he hisses. Bobby and Sheila only continue to stare at him while he makes his way down to Wolf Village.

As he trudges out of the thicket of trees, the sun glares at him from the sky. In front of him, daisies and dandelions glow in a lovely green meadow. A beautiful mix of yellow and white lines the path of long grass up until a purling river, where right next to the cold blue, a lonely apple tree paints red fruits into Willi's view. Wolf Willi takes the scenery in, and a wave of nostalgia sweeps over him as he crosses the meadow and starts picking up daisies. "Tilda and I always loved to come here and look at the flowers when we spent time together," he recollects to himself. "She adores daisies." Unfortunately, no matter how much he thought about being here again with her, this was going to be impossible in the near future.

Tearily, Willi recalls the recent events that have led to his misery.

A year before, Dr. Lupo, the wolf doctor, had suddenly come running to the village. Distraught, he reported what was happening in the neighboring village, where many wolves had started to feel unwell. "They all fell ill" Dr. Lupo explained. It started with one wolf, then it spread to his family, friends, and everyone in the pack. "And then nothing was ever the same again", mutters Willi to himself. One wolf in our village too had started to feel unwell—the same as in the neighboring village. Dr. Lupo reacted immediately. Since the sickness spread from one family to the next, the sick wolf and his family were barred from leaving their home. During this time, Dr. Lupo lamented that they knew too little about the sickness. To prevent any further spread, every wolf who started to feel unwell was ordered by the doctor to stay under house arrest. In addition, the wolves who were already ill before this sickness came in, had to be protected to ensure that they remained safe. "That's how it came to be, that Tilda and I couldn't see each other anymore," ponders Willi, "because she is particularly susceptible. While the other wolves were still allowed to meet up, we weren't supposed to be in contact."

With his paws full of flowers, Willi sits by the apple tree, feeling the quiet wind caressing his fur. In the river, fish jump downstream towards Wolf Village, while the frogs are croaking in unison. Eyes

closed; he continues to reflect on the times that came after. "We had to be creative. Because of the house arrest, Tilda and I have been yowling to each other from a distance just to stay in touch. We chatted, kept each other updated, clowned around and played our little games. However, the monotony of it all soon caught up with us. We had nothing more to say to each other and so at some point we yowled less, until finally, we didn't yowl anymore. Then, we tried using smoke signals. Although very exciting at first, it was nothing in comparison to actually meeting face to face. Ever since then, we have only waved at each other." Feelings sweep over him, feelings that he desperately tries to fight and ignore. Full of sorrow, he throws the daisies away and weeps. "I feel so lonely..." After pausing for a moment, he stands up and leaves the meadow. The way to Wolf Village is not so far anymore.

To get home, Wolf Willi needs to walk past Tilda's house. Usually, he would try to hurry past it, but the thoughts from the meadow linger in his mind. He stands at Tilda's gate. Grey dust has sprawled across the entrance, making itself at home. The dried grass in the front yard had paled. Willi's gaze is fixed on the door. While he couldn't get himself to take his eyes off the house entrance, his legs, with a mind of their own, start wandering off towards Tilda's house. His paw inches towards the door and knocks on the cracked wood several times.

A moment later, the door opens. Through the gap, a fatigued laugh shimmies its way out. "Hey, we've not seen each other in so long!" exclaims Willi, "Are you still alive?" He lingers in front of the door. They hadn't been so close in almost forever, and he sensed a long-forgotten happiness bewitching the air as he saw the face of his long-lost friend. "It's just so nice to see you, I miss you so much," he whispers,

"I'm really happy right now." For a moment, the world is wonderful – as though everything is back to normal again.

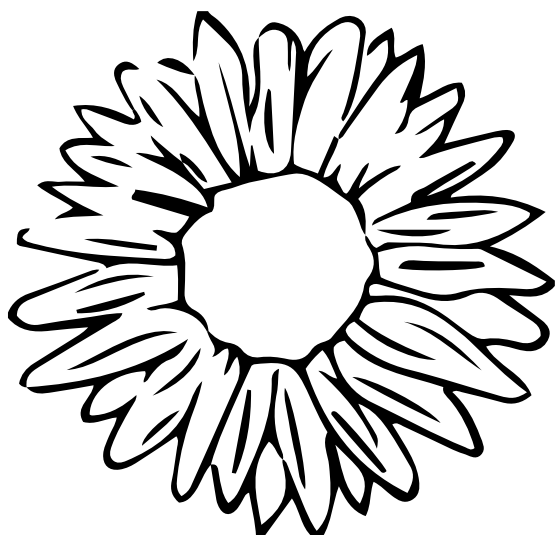
"Why aren't you saying anything?" Willi asks his friend, "You've always been chatty." An unpleasant feeling overshadows his excitement. "Tilda?" Her smile vanishes, giving way to a dry cough. Frightened, Willi repeats, "Tilda? Are you feeling unwell?" His wolf friend isn't looking so great. Only now does the young wolf notice the wad of fallen hair lying under Tilda, and her bloodshot eyes. "Ayayaya, that's exactly what Dr. Lupo described." A thought shoots through Willi's head. What can he do? "I'm fetching Dr. Lupo," he shouts and sprints off.

The wolf doctor's house is not too far away, and Willi is there in minutes. Hammering on the door, he shouts, "Help! Dr. Lupo, please help us!" The doctor quickly pokes his nose out of the front door. "Dr. Lupo, Tilda is not feeling well. She's coughing, and she needs your help!" The doctor immediately shifts gears, scrambling through his medical box. He then accompanies Willi to Tilda's house. "What's going on with Tilda?" Willi asks anxiously, shivering with fear. But the doctor doesn't reply. Instead, he disappears into Tilda's house, signalling Willi to wait outside. Willi sits on a rock and squirms, noticing a single daisy in the yard. To distract himself from the disturbing thoughts floating around in his head, his mind takes him back to the green meadow full of daisies.

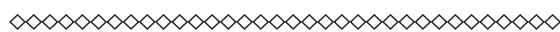
Like a white and yellow carpet of clouds in the sky, the flowers stretch from the shadows of the treetops to the riverbank. The sun beams through the clouds and dives into the meadow, shining in all of its glory, while the light breeze tickles the grass. Willi sits among the flowers, listening to the bees quietly buzzing away, while the frogs sing in the background. A

while later, he looks at the horizon and sees Dr. Lupo making his way towards him. As the doctor approaches him, Willi notices his lowered head and desolate gaze. Dr. Lupo shakes his head. At that moment, the buzzing and singing cease to exist. Willi's memories blur, and the last daisy among the grey dust withers away. Wolf Willi starts to feel unwell.

(For all risk groups, and couples and families who are separated for other reasons)



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DEY/DEREN/DENEN

Comforting Nicky

This is a two-part piece, consisting of an experimental German short story accompanied by a short explanatory essay in English.

