

AREA 41

The Anglosphere
Issue 03 | 2025



Dear Readers, Welcome back to *Area 41: The Anglosphere!*

We are thrilled to present you with the third issue of *Area 41: The Anglosphere*, the IfAA's very own literary magazine.

The first two issues were a great success and submissions for this third issue have exceeded previous numbers. We are grateful for every single one of your submissions and for your unwavering support. This magazine provides a platform for any member of the department to showcase their unique talent. The pieces you submitted attest to the diversity and creativity of our contributors.

And as our spectrum of contributors has grown, so has our editing team. We encourage each other's ideas and use our individual skills to combine your enchanting poems, intriguing short stories, thought-provoking essays and striking artwork into a magazine that is one of a kind. If you have any comments, ideas or questions, or a wish to join us for our fourth issue, you are 141% welcome to send us a message or talk to us in person.



We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed planning and creating it.

Warm regards,
The Editing Team

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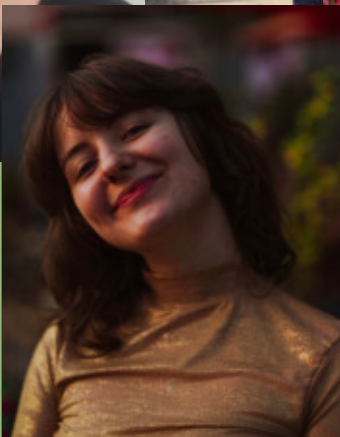
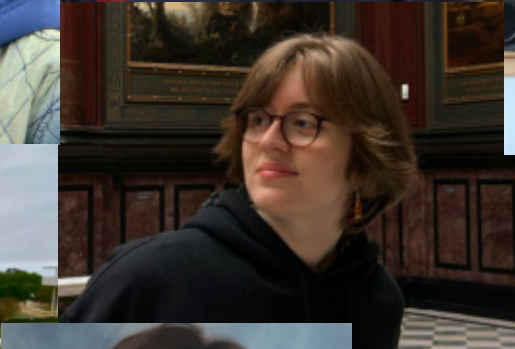
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With special thanks to Linda Wright for copy-editing
our magazine and maintaining our website.



Issue 03 | 2025

Reading in Public	6	Michel Lenz
Where the Sea Meets the Self	8	Phuong Anh Meier
A Trip to India	10	Carmona Michels
Discover Your Inner Literary Icon!	12	
The Wind Still Knows Your Name	14	Anna Loch
Four Months in the Heart of Canada	17	Pia Rückl
The Harvest	18	Onur Emre Cubukcu
Pyramids	19	Amirhossein Farrokhi
1, 2, 3, 4, 5 - Breathe Out	20	Hannah Langen
Neyshabur	21	Amirhossein Farrokhi
An Interview with Prof. Dr. phil. Thomas Kullmann on publishing his first novel	22	Alexandra Simons
A Trip to Stratford-Upon-Avon	25	
A Holy Lesson in Teamwork	28	Xenia Renge
Halloween in the Sem	30	Luisa Herbers
Bulldozer Woman	31	Ronja Schnetlage
untitled poem	32	Lara Arlinghaus
Fumes and Memories	33	Michael Boyko
The Student	33	Emilia Rademacher
When Theory Fails Practice: The Frustrating Reality of Many Didactics Courses	35	Anonymous
Fireflies	36	Lea Förster
The Midnight Term Paper	37	Victoria Stembrik
Tightrope	38	Franziska Rick
The Editing Team's Favourite Games	40	



Reading in Public

a short story by Michel Lenz

I'm not good at reading in public. However, I like reading in public. It's April and it's warm. It's surprisingly warm. We've just witnessed the driest March on record, actually. Normally, April tends to be rainy after such a dry March - but not this one. It's so merrily warm. I generally like reading, but it's a different story with reading in public. I've got a book with me. I've read better books, but this one will do, I guess. Still, I'm reading in public. But there's reading, and then there's reading in public. It's like buying books and reading books – I've heard people say there is a difference. Sometimes I take reading in public just as an excuse to go outside by myself. Some might tell me it's a waste of time, but honestly - what isn't?

I think about how I'm not really good at reading in public. Actually, I don't remember what my eyes just read, so I go back to scan the line where I got lost in my thoughts, trying to find the last word I somewhat recall. However, I don't blame myself. There is so much going on. I'm in the park. The park is very full with lots of people trying to enjoy the weather most efficiently. Again, it's so gently warm. Among the throngs I spot three groups of fifth graders. They're running a signature campaign. They need to get thirty signatures, but each one has to be from a different kind of person. For example, they need to find someone whose favourite color is blue or someone who likes to read, and they must get signatures from each of those people as evidence. So, they are on their run to find someone whose favourite colour is blue, someone who likes to read, and twenty-eight more special someones in this park full of people. I overhear this as they approach a tall, serious looking man, who is sitting next to me, reading a newspaper. "Ehm, excuse me, sir, do you like reading? We're doing a signature rally, and because you're, well, reading, we thought maybe you like reading, too. If you do, ehm, can you please sign here, sir? We are searching for someone who likes to read."

The tall, serious man signs – for his favorite color being blue. These kids suffered a logical fallacy. I mean, his heart is beating, but does he like living? I look up and see seven fifth graders piling up in front of me. I sign for the fact that I like to read. I mean, I have a book in front of me. Also, I am glad, that their logical thinking got somehow rewarded and after all: I like reading in public. I end up signing three times that day for the fact that I like to read. My signatures have no consequences for me at all. It is just a game for them. I feel pretentious. I'm still not good at reading in public. I wonder what the main story in the man's newspaper is, as I didn't follow the news the last couple of days. What makes him look so serious? People might have died - or worse: the stock market could be down.

People come and go. I'm alone in the crowd. I'm alone with my story. I'm alone with my mind. Not far from me, I see an older couple holding each other dearly. They remind me of my late grandparents. They may have met in this park - but who knows. Little children play and have fun – there's a death threat on page forty-one. To my other side, there's a teenage couple arguing about an online debate. They're discussing whether there are more wheels or more doors in the world. There might be more wheels. There might be more doors. They argue with toy cars. They argue with lockers. Are there more doors or more wheels? No one agrees. Everybody seems to be posting about wheels and doors – millions of posts. And after their discussion, there will be two more. The tall, serious man next to me turns the page of his newspaper. I close my eyes.

People get up from their benches, and new ones take their place. I stay on mine, thinking about the hotel just around the corner. The young couple's debate got me thinking. I wonder, if there have been more

people in those hotel rooms or on these park benches? So many different people sit on all these benches every day, while the hotel rooms probably only have a few guests at a time and they don't change with such frequency. However, those rooms are booked year-round, even when no one thinks to sit on the park benches during wintertime. It's hard to tell if more people have stayed on these benches or in those hotel rooms. I come to the conclusion that all these hypothetical thoughts are kind of pointless, really. I hear some girls laugh heartily – there's a murder on page forty-three.

An old man walks from bench to bench, handing out flyers supporting disarmament. Even though he wants the best for all of them, people avoid him. They don't want to be disturbed. It's warm. They want to enjoy the weather. They want to have fun. I turn back a page to see what I missed. The couple next to me uses sunscreen, while I get little sunburnt in April. It's so funnily warm. I wonder, if it's all right to enjoy the weather, while the world is falling apart. A friendly looking man comes to ask for my empty bottle. I give it to him and turn to the prior page again. I simply cannot remember what that sentence, that I had just looked at before, was about

Suddenly my phone is ringing. I pick and look up. While I listen to a friendly voice through my phone, I see a girl crying on her boyfriend's shoulder, while he looks at his phone. I can't help but wonder what could cause such sadness on a bright day like this. I also can't help but wish for him to put his phone away. The friendly voice becomes demanding on the other side of the line. I totally forgot the time. I notice, how very loud it is around me. It is hard for me to understand that friendly, demanding and a bit exhausted voice from my phone. That voice asks for a favour. I'd be really happy to grant that favour. However, this means I must leave now. I hang up and look around before getting my bookmark out of my pocket. There is a constant noise in that park. I realise how loudly I must have been speaking on the phone, given how loud it is around me. Two women my age are holding hands, silently smiling at each other, not minding the noise at all. I turn back to page forty-one and place the bookmark there. I feel like I have to read this passage properly again. I reflect that I really didn't get much reading done today. To be honest, I am not good at reading in public. But I don't want to be. I am very happy about the fact I'm not good at reading in public.



artwork by Kaja Lisann Pawellek

Where the Sea meets the Self

a text by **Phuong Anh Meier**

Three months. One backpack. Countless memories.