PART I. PROSE

Erst beim zweiten Kaffee an diesem Morgen und nach einem Blick auf den Kalender erinnerte Nicky sich: Heute war nicht nur schon Samstag – also Wochenende – sondern auch noch deren Geburtstag. In dieser merkwürdigen Home-Office-Situation, in der jeder Tag ganz genau wie der davor schien, hatte Nicky das irgendwie vollkommen vergessen. Dabei hatte es mal eine Zeit gegeben, in der Nicky sich wirklich auf deren Geburtstag gefreut, ja, dem sogar entgegengefiebert hatte: Endlich wieder all die Freunde sehen, die inzwischen in der großen weiten Welt verteilt lebten und nur noch allzu selten zusammen kamen. Nun hatte Nicky also Geburtstag, und trotz der eilig gefällten Zusagen zu Beginn des Jahres würde heute niemand in deren Wohnung kommen.

Nicky seufzte. Diese Pandemie schluckte wirklich alles. Alles, was Nicky sich am Anfang des Jahres vorgenommen hatte, musste abgesagt werden. Und je länger sich die Tage zogen, an denen man nur zum Einkaufen und Spazieren das Haus verlassen sollte, desto schlimmer fühlte dey sich. Schließlich konnte dey sich unmöglich den ganzen Tag mit

Netflixserien und Romanen in imaginäre Welten fliehen. Da waren ja noch deren Deadlines und dieser Teilzeitjob, der Mitte März ins Home Office verlegt worden war und der die ganze Situation für Nicky dadurch nur noch weiter verzwickte. Auf einmal kümmerte es niemanden mehr, ob dey um acht, neun, zehn oder ein Uhr mittags das Bett verließ, und der Großteil der Arbeit konnte theoretisch auch noch nachts um zwei erledigt werden. Diese fehlende Struktur war offenbar keine gute Voraussetzung für jemanden wie Nicky, wie dey schnell bemerkte. Ab und zu gab es vielleicht mal ein Zoom-Meeting mit den Kollegen, aber da konnte man sich ja kaum vorher oder nachher zu einem Kaffee treffen. Und Duschen musste man vor einem Zoom-Meeting auch nicht unbedingt; die Hauptsache war, dass man geduscht aussah. Manchmal fragte Nicky sich, ob überhaupt noch jemandem auffiel, dass dey existierte; die Art und Weise auf die dey in den Zoom-Meetings angesprochen wurde, wenn überhaupt, ließ auf jeden Fall keine guten Rückschlüsse zu. Wäre dey doch nie aus der WG ausgezogen! Zu Beginn hatte die Vorstellung der eigenen vier Wände ganz entspannt gewirkt. Bis... ja, bis Corona. Nicky rührte ein weiteres Mal deren Kaffee um, nahm einen Schluck, und erschauerte. Kalt, natürlich.

Plötzlich klingelte es und Nicky schaute erschrocken auf. Das elendig scheppernde Geräusch hatte dey schon eine ganze Weile nicht mehr gehört. Nie hätte dey gedacht, dass dey es mal vermissen

könnte. Es klingelte wieder. Definitiv an deren Tür. Nicky sprang auf, hastete zur Tür und drückte den Öffner mehrmals und hektisch. Unten ging die Haustür auf. "Paket!", rief der DHL-Bote, entledigte sich direkt unten am Treppenabsatz eines ziemlich großen Kartons, und verschwand wieder.

Dey stellte den Karton misstrauisch auf dem Küchentisch ab. Nicky hatte nichts bestellt, da war dey sich ganz sicher. Und doch war das Paket eindeutig an dey adressiert... Irritiert starrte Nicky auf das Paket und schnitt sich dann kurzerhand entschlossen durch das Paketband. Direkt fiel denen ein dünner DIN A4 Briefumschlag entgegen. Verwirrt hob Nicky ihn hoch und linste in das Paket. Ein ganzer Berg zerknülltes Zeitungspapier, eine einzelne Streichholzschachtel und ein Seidenpapierknäuel in Tassenform. Was zum Teufel. Auf dem Umschlag stand "ÖFFNE MICH". Nicky tat wie geheißen, fühlte sich ein bisschen wie Alice im Wunderland, und musste grinsen. In dem Umschlag befand sich eine unscheinbare Karte, in der an Stelle von Signaturen oder Glückwünschen zum Geburtstag bloß ein einsamer, verlorener Link stand.

Merkwürdig. Und auch etwas verdächtig. Wagemutig holte Nicky deren Laptop und gab den Link ein. Hoffentlich funktionierte dieses blöde Internet heute wieder. Und tatsächlich – eine schwarze Seite öffnete sich, und

ZUM GEBURTSTAG

flackerte über den Bildschirm. Nicky lachte überrascht freudig auf und beobachtete, wie sich nach und nach ein grell-gelber Text langsam von unten nach oben schob:

Zum Geburtstag alles Gute. Leider können wir heute nicht mit dir persönlich feiern,

aber wir wollen trotzdem gemeinsam eine Reise ins Wunderland oder durch den Kleiderschrank antreten. Hast du Lust? Dann öffne die Streichholzschachtel. Wenn du damit fertig bist, klicke hier auf "Weiter".

Nicky starrte eine Weile ungläubig auf den Bildschirm, griff dann nach der Streichholzschachtel und schob sie auf. Der Inhalt sah ziemlich unspektakulär aus, roch aber lecker. Nicky holte das kleine Ding heraus und besah es sich von allen Seiten: Ein kleiner, weißer, flacher Quader, der sich anfühlte, wie Seife. Am Boden der Schachtel klebte ein warnendes Zettelchen:

FESTES SHAMPOO - HINWEIS IM KERN.

BEI ZERREISSEN ODER ABKRATZEN DISQUALIFIKATION!

Nicky verdrehte die Augen. Was sollte das denn jetzt? Ein Hinweis im Shampoo? Und dey sollte nicht reißen? Ja, aber wie denn dann... Deren Blick fiel auf die Badezimmertür. Sollte dey etwa – Naja, etwas Besseres hatte dey gerade auch nicht zu tun. Außerdem tat so eine schöne, heiße Dusche schon gut, zumindest meinte sich Nicky ganz dunkel an sowas erinnern zu können...

Als Nicky wieder aus der Dusche stieg und den flauschigen Bademantel fest um sich zog, hatte dey erfolgreich einen kleinen laminierten Zettel mit einer Zahlenreihe aus dem festen Shampoo geborgen. Den Zettel dubios betrachtend wunderte dey sich, was um alles in der Welt damit anzustellen war. Dann fiel denen wieder ein, dass dey ja auf "Weiter" klicken sollte. Kaum getan, erschloss sich die Bedeutung der Zahlenreihe sofort. Den Zahlen waren jetzt Buchtitel zugeordnet und darunter stand:

*Auf geht's, Bücherwurm. Hast du alles?
Dann klicke hier auf "Weiter."*

Nicky lachte einmal kurz auf und huschte zu deren Bücherregal, um das erstgenannte Werk hervorzuholen. Vielleicht galt die erste angegebene Zahl ja einer Seitenzahl? Schnell blätterte dey zu der ersten angegebenen Seite. Die zweite Zahl hinter dem Buchtitel gab vielleicht die Zeile an? Nicky sprang dorthin. Die nächste Zahl gab dann sicher an, um das wievielte Wort in der Reihe es sich handelte!

Schließlich hatte Nicky alles beisammen, eilte euphorisch lachend zum Computer und hieb in die Tasten, um so schnell wie möglich weiterzukommen. Was würde wohl als nächstes dort stehen? Die Worte aus all deren Lieblingsromanen ergaben offensichtlich ein längeres Zitat: "In jedem meiner Freunde steckt etwas, das nur ein anderer Freund ganz hervorbringen kann. Ich allein bin nicht groß genug, um den ganzen Menschen zu bewegen; ich brauche mehr Lichter als bloß mein eigenes, um all seine Facetten aufzuzeigen."¹ Kaum hatte Nicky die Worte eingegeben, wurde dey auf die nächste Seite weitergeleitet. Wieder lief eine gelbe Schrift langsam über schwarzen Hintergrund:

Gut gemacht! Aber bevor du alle Facetten (zwinker zwinker) sehen kannst, fehlt noch eine Kleinigkeit. Pack jetzt die Tasse aus und halte dich gut an die Anweisungen. Wenn du fertig bist, klicke auf "Weiter".

Nicky schnalzte mit der Zunge und wickelte die Tasse aus dem Papier. Erst jetzt erkannte dey, dass dort Markierungen vorgenommen waren: Striche und auch Worte, in feinsäuberlicher Handschrift.

Die unterste Markierung sagte "Milch." Machbar – Milch hatte Nicky für deren Kaffee immer im Haus. Die nächste Markierung sagte "Mehl." Auch das hatte dey. Dann kam Zucker, dann Öl, dann "eine Messerspitze Backpulver" und schließlich noch Kakaopulver. An der Seite der Tasse fand sich eine Anweisung zum Umrühren und Backen in der Mikrowelle, und darunter: "Wieg mich." Nicky fragte sich, ob sich das "Wieg mich" auf das Gewicht vor oder nach dem Backen bezog, beschloss dann, dass die Anweisungen wohl chronologisch waren, und stellte die Tasse in die Mikrowelle. Nicht mal zwei Minuten später roch die ganze Wohnung nach Schokoladenkuchen. Dey kramte deren Küchenwaage hervor und wog den Kuchen mitsamt Tasse. Dann klickte Nicky auf der Website auf "Weiter" – und wurde aufgefordert, das gerundete Ergebnis des Wiegens einzutragen. Die Website lud neu und zeigte nun einen "Kuchen-Ess-Countdown" an. "ISS MICH" flackerte alle paar Sekunden über den Bildschirm. Nicky schnaubte amüsiert und begann, den unerwarteten Geburtstagskuchen zu genießen. Kaum getan, lief wieder gelbe Schrift über schwarzen Hintergrund:

Wir hoffen, du bist angezogen! Wenn nicht, solltest du das lieber schnell tun – und dann vor deiner Haustür gucken.

Nicky verdrehte gutmütig die Augen und schlüpfte in eine bequeme Hose und ein T-shirt, während auf dem Bildschirm ein neuer Countdown runter lief. Die Sonne begann schon langsam unterzugehen, als dey die Haustür öffnete und das Paket sah. Es lag einfach so, ganz allein, auf dem Fußweg vor deren Haus; groß, bunt eingewickelt, und mit einem Ballon, auf dem "Zum Geburtstag!" stand. In deren Brust machte sich ein aufgeregtes

¹ C. S. Lewis: "In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets."

Kribbeln breit, von dem Nicky anfang des Tages nicht gedacht hätte, es heute überhaupt noch mal zu spüren.

Als Nicky glücklich glucksend mitsamt Paket voller Geschenke in die Wohnung zurückkehrte, hatte sich die Website schon wieder verändert: Auf dem Bildschirm leuchteten viele kleine Kästchen, und aus jedem Kästchen winkte einer deren Freunde. Sobald Nicky überwältigt lachend deren eigene Webcam und Mikro an schaltete, begannen alle, laut und leicht asynchron, aber darum umso enthusiastischer ein Ständchen zu singen. Nicky strengte sich an, nicht allzu gerührt zu wirken, und versagte kläglich. Aber das war natürlich vollkommen egal, schließlich waren das hier alles deren Freunde:

Nicky konnte ganz dey selbst sein.

PART II. ESSAY MUSINGS

We bet you were not expecting to come across a German language text in this ostensibly rather English language focused journal. Prolific use of non-binary pronouns, on the other hand, should have been a little less unexpected, especially considering that the singular “they” is not much of a rarity in English by any means. Stumbling upon a brief, experimental short story detailing the queer life of non-binary Nicky in times of Covid lockdown is therefore likely not too surprising – after all, this Saturday issue is concerned with anything lockdown-related, and some aspects of the affective qualities of this overall rather queer experience likely ring true for a lot of us in some way, shape or form. Like many of us lucky enough to still be in work, Nicky is stuck working remotely from home, and is feeling rather isolated and cut off from their regular social sphere, partly due to the additional strain on their queer social circle from regulations fashioned exclusively on amatonormative living standards. Even queerer: Nicky’s story uses gender-neutral pronouns in an attempt to accommodate Nicky’s non-binary gender identity. If this text had been written in English (“It was Nicky’s birthday, and they were sad.”) you likely wouldn’t have batted an eyelash.

Speakers of English employ the third-person singular pronoun “they” quite successfully. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) suggests a poem from the 1450s as the first noted example of “they” being used to refer “to an

individual [...] without specifying gender” (“they”²). The OED further lists the specific use of “they” as a pronoun for those whose “sense of personal identity does not correspond to conventional sex and gender distinctions.” For speakers of English, it is therefore just as common to say that “somebody forgot their umbrella” as it is to say, more specifically, that “Nicky forgot their umbrella.”

In German, however, it is quite a bit more difficult to refer to someone without revealing or assuming their gender, nevermind the difficulty in referring to someone who neither identifies with the gender identity implied by the feminine pronouns “sie/ihr”, nor with the one implied by the masculine “er/sein.”³ But growing awareness and visibility of queer experiences have provided us with the insight that not everyone’s experience aligns itself so easily with this culturally and linguistically constructed gender binary. Standard German offers three third-person singular personal pronouns (plus their declinations): “Er,” “sie,” “es.” These correspond to the grammatical genders “masculine,” “feminine” and “neuter,” and although “es” is ostensibly gender-neutral, it does carry dehumanising connotations. If one is referring to an unknown individual/subject, instead of using what is often called the generic masculine, one may talk about them in a roundabout way, as in “Jemand hat den Regenschirm vergessen” or “Die Person erzählte mir etwas.”⁴ Unfortunately, this may only work up until possessive pronouns are needed (“Jemand hat seinen Regenschirm vergessen,” and “Die Person erzählte mir, dass sie nass geworden sei”⁵), which

2 The Middle English sentence the OED refers to (“If þou sall lofe, þe person fyrste, I rede, þou proue / Whether þat thay be fals or lele.” fol.185, emphasis by us) is taken from a paternal instruction poem in the Cotton Manuscript Vespasian D.xiii as it was transcribed by Mustanoja.

3 We’ll shelve the discussion of gender neutral nouns for another time, although a first approach could definitely already turn “Feuerwehrmann” and “Feuerwehrfrau” into “Feuerwehrende*r.”