I set off alone, chasing a dream across Asia and into the southern sun. What began as a solo trip soon became something much greater – a journey not just through countries, but through pieces of myself I hadn't yet met.

In Bali, time moved slowly. I woke to the scent of incense and the sounds of scooters weaving through jungle roads. Peace wasn't something to be found, I learned – it was something to be felt, moment by moment.

Singapore dazzled with its order and modern beauty. Amid steel and sky gardens, I saw how tradition and future could live side by side.

In Vietnam, chaos and charm danced together. The streets buzzed with life, and yet, the people – so kind, so quick to help – offered a calm that made the noise feel like music.

Australia offered vastness in every direction. I earned my open water diving license in Thailand, but nothing compares to swimming through the Great Barrier Reef, where the world beneath the surface feels more alive than anything above it.

Malaysia fed my curiosity – and my appetite – with a richness of culture I hadn't expected. Then came the Philippines, where time stood still. On a boat tour between untouched islands, I found myself surrounded by strangers who quickly became family. We shared salty air, starry nights, and stories that will echo within me forever.

And then, Japan – where silence spoke louder than words. The gentleness of the people, the balance of tradition and innovation, left me in awe. It was a place that invited reflection. And I had much to reflect on.

It wasn't the places alone that changed me – it was the people. Faces that smiled without reason. Strangers who helped without hesitation. Conversations that cracked open my perspective. I met people I'll never forget, who gave more than they know, and asked for nothing in return.

I had feared traveling alone. Now, I can't imagine having done it any other way. This journey gave me more than sights and pretty views – it gave me courage. It showed me a world filled not with danger, but with kindness, generosity, and shared humanity.

I returned with stories, yes – but more than that, I returned changed.

And to anyone wondering if they should go:

Yes.

Go.

You'll come back more whole than when you left.

"Entfaltung" (2025)
by Phuong Anh Meier
acrylic and paste on canvas



A Trip to India

a text by Carmona Michels

The morning sun enacts a languorous, teasing dance on the waters of the Ganges; its light is almost blinding no matter where you stand in front of the ancient *ghat*, but the view looks as if it were straight-up taken from a photograph.

The colourful crowd of religious Hindus moves up and down the stairs to take baths in the holy river, and we get in line to watch, mesmerized: We are in Varanasi, formerly called Benares - the sign at the local airport is painted over in a lighter shade of blue to cover the old name of India's sacred city.

The idea of going to Varanasi came about in the context of Prof. Kullmann's winter semester seminar "The City of Benares in 19th-Century Texts." The stay was planned for one week, until the 24th, with a small group of four people: Prof. Kullmann, two students and I.

So we travel to India in February, a time when the temperatures still hover around a comfortable 27°C – just one or two months later, the heat will become unbearable, and the Ganges may flood the area.

Our group reaches Varanasi in the midst of *Maha Kumbh Mela*, a festivity of Hinduism which only takes place every 12 years and culminates on February 26th with *Maha Shivaratri*, the Night of Shiva. *Kumbh Mela* is celebrated every three years with the centre of the celebration rotating between four holy cities (Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik and Prayagraj). The fact that it takes place in Prayagraj this year – just about 120 kilometres away from Varanasi - makes it an especially important and large celebration ("maha" meaning "great"), surpassing even the 400 million expected pilgrims this year. This means that many more devotees than usual will also come to Varanasi.

There are no taxis going right to our hotel, the main streets are closed for traffic because of the dense crowds of pilgrims squeezing through them. We have to make do with Rickshaws: Two drivers heave our large trunks into the back and impress us with their skill of manoeuvring through the crowds with the weight of two people and two heavy trunks each.

It is a literal uphill battle, and if it is not a throng of people in the way, it is carts with fruit or other food, motorcycles or the occasional Tuk Tuk.

We manage to reach our hotel after another walk with our luggage through the crowds.

The city is filled to the brim with history and spirituality. Wherever we go, whatever we see, hear or smell, it seems that every corner has a new experience and adventure stashed away for us.

There are cows in the streets, carts, motorcycles and many, many people – and sometimes all at the same time. Still, no one and nothing ever crashes into each other. Oddly enough our Tuk Tuk rides seem to stand as a metaphor for discovering Varanasi in general: Initially, the "German mind" seems frightened whether the "wild ride" of India may work out, but seeing how it all comes together - no one even struggling not to bump into each other – you just lean back, let the breeze hit your face and enjoy the ride.

We happily drown in colourful curries and rice with cumin seeds, we eat fennel seeds after our meal to help with digestion and freshen our mouths, we take a trip by boat on the waters of the holy river to the opposite bank, investigate the *ghats*, stores and streets.

However, it proves very difficult to squeeze through the streets with that many people who try to do the same thing and, well, we do not exactly blend in. We learn to avoid the main streets and to scurry through narrow alleyways instead.

We visit the *Brown Bread Café*, a small restaurant popular with tourists. Although we tend to lose our way in the winding alleys full of cows, dogs and people, we are always happy to finally sit down on the rooftop terrace with some tea and some of the day's baked goods.

The Ramnagar Fort has more palanquins in its museum than I have ever seen in my life. These are made of silver, gold and ivory, with intricate and clearly very expensive designs. The *Maharajahs* also collected weaponry of similar artisanship and we debate which gun, sword or dagger we admire most.

In Sarnath, we visit the Deer Park where Siddharta Gautama is said to have given his first teachings. The giant Buddha statue can be seen far and wide and many pilgrims come to visit the birthplace of Buddhism.

But the adventures in Varanasi are not just made up of what we could see; rather they are mostly made up by oddly specific interactions with people - odd because of the large crowds of people which never seem too large to still allow for some one-on-one interactions. The locals want to show us parts of their culture – and they want to take pictures. In the garden of the Shiva temple, a small group of young women in beautiful attire stares at me. So I stare at them, they stare at me, both sides smiling shyly. Eventually, they approach me and ask for pictures with me. I am photographed with children and young women a lot. One child cries and is bribed with sweets by its parents. It looks at me over its shoulder with huge eyes and some babble in Hindi.

“How long is this going to take?” the expression seems to ask me.

“I have no idea,” I smile back awkwardly, apologetically. The child bawls and eventually the parents thank me warmly.

I do not really understand why they want to be photographed with strangers, but then we are also taking pictures of women’s colourful *saris*, people taking sacred baths and everything around, so it is actually not that strange.

We visit the Shiva temple. We stand in line with the local people and get talking with the women around us. The lines are divided by sex. The young woman behind me asks where I am from. She is also not from Varanasi; she is a tourist from Bihar who has come here for the festivities. She teaches me what to do and later introduces me to her husband: They got married just a week ago and seem very happy. It’s only natural that she wants to ask Shiva for his blessings – she prays to the *lingam* for a harmonious marriage and healthy children. Then, an older Hindu woman starts a loud argument with a younger one, one who wants to show us, wants us to partake in the touching of the *lingam* we are approaching. Generally, we are regarded with happy smiles, but some of the older women do not seem too happy that we are there. I nod apologetically towards the older woman and refrain from touching the sacred object.

We approach an idol of Nandi and are told that you whisper your wishes to Shiva into its ear. What did I kindly ask the god for? Well, this will remain our secret.

We find a small store with beautiful Indian attire in the shop windows. Inside, the walls are lined up to the ceiling with shelves full of traditional wear of every colour imaginable. We marvel at the colours, the hand-stitched patterns, the intricate designs. Apparently, the store has been in the family for generations, as the woman tells us - and many of its products are handcrafted. She shoos her brother around and we giggle at their sibling banter, understood in any language. They show us fabric after fabric, offer to have it dyed or tailored to us, and recommend *saris* that would suit us. Sadly, we cannot really wear them in Germany, we say. Then why not a *dupatta*, a traditional Indian scarf? Initially, we only meant to buy one silken scarf. About two hours later, we leave the store with several *dupattas*, but also with new memories: We drank their homemade masala chai from tiny clay mugs, had deep conversations and were even asked to partake in a video for the store’s social media.

I bought two *dupattas*. Prof. Kullmann hates the dark red one.

Then, I have a stomach ache. At first, it’s only that. We, too, won’t be spared by the infamous *Delhi belly*. In the hopes of keeping down at least something, I go upstairs to the small hotel restaurant.

It is a sort of roof terrace with the staff’s hammocks right behind some curtains. A man approaches me - Rakesh. We can’t really understand one another, as he doesn’t speak much English and I don’t speak any Hindi, but sometimes a few words are enough: I say “white rice, please”. Rakesh’s face seems to say “Only white rice?”