4 English translation: “Someone forgot the umbrella” or “This person told me something.”

5 English translation: “Someone forgot his umbrella” and “This person told me that she had gotten wet.”

signify the grammatical gender of the subject of the sentence and may cause confusion when the gender identity of the person being referred to does not match. It therefore does not serve as a solution for non-binary and genderfluid German speakers.

There have, in the past, been attempts to establish new third-person singular pronouns for non-binary identifying, German-speaking individuals which include neologisms such as “xier” (Heger, Illi Anna Heger).⁶ Given, however, the notable absence of these pronouns in the large majority of contemporary German texts, one would have to assume that, so far, none of them have really stuck. One of the most striking reasons for that is surely both the problem of pronouns generally belonging to a “closed” word class (meaning, it doesn’t expand easily) (Mair 74), as well as many of the proposed alternatives being rather unwieldy in terms of phonetic articulation, especially so in the case of “xier.”⁷ All in all then, while an English language journal featuring a German text may have been unexpected indeed, to come across a German text using non-binary pronouns may have been even less expected. In fact, the ease with which the English language (and therefore English studies) accommodates gender-neutral writing may even be a small contributing reason as to why many German queer studies scholars seem drawn towards English. Which, invariably, leads us to the third-person singular personal pronouns used in the short story above.

In the first paragraph of this German short story you may not even have noticed anything altogether too strange or amiss: most everything was described using words that generally already exist in German, and that includes the use of the pronouns “deren” and “denen.” Now, Nicky uses these possessive pronouns because they correspond to Nicky’s non-binary gender identity, so if this story was told in English, the likely consequence would then be to use the pronoun “they” to refer to Nicky. What, you may ask, would or could be a German equivalent? Well, you have likely noticed that this particular piece of German prose is adorned with some unfamiliar vocabulary:

Diese Pandemie schluckte wirklich alles. Alles, was Nicky sich am Anfang des Jahres vorgenommen hatte, musste abgesagt werden. Und je länger sich die Tage zogen, an denen man nur zum Einkaufen und Spazieren das Haus verlassen sollte, desto schlimmer fühlte dey sich.

The unfamiliar “dey.” At first glance, it may seem like any of the other new pronouns proposed by German non-binary persons online: unexpected and strange.⁸ Nichtbinär-Wiki quotes an anonymous submission on the blogging platform tumblr as the origin of this new pronoun, which suggests “deren” as the possessive or genitive form and “denen” as the dative form (Nobinarytransgermany).⁹

Why, then, did we use “dey/deren/denen” for this story, and how is it any

6 There is little to no research on queer German language pronouns. These examples have been taken from the German open-collaborative online encyclopedia for non-binary concepts and issues, Nichtbinär-Wiki, which includes examples of declination. According to Nichtbinär-Wiki, the pronoun xier was first introduced by Illi Anna Heger, whose website offers more insight into the usage of “xier,” providing ample examples and explanations.

7 “Xier,” pronounced /ksi:□□/ (Heger “Pronomen ohne Geschlecht 4.0”), starts with the non-germanic word-initial consonant cluster /ks/, which seems to only occur in (generally Greek) loanwords (have a look for example at the words starting with the letter x in the Duden, 1235-6.), making it less likely for it to become widely adapted and used any time soon.

8 In fact, it is mentioned in the same open-collaborative online encyclopedia, Nichtbinär-Wiki, as many of the other newly proposed German pronouns, each listed with a few different ideas as to how to decline it (“Pronomen”).

9 It is quite fascinating to note that this is a way of constructing new language and therefore discursive structures via what one might call a democratic grassroots effort... In how far these rather niche explorations are then accepted by a larger language community remains, of course, to be seen.

different from other unwieldy new pronouns? “Dey” appears to have been inspired by the English “they,” substituting the English voiced dental fricative /ð/ with the voiced alveolar plosive /d/ and thereby making it more palatable to German tongues while the use of the grapheme Y in writing avoids confusion with the German article “die.” Similar to the successful singular “their” and “them” in English, “deren” (genitive) and “denen” (dative) are already part of the German vocabulary and German speakers need therefore only adapt the plural “deren/denen” to refer to individuals, as English speakers have similarly done.

Den Zettel dubios betrachtend wunderte dey sich, was um alles in der Welt damit anzustellen war. Dann fiel denen wieder ein, dass dey ja auf “Weiter” klicken sollte.

Die Worte aus all deren Lieblings-Romanen ergaben offensichtlich ein längeres Zitat.

Consequently, the only truly new addition is the word “dey” with conjugation still following third-person singular rules. Since nominative and accusative forms of the relative plural pronoun “die” are the same in German, the short story above uses “dey” for both cases in the new singular, too. Another advantage of “dey” over, for example, “xier” is that the pronunciation /dei/ follows German phonotactic rules (Meibauer et al. 109), as plenty of German words that begin with /d/ continue with a vowel (see entries in the Duden starting with “D” 322-76). A user-friendly pronunciation would have “dey” sound like /dei/, a sound which already occurs in plenty of English loanwords and is therefore not alien to German tongues, despite the more common German <ei> usually being pronounced /dai/ (Meibauer et al. 80). Even better, the slightly altered pronunciation may even

function as a feature differentiation, preventing confusion with other German words without sounding too jarring. The adherence to German phonotactic rules, plus the inclusion of only one new word while the new, gender-neutral third-person singular genitive and dative make use of already existing forms, situates “dey/denen/deren” as one of the best solutions for a gender-neutral German third-person singular pronoun so far. As such, “dey” may possibly have a chance at eventually experiencing broader recognition and usage, not dissimilar to the Swedish “hen,” which, after an initially negative reception around its implementation in 2012, has since experienced increased use and is being met with largely positive attitudes (Gustafsson Senden et al. 10). We would, of course, adore it if this small piece of prose turned out to be just one of many more to come, all demonstrating the use of “dey” and possibly setting off a similar development in German.

So here we are: Nicky is a non-binary person experiencing the daily struggles of Covid lockdown that so many of us have experienced ourselves at some point—or are possibly even still experiencing. Through the usage of the “dey/denen/deren” pronouns we are able to tell the story in German without distorting the protagonist’s realities by virtue of the restrictive nature of binary gendered language; Third person singular “dey” may well offer us a comfortable (to borrow Sara Ahmed’s terminology) opportunity, both phonetically and socially, to bring us ever so slowly closer towards intelligibility—and consequent livability—of genderqueer and non-binary persons in and through the German language. In this story, Nicky was lucky enough to have their lockdown day brightened and rendered more comfortable by perceptive friends. May

any Nickys and non-Nickys reading this playful little experiment in lockdown – or, hopefully, out of lockdown – take from it the comfort of possibility, if nothing else.

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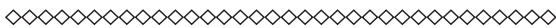
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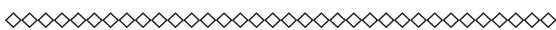
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we are handtalkers(-)

SOME MUSINGS

OH MY GOD I'M A WRITER.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

PLEASE DON'T LOOK AT ME AS
I'M WRITING.

ALL THESE POEMS.
POEMS. POEMS.

I NEED THIS MORE THAN
I'D LIKE.

MORE THAN I KNEW.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN A
WRITER AND A POET?

IF YOU ARE NOT SPEAKING
OUT FROM THAT WHICH SETS
YOUR SOUL ON FIRE THEN
WHAT IS REALLY THE POINT?

// How can I make things beautiful when they are not?

I can feel it. I'm shedding my skin again. It's rising to the surface. *This feeling*. The restlessness is returning. I am beginning to realize I can push *it* back all I want, but I can't push *it* away. I mean, I could, but to do so would be to erase a part of myself. I know I cannot do *that*.

Someone recently suggested that perhaps writing is a part of my thrill seeking nature. I think maybe they were right. I had never thought of my writing in those terms before. For eighteen years of my life I never even thought about writing at all. It was just something I did. No pretense. For most of my life writing was the only thing I ever did for myself. It is different now. I have become selfish. I am aware of my dull, aching need to write. I need *this* more than I'd like. More than I knew.

These days I write to acknowledge the beauty in the nothingness. I am learning anything can become beautiful if I shed light on it long enough. Even the darkest parts of myself. Of life. Poetry is where I pose my questions, and essay writing is where I try to reckon with the answers. Only for myself, though. I am selfish. So selfish.

// Can inner chaos be both dynamic and paralyzing?

The role of the poet is to express more lucidly what is concealed beneath the skin. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche introduces this initial act of unearthing depth by writing, "constantly, we have to give birth to our thoughts out of pain... constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame" (GS, Pref. §3). The poet recognizes that disorder is both dynamic and paralyzing. Writing is a means of learning to dance with disorder. Playing with language becomes a means of engaging in fiction and art. This means providing a "counterforce against our honesty" (GS, §107). In doing so the poet begins this process of peeling away the skin to make sense of her interior chaos. She is cautious that life has something beneath it, so she uncovers depth with a careful hand. Through a process of igniting thought, and burning away the pain the poet reveals the depth that emerges from suffering through a smoky haze.

HOW CAN I MAKE THINGS BEAUTIFUL WHEN THEY ARE NOT? / CAN INNER CHAOS BE BOTH DYNAMIC AND PARALYZING? / WHAT IS THE MEANING OF ALL THESE WORDS FALLING OUT LIKE WATER? / WHAT DO I GIVE MY TIME TO AND WHY? / AS A WRITER DO I WRITE WITH MY HAND OR MY BRAIN? IF I AM NOT SPEAKING WITH MY MOUTH, THEN WHAT? / HOW CAN I MAKE THINGS BEAUTIFUL WHEN THEY ARE NOT? / CAN INNER CHAOS BE BOTH DYNAMIC AND PARALYZING? / WHAT IS THE MEANING OF ALL THESE WORDS FALLING OUT LIKE WATER?

WHAT IS SAID IS HARDLY
EVER WHAT IS MEANT.

Perhaps then, the role of the poet is to divulge the human being under the skin by exploring the darkest depths of her own mental thresholds. Writing is a process of crushing and pressing thoughts in such a way that the sweetest wine may flow forth as ink passes from the pen to the page. The poet is not merely charmed by the appearance of depth, but knows she contains an abyss within herself. Through entering the abyss and pouring her thoughts on paper she is able to resurface in a new light. Her brittle bones cannot bear the weight of her thoughts, so by purging them as poetry she is able to exhale the dust from her hollow body and become bright again, shrouded in clean light.

// What is the meaning of all these words falling out like water?

In grade school, I remember my teacher once told me I had written a beautiful poem, but the ending was jarring and abrupt compared to the rest. I responded with, "Yes, but isn't that how life is?" She never answered my question and told me I needed to edit the poem. I didn't. *How could I?*

I NEED THE THRILL. OF LIFE.
AND THE WRITING OF IT.

In his poem "Passage to India" Walt Whitman writes, "Wandering, yearning, curious, with restless explorations / With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-happy hearts / With that sad incessant refrain, *Wherefore unsatisfied soul?* and *Whither O mocking life?*" (lines 90-92). I cannot help but be reminded myself by these words. They become a sort of mise-en-abyme where I am confronted with a reflection of myself that is not, of course, my self. Whitman is taking a scalpel to both my motivations as a writer and adrenaline junkie. Which, really, are the same. He is holding me up to the light and I am see through. Exploration begins as a curiosity that moves toward restlessness and becomes feverish. When my thirst is not quenched I become oh, so unsatisfied. I need the thrill. Of life. And the writing of it.

// What do I give my time to and why?

A Buddhist monk once told me to only have eight possessions in my life. A mat to sleep on. A prayer book. A mosquito net. An umbrella. A bowl for food. A pair of shoes. A robe for the winter. A robe for the summer.

What does this mean? Nothing in excess. As a writer I am striving to have more and more of less and less. When I am free from distraction and noise pollution I realize,

Everything seems silent, yet it isn't.

*Someone, somewhere is going through their day.
I am hit by how the world simultaneously seems so small,
yet is also so far away.*

The value of my writing begins with noticing life in motion. In color.

HOW CAN I MAKE THINGS BEAUTIFUL WHEN THEY ARE NOT? / CAN INNER CHAOS BE BOTH DYNAMIC AND PARALYZING? / WHAT IS THE MEANING OF ALL THESE WORDS FALLING OUT LIKE WATER? / WHAT DO I GIVE MY TIME TO AND WHY? / AS A WRITER DO I WRITE WITH MY HAND OR MY BRAIN? IF I AM NOT SPEAKING WITH MY MOUTH, THEN WHAT? / HOW CAN I MAKE THINGS BEAUTIFUL WHEN THEY ARE NOT? / CAN INNER CHAOS BE BOTH DYNAMIC AND PARALYZING? / WHAT IS THE MEANING OF ALL THESE WORDS FALLING OUT LIKE WATER?

// As a writer do I write with my hand or my brain? If I am not speaking with my mouth, then what?

HANDTALKING = WRITING

HANDTALKER = WRITER

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO YOURSELF IF NO ONE ELSE WAS LISTENING?

WRITE THAT.

This is a question that has been filling up my headspace since I was in China a year ago. I still don't really have an answer. However, I do believe that artists and writers speak with something far more intentional and less loose than their mouths. Writing is a sort of hand talking where what is being "said" is not being heard, but interpreted from the silent symbols on a page. The reader determines the meaning for herself. The creator becomes a twisted type of mime engaging in a one sided conversation, on mute. That is, the writer makes statements then turns her work over to the readers who engage in their own conversations... Conversations that the writer is excluded from.

Sometimes it seems like the author is writing from extremes of the head and the heart. Perhaps only her hand talking can provide this sort of dynamism. The best writers seem to write in such a way that the reader is able to create their own conversation within the text. Their writing has a gentle way of drawing the reader out of their everyday self into feeling more robustly. Even if only for a moment.

Then, could it be the case that writers speak from their soul rather than anything else? Is this what gives their work such depth and vulnerability?

Still learning,
-EMILY HUNT



Emily Hunt is in her final year of undergraduate study at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. She is studying philosophy and English. Her primary interests are in the intersections between the verbal and the visual. She is fascinated by what words and images can communicate when placed together that they cannot alone. Hunt explores these interests both in her own personal writing and through research. She is currently focusing on the interplay of poetry and contemporary art.