“Delhi belly,” I reply. I need not say more. Rakesh cannot help but laugh, but he does so with a pitiful expression and hands me my white rice with an even kinder face.

I like Rakesh, even if I don’t understand him. I wish I could eat his *Biryani*.

I must say that I am happy to smell *Brezeln* at Essen Hauptbahnhof after more than twelve hours of travel, but ever since I seem to see India and its colours and textures looming just around the corner.

In a way, India is an invitation to a more adventurous spirit.

Every journey in life is one coloured by new experiences. And India welcomed us in, with an amused smile and a tiny clay mug of its sweet and spicy *Masala Chai*.

photograph by Carmona Michels

Discover Your Inner literary Icon!

Add up the points of your answers to find out who you are.

1. What motivates you most?

- A. Power (1)
- B. Self-respect (2)
- C. Love (3)

2. How do you react when someone betrays you?

- A. Revenge is a dish best served cold. (1)
- B. I feel hurt but try to forgive. (3)
- C. I distance myself. (2)

3. What's your idea of a perfect evening?

- A. A cozy night with a book and someone I care about (3)
- B. Deep conversations with a few trusted friends (2)
- C. An exclusive party where I'm the star (1)

4. How do you deal with rules?

- A. They're made to be broken. (1)
- B. I question them but mostly follow. (2)
- C. I follow them religiously. (3)

5. What role do you usually take in a group?

- A. The peacemaker or supporter (3)
- B. The thinker or strategist (2)
- C. The leader — obviously (1)



Dorian Gray by Celina Gohl

6. What would you wish for most?

- A. Eternal youth or power (1)
- B. Peace for the people I love (3)
- C. Clarity and purpose (2)

7. How do you see romantic relationships?

- A. As complex but potentially beautiful (2)
- B. As something to be admired (1)
- C. As the most important thing there is (3)

8. What kind of legacy do you want to leave?

- A. One that brings comfort and hope (3)
- B. One that reflects my hard work (2)
- C. One people fear or admire (1)

9. When faced with a moral dilemma, you...

- A. ...do what benefits *you* most. (1)
- B. ...weigh the options logically. (2)
- C. ...do what's best for others. (3)

10. Which setting sounds most appealing?

- A. A grand estate or mansion (1)
- B. A peaceful village (3)
- C. A cottage by the sea (2)

Gandalf by Lisa-Marie Südbek





Jo March by Luca Sophie Hillbrands

20-23 points: JO MARCH

Creative, rebellious, and endlessly independent — you're Jo March. You challenge norms, value freedom, and have a big heart. You might not always take the easy path, but it's always the honest one.

Recommended read: *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott.

Warning: May inspire journaling, novel-writing, and emotional growth.

24-27 points: GANDALF

Wise, humble, and selfless — you are the guiding light in a world of chaos. Gandalf doesn't crave power, but uses it for good. You're deeply trusted, a bit mysterious, and always seem to arrive precisely when you need to.

Recommended read: *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien.

Bonus points if you read it while wearing a robe and sipping tea.

28-30 points: ELIZABETH BENNETT

You're quick-witted, strong-minded, and full of heart — just like Lizzy Bennett. You value kindness and truth over status, and you're not afraid to challenge expectations with charm and grace. You are truly a good soul.

Recommended read: *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

Prepare to roll your eyes at pompous suitors and then fall in love anyway.

10-14 points: DORIAN GRAY

Ah, the allure of beauty, power, and the thrilling edge of vanity. You are Dorian Gray — complex, magnetic, and endlessly intriguing. You may walk the line between charm and danger, but who says that's a bad thing?

Recommended read: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde.

Bonus: The book pairs perfectly with a glass of wine and a mirror you're just a little too fond of.

15-19 points: DRACULA

You're Dracula — elegant, strategic, and deeply charismatic. You value control and eternity, which means you're not afraid to play the long game. You embrace darkness, and let's face it, you are the best at making an entrance.

Recommended read: *Dracula* by Bram Stoker.

Warning: May cause a sudden craving for candlelight, red wine, and sleeping in extremely stylish coffins.



Elizabeth Bennet by Jona Waltenberger



Dracula by Kaja Lisann Pawellek

The Wind Still Knows Your Name

a short story by Anna Loch

Trigger Warning: Suicide

“Hey Jackson, just checking in. I know it’s been a while, huh?”

My voice cracks through the silence, vulnerable and shaky. The morning breeze carries its ache off into winter’s bare branches and the brooding banks of clouds beyond. The gravestone stands silently before me, its marble surface crystalline and cold. It glimmers faintly in the pale daylight, adorned with veins of white and blue, like frost caught in stone. A tree is carved into the face of the stone, its leaves scattering in an eternal fall. *It is beautiful*, I think to myself, *yet it is so unlike the boy I once knew, so unlike you*. Perhaps it is the stillness and impersonality of it that bothers me. *It is not the same. It is not you*.

“I should’ve come sooner,” I continue. “I kept telling myself I would. That I’d come see you and... talk, you know?”

I stuff my hands deeper into my pockets, the cold biting through the cheap denim fabric. I sigh, unsure of what to say. The silence makes it unbearable to stand in front of your grave.

“Was really missing you at our last game. You were always a hell of a runner, you know that. The team hasn’t been the same since... well, since we lost you. Uh, we did get a new guy, though. He is good and faster than most of us, but he really fumbled hard at that game. Under pressure he was so damn slow. I told him he would be running backwards if he got any slower than that, heh. Yeah, I know, kind of a crappy thing to say. Got frustrated a little. I mean, with you, we always won, heh.”

I smile into my coat, thinking of all the effortless victories we experienced when you were still with us. My mind replays the fondest memories: you, tearing down the field with that eagle-eyed intensity and that wild grin, the pounding of your footsteps louder than the roaring crowd. I see you jumping in the air after each win, always being the first to celebrate our victories. I hear you smashing the football into the ground out of excitement, always giving the coach an apologetic look upon his disapproving gaze. I feel your shoulders tackling me down to the ground, always smiling underneath that undersized helmet. The coach kept promising he would get you a proper one someday, but time ran out before he could make good on it.

“You’d probably tell me to go easy on the new guy,” I mumble, shifting my weight from one leg to the other. “You were always nice when you didn’t even have to be. You were so popular, but you treated everyone the same. I mean, even the weird kid from chem class – the one I teased. You told me to knock it off and be better, remember?” I wipe my nose with the back of my hand and sniff, the cold itching in my nostrils.

“You’ll love to hear that I, uh, don’t do that kind of stuff anymore. Sure, our teammates get some digs thrown their way sometimes, but you know it’s all in good fun. Anyway, I’m not messing with the chem kid anymore – or that emo witchcraft girl, or whatever she is. Stopped doing that a while ago, back when everything... yeah.”

I fall silent as my lips start trembling. I tilt my head back, letting my eyes wander along the vast stretches of the sky, and fill my lungs with the cold air to gain back composure. Suddenly, I feel a faint, warm breeze brush across my face, like a familiar hand, ruffling my hair the way you used to. I smile in the direction of the wind, and for a brief moment, my chest feels lighter and breathing gets a little easier.

“Hey, do you remember the day we talked for the first time? Back when we were, what, six? You came up to me and wanted to share your new toy tractor with me, and what did I do? I was too busy wetting my pants. Literally. Right there on the playground, puddle and everything. God, I was such a loser. I couldn’t go

a week without an accident. The other kids wouldn't let me forget it. Well, except you."

I start giggling a little as the memories flash before my eyes. I remember the way the other kids stood around, chuckling at the dark patch spreading across my pants. I was so embarrassed back then; I wanted the ground to swallow me whole. You just shrugged it off, saying, *'Just ignore them. We're gonna be football stars one day, and then you'll be the one laughing.'*

"You were always there for me, weren't you? Remember when we started playing football in third grade? I broke my arm and wet myself during the game when that kid Robert tackled me. You just screamed at me to get up. You threw me the ball and said, "Run!" And a hell of a lot of running I did that day. I think that was when it all changed for me."

I ponder on all the things I should have appreciated about you when there was still time. The memories, once buried beneath life's haste and noise, resurface now: Your kind-heartedness, your annoying optimism, the way you always encouraged me to be a better man.

"I should have been there for you, just like you were there for me every step of the way. I didn't know you were suffering. I just wish you would've come to me. I know I probably wasn't the best shoulder to cry on, but damn it, Jackson, I would've listened. I would've stayed up all night with you if you needed it. I would've sat in silence or talked for hours – whatever it might have taken, I would have been there."