SUMMERTIME PASSACAGLIA

Day 1

Daniel checks the death numbers every day, and it's always the first thing he tells me. He used to wish me a good morning, now he informs me about local infection rates. His tone has changed, too; his sentences now end with an exclamation mark, although he hardly ever raises his eyes from the newspaper. The sound of his own voice fascinates him. I don't think he enjoys bad news; he's just amazed that he's reading a newspaper and not a history book. I can't share his excitement. It doesn't feel like I am experiencing anything at all; my days are packed in cotton wool since I've been back home. The hectic departure, my overloaded luggage, the lady from the airport staff who screamed: Run. I was so afraid I wouldn't make it home and now that I'm home, I don't know where to go with me.

Day 2

I try to keep my brain occupied and use this tremendous amount of free time I'm suddenly facing to improve my long-forgotten French, but really all I want to do is turn my brain off, do my hair and go out. I feel bad for having such self-centred cravings, but it's a voice inside me I am unable to mute. No one told me a pandemic is so quiet that it makes your mind scream. There is much more going on in movies. In reality, there are no bombs, no rapes, no panic. People are just choking, slowly and quietly, in a lazaret that used to be a gym. And from those of us who are spared for the moment, it's only expected to stay at home. "Make yourselves comfortable," the politicians say. "Bake some banana bread!" My grandparents avoid me as if I had the plague and the chancellor tells me to bake banana bread.

Day 3

When I look out of the window, I see a swarm of white seabirds in the field next to our house. They're just on a quick stopover on their way to the coast. They're moving in flowing, wavelike formations that remind me of water and I envy them. It's a ballet they are performing; a water ballet, and I wish I could dance.

Day 4

Today was a good day. I've started playing the piano again and I had forgotten how

much I missed it. When I'm playing, thoughts are running through my mind freely, flowing around me like waves, like the birds outside my window. I'm playing Handel's Passacaglia, and my hands know their way by themselves, allowing my mind to float, although I've never entirely mastered the piece. But with the Passacaglia it doesn't matter; it's written in such a way that you can't make out little mistakes. The melody is fragile and light, continuously ascending and falling, with no climax to worry about. The reason I've never learned to play the piece properly is that I always stop before the end and rush to put my thoughts on paper. Sometimes Daniel plays ABBA upstairs - on Spotify, not on an instrument - and it drowns out my Passacaglia.

Day 5

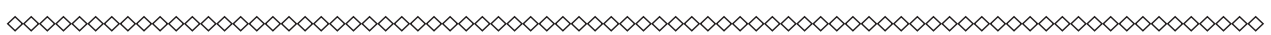
There's a cherry tree next to our house. It's huge and blooms white in spring. When a breeze comes in and the blossoms swirl through our garden, you'd think it's still snowing. And now it's summer and the white buds have turned into fat red cherries only the birds can eat because they're poisonous. There are too many cherries for too few birds, so most of them hang on the tree until they are all soft and soggy. In these times, leaving the house is dangerous, as red drops frequently shower down from the sky. The ones that don't directly ruin your clothing burst on the ground, making our terrace look like someone died on it.

Day 6

I can't stand Dan's face anymore. I'm sick of ABBA, and I will never be able to play the Passacaglia like one's supposed to. I'm running out of time, but I'm unable to move. My days are all the same, flying by in slow motion.

Day 7

Today, I was cycling with Dan and we passed the seabirds resting on the field. Daniel left the road and just drove straight into them causing the whole swarm to scatter into the air. It looked like water splashing when you jump in. Afterwards, I asked him why he did it and he said it just seemed like fun.



Maya Baumann is a third-year B.A. student of Comparative Literature at the University of Augsburg. Her studies focus on Italian and anglophone literature. Besides, she writes prose in German and in English and is currently working on a novel. In 2019, her short story Family Romance was selected for the Swabian Prize of Literature for a young author. She plans to pursue a career in the literary field.

WINDOWS

Open. Window.

Look into my world.

See my room, see my life

Or at least the part I show.

The seminar: Also coming to your room, soon.

No escape, unless you've got a free kitchen or living room.

Morning, wake up.

It's ten minutes before your lecture starts.

Who cares, listen to it while you're having breakfast, like a morning podcast,

You could even shower now, you think, and nobody would see,

Girl, where are your morals, you ask, where's your dignity?

I sit.

You sit.

We all sit.

I sit in front of my laptop, to look into my world.

I sit, I wait, I hustle, from work to work to work.

No clear borders anymore, no life to take a break from learning

Your room is the only place to go, inevitable returning.

Your world – became significantly smaller

Your world – got transferred to being an online scholar

Your world – changed within a day or two

So many parts of your normal – stopped existing for you.

Before – you went home after a full day of studying and coffee and talks,

Now you leave home after work to get at least a ten-minute walk,

Some fresh air, sun or a small gathering of two people that you miss

To still be weirded out by it—

Your studies came closer to you, as close as solely existing in your home
but at the same time, distant, far, loosening connections through missing human contact
and being apart, through sixteen emails that could've been one talk, ten minutes, even less,
but there was no breakout room for that.

Motivation? Gone, or at least harder to find

It's hard to motivate yourself if you contemplate that your grandparents might possibly die
if you see them next week, finally, after half a year.

Meeting people before? No second thoughts, meeting people now?

*Are we too many? Did you distance yourself properly? Did you wash your hands? Do we sit
apart? Are we allowed to – hug?*

You think at least ten times before meeting someone you haven't seen for two weeks

You think at least twenty times before meeting your grandparents or someone with a baby

Your thoughts crash if you enter a crowded place

You don't feel comfortable anymore with not having enough space.

Other humans are potentially dangerous now

You are a potential danger to other humans now.

After some weeks, you would love to meet your friends from the other side of Germany

You would not love to take a train there, or a bus, or see their twenty friends from university.

Scared for your mum, who's working with large groups of children,

Scared for your friend, who's an underpaid nurse in need of self-isolation,

Scared for the people you know with lung problems, depression, or other diseases,

Scared for the sister of your grandmother, or children, losing the mobility they needed—

So much to think about,

Your head is running wild.

You constantly need to calm yourself

Not allowing it to become too loud.

Your head? It's filled with crushed plans, fear, and panic.

Let's not pretend that this is the same basis as before

For studying or for learning.

learn to stop thoughts

from crawling into your head

prevent yourself from reading the news
before going to bed.

At least

Nobody you know has been affected, as in “dying”
And the safety measures are working rather fine, worth it, no denying.
The uncertain uncertainty it is that keeps us up at night
Not knowing how long this will continue to be
Not able to tick off days, counting down, till we —

And at the end of my full day, happily

I close my windows

And get up from my desk at home to close the other windows.

I’ve been looking out of these windows much more than ever before,
leaves turning green
on the tree in front of it
and on my computer screen.

You get used to it, you think.

The new normal becomes less intimidating.

Still though, you miss

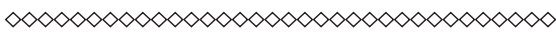
Not having windows between your world and yourself.



Leonie Figge is currently pursuing a bachelor’s degree in English studies and history in the city of Münster. She is fascinated by the human desire to tell stories –something that she encounters in both her subjects- and also enjoys studying a diverse mixture of texts. Interested in creating something with and through words, she has been writing for the past few years and has tried out several different genres and text forms, beginning with poetry and short stories. For some time now, she has mainly settled on writing Spoken Word Poetry because she finds the need to give words a (heart) beat, not just through writing but also performing them.

HAIKU OF MALADISMS

They were not attentive
Now worlds are wilting
Will you cure them - - -



Jessica is a visiting scholar at the Graduate School 'Practices of Literature' of the University of Muenster. She is currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University of Leeds and is a passionate writer.



HOW TO BURY A WORLD

Model behavior. We want others to care. But first we must learn how. To care while numb with rage sadness grief hopelessness. Burying ourselves. Comfortably. In denial.

Statistics. Abstract numbers that try to hold deaths not counted, buried in unknown memories. Stories denied, coming alive as lives taken. HiStory. HerStory. TheirStory. Our Stories. Whose lives? Matter.

Burying a friend's friend. Hands pushed deep into pockets of coats and trousers. Clenched fists. Invisible. People looking away. Questions and doubt shrugged off. Trivialised. We have no choice. Or do we? Conscience for sale. Go, buy a new one. Ours lost. Or ignored. Too many responsibilities. Quiet now. Don't disturb the sleeping.

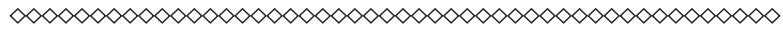
Routines of the sleepless. Faces buried in pillows. Burst out laughing. Crying. Beneath blankets on hot summer nights, we suffocate from fear. Trying to stay still. Trying not to think. Pretending to sleep. Like before. No questions. No dreams. Addicted to absolution. Drugging ourselves, we remove all traces of guilt. Unconscious. Bias. Narcotised blur.

Mindfulness. Me first. My vacation. My much-deserved break. My social life. My well-being. My immune system. My life. My risk. My arrogance. My shame.

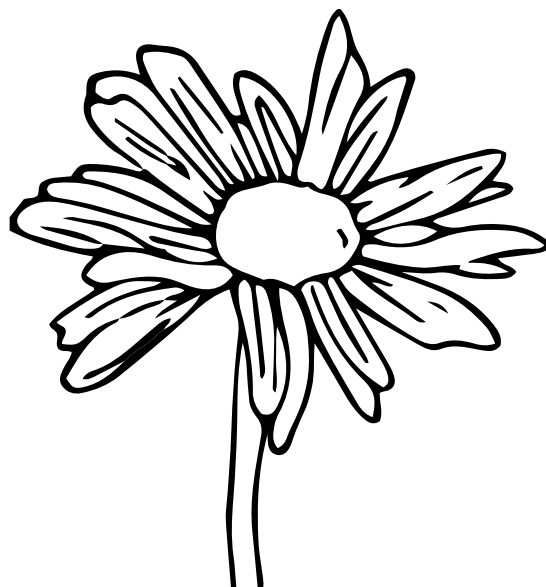
Proper send-off. Bodies held in the cold embrace of freezer trucks. Archives of the dead. Millions competing for the privilege of space. Millions more buried in the margins of history. Off the page. In unmarked earth. The cost of dying. Welcome to the future job market.

Short-circuit. We wander through forests and gardens and empty streets. Restless. Fed up with tracing the walls of our apartments. Through crowded cafés and supermarkets. Into hospitals.

Who's next.



Drinks tea any time of day and night. Hooked on collecting plants. Believes that irony makes everything more fun. Zoom-fatigued. Works on borders. Indigenous literatures. Postcolonial studies. Time. Space. Anything in between. Might be obsessed with Thomas King's works. And Travis Wall's. Would probably write a book on sticky notes.



VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY CHANCE

Note: for this text you need a context. Set yourself against a priority and see who wins.

We were building bridges when we realized we were afraid of heights.

I'm worrying. I heard that in Chinese the word most fit to translate to melancholy has worry as its core meaning.

We moved, and now we've got more walls than ever before.

I'm becoming a stranger to myself; I'm not touching my hands anymore.

Lockdown day 1: He is correcting my paper on my tablet, so the corrections come under my name.

Can water experience sehnsucht? The wind blows snowflakes against the window in our kitchen that melt on contact, and from the inside condensation obscures the view, becoming heavy with humidity. Now water droplets are running down on both sides of the closed window.

I've seen wild horses. They were just there; that was enough.

Soap Bubbles of Thought.

I touched a donkey today. Donkeys seem to me like the cats among the ungulates.

The days blend into each other.

I dreamt of a horse last night. It was black and it was white, like a hologram, and it was tugging at its strings.

I'll be back dancing tomorrow. We dance in circles. We sit in circles. Painted with chalk on uneven floors, we are outlined against the background of chance.

Where do the stories hide? I searched in the gap between the sofa cushions and all I could find were particles of dust.



Gesine Heger was born close to the fuss of the Ruhrgebiet and could have created an urban legend background. Instead, she moved to the village. She started writing early to create in the words what wasn't there in the world, but then left off to study law because she didn't understand the world. She then left law to study texts. They made more sense. She now works in the field of law and literature, where she focuses on rhetoric. In the meantime, she writes her own texts to distort sense because it means something to her.

LOCKED DOWN

Come in 560079, this is 48143, over. Go ahead 48143, over.

Corona virus aka Covid 19 on the loose.

Docs say it's highly infectious, communicable. Things look bad. Over.

Will you make it back home? Over.

Come in 48143, I repeat, will you make it back home? Over.

Negative. Over.

.....

Lockdown 1.0

Half asleep, his hand automatically reached out to the button on the side of his phone. White light from the rectangular frame rudely poked at the eyeballs cozily tucked within his eyelids. 12:00 pm. Kicking off his blanket, fingers still intimately tangled in the wire of his earphones, he heard plates from the morning's breakfast being washed out and laid down for lunch in the apartment upstairs. A silhouette by the door caught his attention.

Amma?

Her fingers are a dull orange. Mangoes. He smiled. She had the craziest ways of eating them. Lower incisors to pull out the peels, then tending to each peel with great patience, slurping the juice that flowed down her arms as she did so.

He looked over to the table by his window.

She would cut the pulp off the jacket free mango into perfect cubes and place them onto a plate for him, while she happily slurped on the seed.

There was no plate on the table. Looking towards the door, he saw the shadow of his mother had taken the shape of a tree, its yellowed leaves dancing.

No flights back home. Barely the sound of an automobile on the street. Not a single soul had walked by the window he had been staring out of now for the past 40 minutes.

21 days and counting...

.....
Come in 5679, this is 4843, over. Go ahead 48143, over.

Cases now at twenty thousand. Nine thousand deaths and rising. Safety gears and weapons declining at a drastic pace. How is the situation there? Over.

Not far behind. Have you stocked up? Looks like we'll be stuck indoors for a while. Over.

Not enough. I'm heading out now, over and out.

.....
Stepping outside, something felt different, strange after a point.

He was all geared up. Face mask, hand gloves, sanitizer neatly seated in his back pocket, wet wipes in his bag. Looking around, he saw that the trees had extended their branches, like arms ready to embrace, their leaves and flowers crisp and fresh, dancing joyfully in the wind. But the sun pierced through those arms that refused to embrace him, as he breathlessly puffed within his mask.