My voice cracks on the last word and the weight of it all crashes down. I slowly sink to the ground beside your well-kept grave, filled with flowers from your family, miniature football action figures from the team, and a weathered brown teddy bear left by your momma. My breath catches in my throat as I take it all in – the silent evidence of how deeply you're missed, by so many, in ways words could never fully capture.

Another warm breeze whirls around my shoulders, soft and comforting, like your hand holding on to me as we half-carried each other off the field, legs too tired to go on. I close my eyes and let it wash over me, grasping for a moment to feel you beside me once again.

"If you're there, Jackson, I just want you to know that you made life easier for me, for everyone," I mumble under my breath. "You always had that energy that could fill up an entire room. But you didn't feel that energy yourself, did you? You were struggling, and I, like the goddamn idiot I am, didn't even see it. I should've asked more questions. I should've seen you." I swallow hard, the guilt panging in my chest. "I'm sorry, Jack, I really am."

A branch snaps beside me. My shoulders tense, the hairs on my neck standing on end, when for a fleeting moment, I want it to be you, even though I know that it cannot be. I wipe the tears from my eyes and look up to see who it is, bracing for an impossibility that I would give anything to be reality.

I recognize her immediately, as it is a face that I have known almost as well as yours over the course of my life, though it is worn down by grief. It is your mother, her steps small, yet deliberate. The morning light catches the silver streaks across her hair, and her eyes – the same friendly blue color as yours – lock onto mine. Her lips form a faint, knowing smile, though her eyes betray her, as they tell a story of deep and endless sorrow.

"Hey, sweetheart," she replies, stopping beside me. She glances at the grave, her expression softening. "He's probably laughing at you right now, you know. Listening to you ramble on about old football games and playground accidents."

"You heard all that; I'm so sorry." I chuckle quietly, the sound icy in the morning air.

She nods, pausing briefly before speaking again. "You know, I come here every morning. Just to feel a little closer to my little boy. And when I heard you talking this morning, I couldn't help but listen in because I know Jackson has missed you a great deal since his passing."

I look down, my face burning hot with guilt. “I know I should’ve come sooner.”

She nods reassuringly. There are no signs of blame in her expression – no accusations, no unspoken questions of *why weren’t you at the funeral?* Instead, her expression softens more and more with every passing moment, knowing the burden I have been carrying. We stand in silence for a while, the wind embracing us like a shared blanket of grief. Then she starts rummaging around in her purse, pulling out a phone. I recognize it immediately. It is wrapped in that old, scratched blue phone case of yours.

“I wasn’t sure if you should see this just yet,” she says calmly. “But I’ve been looking at it every day, and since it is meant for you, I think it’s time.”

I hold my breath in anticipation as she powers it on. The lock screen wallpaper appears: a picture of us at last year’s prom, our first night drunk. You, with that wild, mischievous grin, and me, wide-eyed and confused, like I couldn’t believe we got away with it. I can’t help but smile.

She opens the SMS application and scrolls down until she finds my name. The familiar thread of conversations – jokes, rants, and plans we never followed through on – flickers across the screen. At the bottom of it, I see a message with a red exclamation mark next to it; the timestamp is June 21 2024, 6:03pm. The night you passed, a sent, yet undelivered message. She hands it to me, her fingers holding onto the edges of the phone tightly as if releasing the last bit of you she has. I stare at the screen, heart pounding, as my eyes finally take in your last words.

“Man, you busy? Kinda having one of those nights. Could use a dumb story... maybe the one about me and that tractor again?”



“Patches”
by Onur Emre Cubukcu

Four Months in the Heart of Canada

a report on a semester abroad by Pia Rückl

Moving to Canada for four months can be funny, especially if no one knows exactly where you will live. “Regina? Where is that?” was a frequent question whenever I told friends about my upcoming semester abroad. Like every future English teacher, I had to spend at least 3 months in an English speaking environment. I got accepted into a Canadian partner university. I knew little of what to expect, as I had never left Europe before.

After months of collecting important documents and choosing courses, I was really excited when I finally got on the plane to Regina.

Regina is the capital of Saskatchewan, a state right in the middle of Canada. The heart of the city is Wascana Lake, a big and beautiful lake with lots of trees, perfect for walks on sunny days as well as snowy winter ones. It is also home to the University of Regina, which is situated directly by the lake. Like many students, I moved into a dorm on campus. Living on campus has many advantages, as I would learn later on, and I was happy to share the spacious apartment with four other girls. After I’d moved in and had the first interaction with my new roomies, we were ready for the kick-off.

Orientation week was an unforgettable experience. It began with a big official “welcome”, accompanied by bagpipe music, continued with a Sharpie Party in the evening, and was wrapped up on Friday with a lunch for the exchange students. This was the first time I realized just how many students from all over the world really study in Regina. Overall, it was a very good experience. The university’s staff had created a diverse program and was open to every kind of question that came up.

All through September, I participated in all kinds of other activities offered by the university. My personal highlight was a trip to a football match of Saskatchewan’s only professional football team. Before starting the game, the university students had the honor of carrying the flags of Canada and Saskatchewan onto the football field and singing the national anthem along with the audience. This was a very special moment for me.

All in all, orientation week helped me find new friends at the university and it gave me hope for the semester.

September marked the start of my classes too.

The professors and my fellow students in the courses on education were warm and welcoming. As the university is very international, they were already used to international students, and helped me whenever I needed it. My most interesting course was “English as a Second Language”, because I am a second language learner of English myself and the course gave me a deeper understanding of L2 acquisition. It was also enriching to learn about the First Nations people, who are the native inhabitants of Canada, their culture and history. Whenever I was not studying, I used the time as best as I could for sightseeing, going out with friends, traveling, and camping with the Canadian Scouts.

Although we are from Mexico and Germany, respectively, my friend Carmen and I were allowed to participate in group meetings and camps, since the scouts are a global organization. The best camp was at Thanksgiving, where we got to cook a Thanksgiving meal over the fire. I was happy to become part of the group and to get a new perspective on scouting.

Discovering Regina with my new friends would become one of my favorite activities. We went to the Canadian Police Museum, celebrated Mexican Independence Day, had snowball fights in October, and so much more.

Furthermore, I travelled to Banff and Vancouver with some fellow exchange students, who would become kind of my Canadian family later on. We gasped at the beauty of the mountains in Banff and Lake Louise, and were stunned by Vancouver at night.

I could give you many more examples of my never-ending list of experiences in Canada, ranging from dorm parties, through an escape room, to Halloween.

But I think it is time for you to experience all these miracles of a semester abroad yourself. So, go step out of your comfort zone and do it! The very best might be waiting for you.