It was as though he was not allowed to be part of their happiness. As though he was wandering off onto a restricted zone. *Danger, Beware!*

His mind was constantly alert, looking around, making sure he didn't touch any surface, maintaining two feet social distance. He bolted into the nearest Rewe that he spotted. Eyes scanning the perimeter, searching through the half empty shelves, locking on things that would last him a while. Rice, some packets of noodles, potatoes. He felt like he was in a video game. Turn Left, avoid lane 4, dodge the two men standing by the deep freezers in 50 meters. Collect as many goodies from the shelves on your way to the billing counter, super speed activated. Bill items, collect items, hand weapon sanitizer activated.

You are now back home. Your game is over.

.....
He stared into his laptop screen. A camaraderie of tabs. Clicked on Zoom, everyone he knew had been reduced to a tiny box on the screen, trapped. Clicked on news, "US, leading with more than a lakh cases", "thousands of deaths worldwide", "migrant laborers in India trapped in lockdown"...

The tab labelled Gmail was suddenly blinking. *1 new message in your inbox. "Shakespeare wrote his magnum opus King Lear during the plague."*

Hovered over WordPress, a blog post titled "Quarantine haircuts are apparently a thing now" popped up, "Continue watching" on Netflix.

Suddenly, he heard a commotion outside his apartment. An ambulance was parked. A bunch of nurses and doctors wearing what he saw as some sort of space suits had gathered around.

The next morning, he heard no plates being laid down for lunch upstairs.

An eerie silence.

.....
Come in 5679, this is 4843, over. Go ahead 48143, over.

Things are not looking good. I hope the vaccines are out soon. Over

What do you mean, is everything okay? Are you safe? Over.

It has reached my apartment. Over and out.



Roshini Raghunathan is currently studying at the University of Münster. She is in her third semester of the Master's program in National and Transnational Studies (NTS). She holds a triple major bachelor's degree in English, Journalism and Psychology. Her current research interests include Diaspora and Transnational Studies, South Asian Literature and Gender Studies. She is very passionate about writing stories and hopes to publish a novel someday.

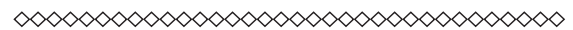
YOU'LL NEVER SMOKE ALONE

The waxing Decrescendo moon
Stands high upon the cloudless sky.
A gloomy baby blue through my sunglasses,
A piercing neon with the naked eye.

My skin is burning hot yet cool
In the smooth and silky summer wind,
The only one to touch me where I lie
In social distance from my lovèd kind.

But as I read the death threat on the pack
I cannot help but think of what you said
When you reached out to light my fire
Under the dying sun of bloody red:

You'll never smoke alone because the wind
Always smokes half of your cigarette.



Felicitas Sophie van Laak is a student of Kulturpoetik der Literatur und Medien and British, American and Postcolonial Studies. Her research interests include feminisms, gender studies, queer- and monster theories, as well as posthumanism. She has written several articles on the intersections of gender, sexuality, and monstrosity, one of them being "Monstrous Gender Performance in Macbeth", which was recently published in *Satura* Vol. 2. Lately, Felicitas has acquired a taste for horror fiction that simultaneously intrigues and scares the living daylights out of her. Sometimes, she writes short stories and poetry. And she drinks a lot of coffee.

MY STREET

When it rains, my street smells like washing powder. I don't know where the smell comes from, I wonder how a street so dirty can smell so clean. Some days the trash is piling up and I have to hold my breath and whenever there is no rain, my street smells like weed. A whole street smelling like my old roommate's bedroom.

I've started looking out of my window. There's a windowsill in my new flat, that has just enough room for me to sit on, not quite enough for all the plants I've started collecting manically. I can distinguish the people who talk to themselves now by their voices and by the conspiracy theories they scream about, I know the old man who collects empty bottles and I start to recognise the same moms holding their children's hands, rushing along.

Most of the time, the street smells like kebab. The Armenian place on the corner leaves its doors wide open, it smells like kebab and stale oil. *Barev tses*, I think whenever I pass, but I have not been inside yet.

A wave of air reaches me on top of my windowsill on the third floor from time to time, aftershave and cologne, mixed with whiskey and beer. Across the street is a bar, I can hear faint music all night long. My neighbours warned me about this place. I don't know anything apart from the fact that I like their lights and I like the wind chime on their door and I like how the men sit outside and talk through the dark and I like how they once said they liked my new bike.

My street smells thick and foggy, my street smells like weed and Armenian *Khorovats*, my street smells like gin and tequila, like aftershave and perfume, my street smells like trash and flowers and sun and wind.

You smell different. I can sense it when you stand on the street below my window. When you reach out and wave to me. And I know it for a fact when you wrap your arms around me.

When it rains, my street smells like washing powder.

And you smell like home.



Hannah Essing just finished her degree at the WWU. Originally from Essen, she studied European Studies in Passau, Bavaria and spent two years abroad in Cyprus, Armenia, and Estonia. In her master thesis she analysed the media discourse on gender and race on the Fridays for Future movement. She semi-settled in Bonn where she works as a PR consultant and writes her first novel.

Laura Ntoumanis

FOLIE À PLUSIEURS

Dear Mama,

It has only been a few months since I left, and I miss you.

Your strong arms, spread eagle-like,
engulfing me in your powerful embrace.

Red, white, blue
eyes watching.

Protecting.

Warmth, safety, comfort – home.

I do hope I will be able to return again, soon.

Love,

Your Little Bird

Dear Mom,

We move about each day through dizzying clouds
of uncertainty.

Our plans are dust.

Will we be?

I see you there, defiant.

I know.

You think you are safe.

Invincible.

We weren't.

Careful, please.

Love,

Birdie

Dear Mother,

Did you see on the news? You should pay attention.

Did you see? How quickly they go.

Just gone.

Hubris can't save you.

Are you listening? Think. Think.

Did you see? Blindness. Deafness.

Hear them cry.

They can't breathe. Not a single one.

Begging. Pleading.

Do something. Now.

Love,

Daughter

Dear Mother-land,

I don't even know who you are anymore.

Please. *Please.*

Define freedom.

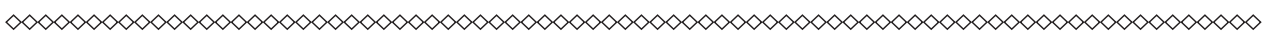
It has nothing to do with a fucking mask.

Honestly, you just don't get it. Did you ever?

Never.

So now

we measure our dead in pages.



Laura Ntoumanis is an M.A. student at the University of Muenster (WWU) in the National and Transnational Studies program. For her thesis she is reframing Robert Darnton's Communications Circuit in order to study the agents and influences impacting the Cherokee Phoenix newspaper of 1828. She hopes to pursue further research into methods and theories for studying the intersection of Western and Native American book history. She is the co-editor-in-chief and co-founder of the yearly student journal *Satura* at the English Department of WWU, which is in its third volume. Her love of all things book studies led her to join three friends in the production of the bookish podcast, *Biblio Banter*.



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