The Harvest

a poem by Onur Emre Cubukcu

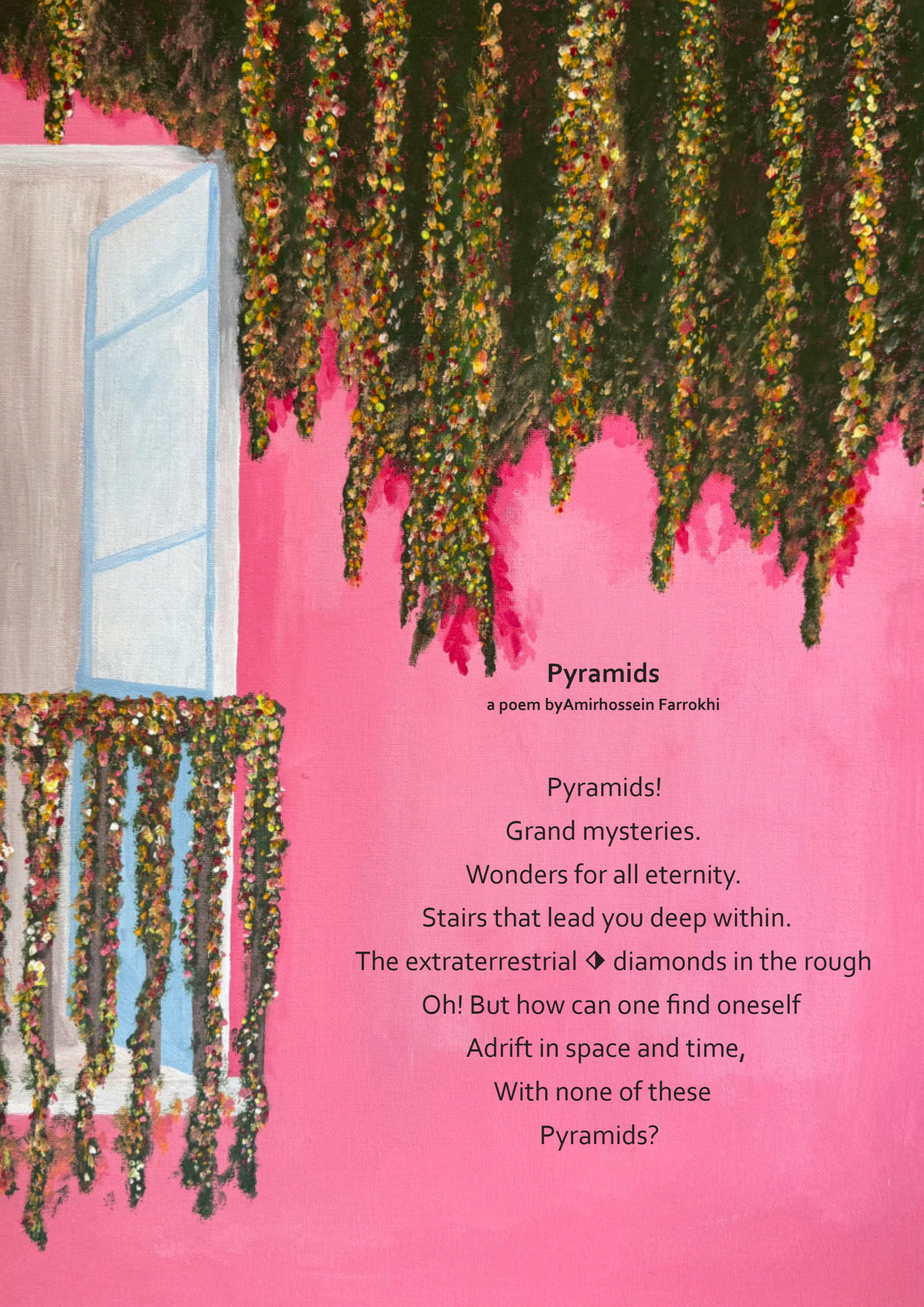
Fire on the soil they were first planted on,
Rain on them, so they'll flourish and bloom
Endless this drought is seeming to be
Everything is dead because of whom?

Pray for the crops, for the seeds, for the best
Although they did nothing wrong,
Loathsome farmers still began to harvest -
Everything is dead; same tomorrow

Stone-cold, they ripped them from the root
They deadheaded their flowers, but
Invincibly, they will one day begin to fruit

No one will ever stop the flowers from growing
Everything is dead, unless we start sowing.

artwork by Phuong Anh Meier
acrylic on canvas (2020)



Pyramids

a poem by Amirhossein Farrokhi

Pyramids!

Grand mysteries.

Wonders for all eternity.

Stairs that lead you deep within.

The extraterrestrial ♦ diamonds in the rough

Oh! But how can one find oneself

Adrift in space and time,

With none of these

Pyramids?

1, 2, 3, 4, 5 - Breathe Out

a text by Hannah Langen

Night. Darkness.

Everything's dark. Silent. Nothing moves.

Eyes closed. Closed?

Eyes open. Fuck.

Before I can think clearly, before I know what's going on, something moves inside of me. Apparently, it had already begun before I awoke. Ich breathe faster, breathe louder, but nothing gets in. Breathe harder, need air, need strength, need energy, but nothing reaches me. I breathe faster, breathe harder, don't get why and how and that it all does nothing. Out. I gotta get out. For better air. I can breathe there, I'm sure. My heart leaps, my organs fold, and I fold back the blanket. My body's shaking. Quivering. Is it cold? Maybe. That cold? Everything shakes. I stand. Shake. Stagger. Barely see the way outside, try not to fall, not to stumble, shamle, tremble. I walk. Carefully. Step by step. I am a robot, an automaton. My body burns out, my fuse is blown. No control. Lights blink furiously. My body's trembling.

I am outside and I grasp for air. I breathe to get more oxygen, to cool down the machinery, the motor, breathe to reboot, to start new. But no oxygen reaches my lungs. The faster I breathe in, the louder I get, the more desperate I feel, the less oxygen arrives. Nothing. Breathe. Just breathe. But how do I? How? Can't *everyone* breathe!?

Close your eyes. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Breathe in. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Breathe out. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Breathe in. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. And out. Again: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

Eyes open. Better. Now there we go! I'm still shaking. But I'm breathing, too. The Arctic around me slowly starts melting. I start to think. What has just happened? Where do I go now? My mouth opens and sucks in air. My lungs are snatching every gulp of oxygen. Again. And again. Too fast, this is too fast! My lungs scream for help. Ah yes, breathe! I have to breathe! Don't forget to breathe, don't you ever forget to breathe. Now go slowly: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Eyes closed. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Breathe out. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Breathe in. Everything's going to be fine. Eyes open. Right?

The automaton trembles. Inside and out. Every cogwheel's moving. But every single one on its own. Walking is hard. Feeling as well. Thinking? Breathe! Calm and deep. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Well done! The trembling eases off. It must have gotten warmer. It was freezing cold just moments before! Yeah, sure. Since when am I sitting? Deeeep breaths. On and on. The automaton transforms. The robots' shoulders drop. Soft movements replace the mechanical jolts. It feels like shrinking, but weirdly nice. Then, shrinking becomes slumping. I'm tired. I didn't even realize how tense I was. Slowly, my wires, motors and hinges become veins, muscles and joints. I feel every muscle. Feel, how the tension eases. The nails of my cramped-up fists stop sinking into my skin.

Inch by inch, muscle by muscle, I feel the tension ease and turn into exhausted relaxation. Once again, just to be safe. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Breathe out. Listen. Breathe in. Listen. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Let it out slowly. Listen closely. Perceive the surroundings. My face is wet. I didn't notice the tears running down my face, I just noticed the shudders rolling down my spine. My nose is running, too. This machine oils itself. Impressive, honestly. But I am no machine. I have a living body with muscles and blood and skin and cold sensations. With a heart that slowly calms down, with pupils that slowly shrink, with fine hair that slowly gets out of its state of shock. The goosebumps fade, the shivers, too. Only my brain does not calm down. My head sinks down. My tear-stained face inspects the small reddish crescents on the palms of my hands and my mind starts working. It cannot understand why all of this just happened. Again.



Neyshabur

a text by Amirhossein Farrokhi

The city of muddy vases, the lost jewel of azurite stones, and the host of shredded roads and pathways,

Neyshabur has been a home to many a poet and philosopher through the centuries. Its soil nourishes inquisitive minds, while its air revives the souls of questioners; its dawn inspires careful gazes, while its dusk forewarns of the fleeting nature of moments.

A city hiding the secrets of times past, a witness to the tapestry of happenings, and an aficionado of the harmony resonating in the galaxies, Neyshabur has forever been benevolent to those weary of all the turmoil of this world, granting a snug sanctuary to the hopeful.

THIS is the place I call home, and this is the place I miss most dearly.

photograph by Amirhossein Farrokhi

***Am not I Your Katherine?* - Discovering Shakespeare's Childhood Muse and her Influence on his Work**

Prof. Dr. phil. Thomas Kullmann on publishing his first novel
an interview by Alexandra Simons

So, to start things off, when did you start working at the University of Osnabrück?

I started teaching and researching at the University of Osnabrück in September 2002.

Do you have a favourite spot here in Osnabrück?

This has changed over time. So when my children were small, it was the zoo and now it's rather the *Bürgerpark*.

If you weren't a writer or professor of English literature, what would you do for a living?

I would be teaching in any capacity, I suppose, because I find this exciting. You work with other people, so you're never alone and you can pass on something of yourself.

Would you teach at an elementary school or older students?

This wouldn't make such a difference. Actually, some years ago, I did two projects on teaching English at elementary schools in Osnabrück. I read picture books and we read some easy children's books together. It was great fun.

Do you have a favourite course that you've taught at the university?

It's difficult to say because the courses which work best with students are courses on Shakespeare. However, I also enjoy doing courses on British Indian literature. There are more difficulties, but it's a topic I also do research on. One course which went wonderfully well was the online course I taught in the first Covid semester in 2020. It was on Jay Kristoff's fantasy novel *Nevernight*. The proceedings of this course were published in book form and included the contributions of 25 students.



What is your favourite book of all time?

One of my favourite books is a collector's edition of Shakespeare's works, but I also like books of poetry; Metaphysical poetry, or Victorian poetry, for example. Some of my favourite novels are Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling.

Now, we will dive into the questions about the book. Could you tell us, in your own words, what this book is about?

Well, it's about Shakespeare's development. It's an attempt to answer the question of how Shakespeare became Shakespeare, how he could have become the greatest writer of all time and what the origins of his genius and of his achievements were.

If you could describe this book in one word, what would it be?

It's tentative, perhaps probing.

What inspired you to write this book?

I don't remember quite clearly. One of the inspirations was an email correspondence with a friend, a high school student, who asked me questions about my book on children's fiction. Then it was the excursions I have undertaken for about a decade to Stratford-upon-Avon. Some of the places we usually visit on our excursions are featured in this book.

You dedicate this book to the students who have accompanied you on your trips to Stratford-upon-Avon. What is your favourite part about these trips?

My favourite part is the performances of Shakespeare's plays. I also like Shakespeare's school a lot, but Kenilworth Castle is quite spectacular too. It was added to the programme some years ago.

The title of this book *Am not I Your Katherine?* is such an extraordinary title. How did you come up with it?

It's taken from a passage in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. A girl named Rosalind disguises herself as a boy. When she talks to her lover, she plays Rosalind again, but he doesn't recognise her. In the course of this conversation she asks, "Am not I your Rosalind?" What I'm trying to do in this novel is to work out some of the experiences Shakespeare may have had, which inspired him to write what he did. The novel is set in 1597 and a boy actor, who reminded Shakespeare of his lost childhood friend Katherine, at one stage asks Shakespeare, "Am not I Your Katherine?" My idea is that this inspired Shakespeare to write "Am not I your Rosalind?" two years later.

In your book, Kate takes the spotlight and later on becomes the source of inspiration for William's plays. What made you want to write about this female character and emphasise her role in Shakespeare's life and art?

One thing is that the literary works of great writers were not just composed by one person alone. It was a set of influences, the social circles this person moved in which mattered. Shakespeare was certainly a genius in his own right, but he was particularly fortunate in living in the time when he lived, in the place where he lived, and obviously in the friends that he had. Childhood is the most formative period. I thought

that the roots of Shakespeare's particular ability lay there. My main idea is that Kate, Katherine Hamlett, is very good at telling stories. She invents them on the spot and probably forgets them immediately afterwards. But Shakespeare had the extraordinary capacity of retaining in his mind everything which he ever heard, especially everything that was said by Katherine, whom he loved very much. So he kept the memory of all the words Kate ever spoke. This is where he drew his inspiration from for his plays.

We also know that there was a girl who drowned in the river Avon near Tiddington when William was young.

Exactly, yes. This is this very Katherine Hamlett, where he took the name from. We don't know anything about her, but we can be sure that there is a connection to Shakespeare. We can be sure that Shakespeare did remember this case, which was conducted officially, when he wrote *Hamlet*, because there are quite a few allusions to it in the gravedigger scene.

Kate is such a unique character. I was wondering, what inspired you to write her this way?

Her character is taken from Shakespeare's plays, and sort of projected back. What could have made up the inspiration which Shakespeare drew on? This is crystallised in the figure of Kate.

In your book, you also investigate Shakespeare's sexuality. What made you want to examine this part of him?

During Shakespeare's time, people were not aware of the sexual dimension of personal relationships to the extent that we are today. It's just that Shakespeare's interest in boys could explain the extraordinary energy he put into writing his plays and in particular into writing women's parts, which are truly extraordinary. One of his motivations in putting so much energy into creating the women's parts may well have been that he wanted to rehearse them with the boys and that this was what he was looking for. He wanted to work with the boys and have them around him all the time.

There is a quote that I really liked, and it says, "Try to find traces of Kate in every other girl or boy, man or woman". What is the meaning

behind this statement? Does it mean that Kate symbolises love?

Well, he loved and respected Kate. He paid attention to everything she said. So Shakespeare's teacher's idea was to extend this love to everybody. This love and respect. And this is exactly what Shakespeare did. Another of his extraordinary qualities was that he loved other people and did not hate anybody. My professor said Shakespeare hated injustice. I don't think so. He did not even hate injustice, otherwise he couldn't have described it so feelingly.

Many of Shakespeare's plays, including *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, figure into your novel. Why these in particular?

Actually, the list would be longer. There are allusions to quite a number of other plays. What I wanted to suggest is that Shakespeare's life is the source of the plots and of his language. He was remembering events and people as he wrote. But this particularly applies to those plays where there is no written source, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This was entirely composed by Shakespeare himself and so he must have taken it from somewhere, some memory.

If you could describe Kate and William with one word, what would it be?

Well, I don't think you can tie down one word. Three words describing Kate would be loving, intelligent and communicative. Whereas young William is rather diffident, shy and jealous. Certainly one of his key characteristics.

How long did it take you to write this book and what was the writing process like?

I've been writing it intermittently from about 2019 and I wrote quite a bit of it during Covid to pass the time. I say "intermittently" because sometimes I just felt like continuing the writing process. So, I sat down at my computer, either in my office or at home, and proceeded writing. Actually, I didn't spend so much time on the writing process itself. Other duties intervened before I found time to continue writing again.

Did you self-publish?

Yes, this is self-published. It's self-published with Amazon Direct Publishing, and this is also where the book can be acquired.

What was the most challenging scene to write?

The easiest parts to write were the dialogues, which practically wrote themselves. This is why most of my text is dialogues. It was rather difficult to write those chapters where there is quite a bit of narrative prose without dialogue. For example, the period of depression, which I think Shakespeare underwent when he was 14. One of the chapters about the trip to Kenilworth Castle and the last chapter where Triton and the mermaid appear, these I found rather difficult. The parts about the conference practically wrote themselves because this is simply my experience.

What was your favourite scene to write?

It's difficult to say. Perhaps it's when Kate meets the Queen at Kenilworth Castle or the excursion to Warwick Castle, where they had already met the Queen, which is closely built on a contemporary report. And I would say the final chapter with Philip Herbert and Mary Sidney, appearing as children in the Globe Theatre.

I think my favourite part is the beginning when we first meet Kate, who is sitting on a tree branch, and William asks her, "Kate! Kate! What are you doing up there?" and she says, "Oh, William! Can't you guess? I'm reading a book!" I thought that was a great beginning and introduction to the character of Kate. What do you love most about writing and reading books?

I think it's the communicative aspects and the fascination with language. Language is very malleable for communicating, but also for coming to terms with yourself. This is why I chose this profession. It was a great experience to try out creative writing myself after studying writing for so long. I couldn't have done it earlier on because I would not have known how. After having studied literature for so long, this was a new challenge.

If you could offer a piece of advice to aspiring authors, what would it be?

Read as much as you can and talk about your reading to friends.

Is there a favourite author from whom you draw inspiration for your own books?

This novel was obviously inspired by Shakespeare's works, so it's always sort of trying to find an origin to what Shakespeare was writing there. But then the conference parts of my book were inspired by one particular model, which is David Lodge and his novel *Small World* in particular, which is about attending conferences.

According to you, what makes a great story?

There are no rules on that. I would also be hesitant to say that a story is great or not. If it happens to attract the attention of readers, it is they who decide if the story is great.

What is next for you? Are there more books on the way?

There might be more if this novel is well-received. But I have various projects, mostly scholarly. So I'm not sure if I'm going to embark on another creative project.

What do you hope the reader takes away from this book?

I would say, better understanding and greater love for Shakespeare.

Lastly, if you could ask William Shakespeare one question, what would it be?

Who do you love best?



artwork by Jona Waltenberger



Field 1: The first Earl Grey finds its way into your system - you're energized! Move 3 spaces forward.

A TRIP TO STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

illustrated by Luca Sophie Hillbrands



Field E: The ghost of Kenilworth Castle gives you quite the scare! Run ahead 2 spaces.

Field K: You've arrived at the legendary Globe Theatre. Step onto the stage and perform the iconic "To be or not to be, that is the question" from *Hamlet*. If your performance is convincing (as judged by your fellow players), roll the die again.

Field L: The queue for the London Eye was endless - you had to wait for two hours! Skip your next turn.

Field 3: Oh no! You've lost the group at the airport and the bus left without you. Skip your next turn.

Field 6: You've arrived at Shakespeare's Birthplace. Inspiration strikes! Move

directly to Anne Hathaway's Cottage (Field 9).

Field 10: Go on the detour to Kenilworth Castle - it's worth it. Follow the alternate path.

Field 13: A night at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre watching *The Merchant of Venice* puts you in a gambling mood. Roll the

die: 1-3: Move 3 spaces forward, 4-6: Move 3 spaces backward.

Field 16: You've reached Shakespeare's Grave. Take a moment to mourn. Skip your next turn - unless you can recite a Shakespeare quote (but not "To be or not to be").

Field 19: You've made it to the Youth Hostel. You're exhausted and need a nap. Skip a turn.

Field 24: Oops, you've missed the Fish and Chips shop! Go back to grab a quick lunch.

Field 27: It's raining! Quick, run and find shelter on field 29.

Field 31: Take the London detour and follow the alternative route.

Field 39: Wait a second - you haven't been to London yet, have you? Go back to the bus station (field 31) and catch the bus to London.

A Holy Lesson in Teamwork

a short story by Xenia Renge

G. wakes up in a convent somewhere in Germany at 4:40 sharp, as she has done for the past three weeks. Getting up gets done without groaning at this point: This is what she has been preparing for, after all. She now knows how to properly pray, how to wear a nun's robe, how to be Catholic – or at least she knows how to look the part.

When her supervisor at MSO let her take the lead, far away from any of her colleagues, on a solo mission, to stop Dr. Gordon the villain her organization has been looking for for nearly six years she almost cried from excitement. Or at least she would have if it was something she would ever do in front of others. This could be her one-way-ticket into solitude, peace and quiet, as well as a promotion – what kind of self-respecting and capable secret agent does not dream of this very opportunity?

With her prayer beads in hand, Agent G. makes her way through the cloister of the church, and while witnessing the bees pollinating the different kinds of flowers growing and throwing vines along the outer walls of the building, something else catches her eye. It is the same sister as two days prior waving in her direction, standing right across from her on the other side of the garden. She is even smiling, which is very odd considering Agent G. has never seen this woman before in her life: If she had, she would already have made a point of letting the nun know that, in her opinion, a convent is not the right place to try and make friends- While the vague familiarity of the woman standing across the cloister from her worries her slightly, Agent G. simply continues her daily walk to the church grounds.

Agent G. enjoys the silence of the communal 6 am prayer. It gives her time to retrace her steps and try to map out new ones. So far, her mission has not been a success: While it would be unrealistic to expect to apprehend her enemy only three weeks into the mission, the lack of new information and discoveries made during her infiltration makes Agent G. wary: What if the organization's intel is wrong? What if she has already been discovered, and the one she has been trying to apprehend is already long gone and scheming elsewhere? Before she can jump on any more cynical conclusions, the morning prayer ends, and the nuns commence their tasks for the day. Being assigned with garden duty, she follows her fellow Sister Mary to water the flowers and take care of the soil.

Sister Mary is the one Agent G. chose to get close to the very first day of her being here because the bubbly sister seems like someone who could not keep a secret if her life depended on it, and a convent is surprisingly gossipy. She reminds Agent G. of a fellow agent of hers, who – and Agent G. used her very first prayer in the convent to thank God for that – is not here with her. She is loud and chipper as well as daft and-

“...I just can't believe Sister Prudence would be saying that to Father Peter! Can you?”

Apparently, Sister Mary has been going on about the next-door monastery gossip, Agent G.'s heartbeat speeds up just by thinking of her colleague's annoyingly shiny hair. She probably takes way more care of her hair than her notes on mission briefing. Trying to appear as sincere and possible, Agent G. gasps to reply:

“I can't! It's just...so...” she never finishes the sentence, as her fellow nun starts packing up her gardening tools while listening to the church bell strike 5 pm.

“Oh, I've forgotten the time! I need to go to confession immediately.”

“I thought Father Peter was already done with his confessions for the day?” Agent G. asks, knowing that it is nearly impossible to get to confess to Father Peter after 2 pm when he has already had lunch and it is time for his geriatric nap for the rest of the day.

“Oh no, Father Floyd is doing the confessions tonight. Good night, sister.”, and without another word, Sister Mary turns the corner to basically sprint towards the confession chambers, and while Agent G. does wonder at this behaviour, she also knows that sometimes, people are just odd.

On her way back to her sleeping quarters, Agent G. spots the nun from before, the one who had wavered to her earlier this day, sitting alone in an empty chamber meant for lonesome prayer.

This woman is pretty suspicious, Agent G. thinks to herself. Maybe apprehending her could help me find

a new lead, and even though she enters the room without making a sound, the woman facing her back to her turns around as if sensing her. In that moment, Agent G. immediately, and to her dismay, recognizes the nun.

“Oh, it really is you! I thought you’d gone blind or something, I’ve been trying to make you notice me for, like, a week! It’s sooooo crazy, I was beginning to think you’ve been ignoring me and I was all worried like, maybe you don’t like me anymore or –” As she goes on and on with her surprisingly quiet, excited and long-winded greeting, Agent G. is simply stumped to see her fellow agent Harriet without her usual getup of bright colours, a hairdo that is probably more complicated than it is worth, and a full three inches shorter without her heels on.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Agent G. asks, fully aware that her volume needs adjustment.

“...We’re...in a church, you know,” Harriet replies in staged shock, her unmanicured hands pretending to cover her ears.

“I thought women of the cloth would know better than to swear in here. It’s like, totally rude.”

“Okay, I’ll try again: What in God’s name are you doing on my mission?”

Harriet looks at her strangely; her head tilted the way animals do when they are confused.

“Did...no one tell you that this was not a one-woman-mission? Or..wait! I know what’s going on!” Now Harriet is standing very close to Agent G., her face scrunched up in a frown.

“They knew not to tell you because then you wouldn’t have taken it.” Before Agent G. can protest, she realizes that it is true. She hates working with others, always knowing deep down that no one can do better than her.

“I prepared to infiltrate this place for months. I learned Bible verses, how to act and what to say, and you just get to waltz in here last minute and work with me?”

At this, Harriet’s expression changes from the doe-like look she gets whenever she speaks to anyone or thinks of anything to something more sombre, more serious. She straightens up and takes a step back from Agent G., mustering her up and down with her arms crossed. If the change of demeanour wasn’t so frightening, Agent G. would snicker at the fact Harriet’s long, curly hair that she is so proud of, must be hidden by her habit for the remainder of the mission.

“You really think I just get everything handed to me because I don’t live for my job only, do you? You think that because I know how to look good and how to be nice I can’t be competent? You’re like, off by a mile, Gideon.” Even though it was not intended, Agent G. swallows hard when Harriet says her first name out loud. Her heartbeat quickening is something she is not going to get into just yet.

“I was chosen for this mission because I am capable, smart and adaptable. Just because you think stoicism is the way to go to be an agent does not mean the same applies to me. Also, the reason I even wanted to get your attention in the first place was to make you aware of the fact that Sister Mary is one of Dr. Gordon’s spies. The guy she’s meeting with in the confession chamber is the second.”

“...No kidding,” is the only reply Agent G. can give to this flood of information.

“I mean, yeah! ‘Father Floyd’? That’s not even a Christian name!” Harriet snorts, and the tension is gone. She smiles at Agent G., who has never been this confused in all her years as a spy.

“I didn’t know there were two,” she confesses sombrely, because it’s true.

“Thank you. I don’t think you’re...incapable.”

“No, you do,” Harriet muses. “And it sucks. You’re not the only one I have to try extra hard for. But, you know, for you I just might like to.” She playfully punches Agent G. in the arm.

“You’re not too bad, even though everyone tells me you are.”

“Eh, I might be,” Agent G. confesses, rubbing her arm and growing more and more flustered.

“But maybe you will...help me get better? If you wanna do that...together.”

Now it is Harriet’s turn to blush, if only just a little. Agent G. cannot exactly tell with the dimness of the light, but she takes her counterpart’s giggle as confirmation.

“Happy to be the first person you try cooperating with.” And Agent G., strangely and for the first time in her life, is glad to work together too.

Halloween in the Sem

a report on a semester abroad by Luisa Herbers

Halloween is a US-American tradition, isn't it? This is at least what I had thought before coming to Ireland last summer. But one of my first major cultural lessons during my semester abroad was that Halloween is actually a very old Irish tradition. It has its roots in the Celtic festival of Samhain.

During Samhain, the Celts believed, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead can be overstepped, and evil spirits wander about looking for the people about to die next. To protect themselves, they wore frightening costumes and carved faces into vegetables to scare the evil spirits away.

One of the history teachers at the school I worked at even explained to me that, depending on the region, people sometimes used turnips instead of pumpkins for these carvings. After the majority of the Irish population had become Christian, the Catholic tradition of All Hallows' Eve began to merge with the Celtic tradition of Samhain. Over time, "All Hallows' Eve" was shortened to "Halloween". Halloween was later brought to the US by Irish immigrants who not only upheld the tradition, but expanded it



It is thus no surprise that Halloween is still a big occasion in Ireland today. There are Halloween-themed pumpkin farms that you can visit, there are parades in many Irish towns and cities – and there is "Halloween in the Sem", the Halloween-themed weekend St. Brendan's College in Killarney organises every year. Students and teachers work together for weeks in advance to turn the entire school into a haunted house: The woodwork and art department collaborate to decorate the buildings and the school grounds, the students invent scary stories. Even some parents get involved. On Halloween weekend, the Sem welcomes visitors of all ages to participate in their Halloween celebration. In small groups, students guide visitors through the corridors of the school building and across the yard, performing their scary stories along the way.

What surprised me most is how deeply Halloween is rooted in Irish tradition – at least for some people. When visiting a pumpkin farm, we ran into the owner. He explained to us that it was very important to him to turn his farm into a Halloween attraction every year and that it meant a lot to him on a personal level.



I also had many conversations with my colleagues in the Sem and found out how significant a role superstition has played in the tradition of Halloween – even in the more recent past. Many of them told me that they had grown up with all kinds of stories about Halloween, and that they were sad to see these traditional Irish stories, including myths about pixies, increasingly replaced by the commercialisation of Halloween and American trends that are now returning to Ireland from

the US.

Experiencing Halloween in Ireland was something that I had not particularly thought about before going there, but it turned out to be one of the cultural events I found most interesting and enriching during my stay abroad.

Bulldozer Woman

a short story by Ronja Schnetlage

She never stopped – or, rather, no one ever saw her stop. With high speed she tore through the streets of her town. No matter how small the sidewalk was, how many people were blocking her way or how busy the street was she wanted to cross – None of it mattered to her. She never made room for other people; She never even acknowledged obstacles with a glimpse. The only thing she did was stare ahead and walk. It seemed like things were making room for her, that immovable objects were terrified of her force, so they rather moved out of her way.

At first glance, nothing seemed remarkable about her. Her hair was grey, her frame stocky and steadfast, her expression grim, stone-faced even. The kind of lady you would see on the streets in masses. Moreover, she always walked alone. The only company she kept was her walker, which she used with defiant confidence, as if it was just another accessory.

There were a number of rumours about her, none of them kind, and probably none of them true. People started calling her *the Bulldozer*. Not only did she act like one, she also sounded like a bulldozer. Even though she never opened her mouth, you could often hear her before you could see her. But no one could ignore the screeching sounds of her walker rubbing against walls, her heavy footsteps on the concrete or the angry yells of the people she shoved out of the way without ever touching them. Everywhere in town there were dark stains where she had tried to squeeze through an opening that seemed much too small for her. Miraculously, she always managed to squeeze through tight spots unscathed.

That was until one Sunday morning, when she was found on the perfectly manicured grass of someone's front garden. Apparently, she had waltzed through a hedge, about hip-high, and then fallen to the side. She was still lying on that side when she was found – completely stiff, like a car that had been turned over. Her hands were still gripping onto the handles of her walker, its wheels still turning. Some people claimed they saw smoke rising from her body, as if she, at any second, might go up in flames and burn the well-ordered neighbourhood down with her. It was unclear what had killed her, but after having lived a life of defiance, her engine must have given out. She never stopped, until she stopped herself completely.



artwork by Julia Schilowski

a poem by Lara Arlinghaus

What is the essence of great art?
All emotions intertwining with each other, fuelled by a deep conviction?
What's the main part?

Is it skill or just pure luck?
Is there a way to improve, or are you just stuck?
What's the hack?
Or does talent keep you on track?
Or is it perhaps pain so deep it shatters your soul?
Is art supposed to take a toll?

It certainly gives one a reason to give it your best, to let it all out
There's no doubt

But in the end, all that's left to do
Is to create art that feels true



artwork by Julia Schilowski

Fumes and Memories

a poem by Michael Boyko

Sometimes I take my bike
On a red cloud into the city
Breathing fumes and memories
And potential
Thinking of people I've loved
People long gone
Wasted

Parties left too early
Apartments we once knew
Catching a glimpse
Of what could have been

The puzzle pieces of
My age
Melted, spiteful
In golden sunlight
One last time
Margins dissolve
Compress
Into one last memory
To fly into view
And vanish
In the blink of an eye

The Student

a poem by Emilia Rademacher

Some nights are darker than the rest,
I notice it when they infest
My loving mind with doubt and dread,
And keep me pressed into my bed.

That's when I question all my vows:
What if, one day, my passion's doused
And leaves me empty, aimless, cold?
I'd spend my life just getting old.

As I investigate my fears,
Another impulse turns the gears.
I can't keep up with my own pace –
Heart's got a head start, mind's first place.

As if I climbed a mountainside
Without directions, without guide,
With only love and vague belief
To tell me how my goal's achieved.

Not scared of plummeting the way
Down to where my crushed body'd lay,
But terrified of ending stuck,
Forever waiting, out of luck.

And so I reach, whichever piece
Of rock sticks out most close to me
Will be the next step – I don't need
To see wherever it may lead.

Just forward is enough for now,
No matter why it works and how,
And once I reach the mountaintop,
That is when I will still and stop.

For but one second, just before
I go on looking for some more,
My passion keeps on fuelling me,
Having to satisfy this need.

I pick a pickaxe up and try
To hack it deep into the sky,
Pull myself up on it and find
There's more to see – yet I am blind.



When Theory Fails Practice: The Frustrating Reality of Many Didactics Courses

an anonymous essay

Didactics courses are meant to prepare us for the classroom – to give us the tools, insights, and strategies needed to truly teach. In theory, they are a cornerstone of teacher education. In reality, many of them are outdated, disconnected, and frustratingly unhelpful.

Stuck in the Past

Too often, didactics courses focus on theories that are decades old and developed for classrooms that no longer exist. They ignore the fact that today's students come from vastly different backgrounds, speak multiple languages, and bring with them a wide range of social, emotional, and academic needs. And yet, instead of equipping us with tools to meet this complexity, we're asked to memorise names and models that feel irrelevant. Knowing the name of a theorist from the 1980s does little to help me manage a restless classroom or plan a lesson that sparks curiosity.

No Help for the Real Job

What many of these courses fail to provide is simple, practical support. How do I motivate students who've already given up? How do I design a lesson that's not just informative, but engaging? How do I create slides that aren't just walls of text? These are basic, everyday challenges for teachers – and yet they're barely addressed. Instead, we sit through lectures filled with presentations on abstract frameworks that never touch the ground.

A Rare Success

That being said, it's not all hopeless. There are of course courses that get it right - that understand what future teachers actually need. My biology didactics course, for instance, was a completely different experience from most of the other ones I've had to endure. It acknowledged the real-world challenges of teaching and offered practical methods, fresh materials, and space for discussion. I left that course with ideas I could actually use, something I – and I'm sorry to say that – can't say about either the general didactics courses or the English ones. Those, despite being central to our training, failed, at least in my opinion, to show us possibilities and ideas for teaching.

Conclusion

Not every didactics course is a failure – and it's important to say that. Some do succeed, some do inspire, and some genuinely try to prepare us for our job in the classroom. But far too many still don't. And that's not just disappointing – it's dangerous. Because when these courses fail, they leave future teachers unprepared, unsupported, and unsure of their abilities. This leads to stress and, in the worst cases, to depression and burnouts. If we want good teachers, and we really do need them, we have to start with better training. And that means finally letting go of what no longer works – and focusing instead on what truly matters: The students, the classroom, and the everyday reality of teaching.

Fireflies

a poem by Lea Förster



Long ago, in ancient times,
When truth and magic had blurred lines,
Crossed each other now and then -
And no-one truly wondered when
A spell was cast, and it did rain,
Or bravely got a dragon slain -

Existed creatures ever kind,
With crucial powers to unwind
The evil thread of dark and hate,
Which interwoven in each fate
Can cause anyone to stumble -
But not those, so very humble.

These beings, who are exactly this,
With patience and light-heartedness,
O'er mountains and fields far and wide,
Brought happiness and great delight
To those who sought but never found
A positive and sturdy ground.

They shone a raying golden beam
That felt like an enchanting dream -
A thought just whimsical and small
Could change a nation overall -
At night it was incredible
The lumination one could see.

Alas, they could not stop themselves,
They shone too bright, these little elves
After aiding all and under,
They began to lose their thunder,
Began to lose what made them whole -
'Twas like their heart that someone stole.

Which is why they were forbidden
To wield their mystic inheritance,
To keep on giving just to leave
Themselves behind and stop to breathe -
They took away their gleaming light
Soon they became the rarest sight.

And to this day one rarely meets
A creature similar to these
Now they are known as fireflies
And only once a year they rise -
Return to earth for just one night,
For a serene green glowing flight.

More they are not allowed to do,
As they could crash and burn too soon
But if you're fortunate enough,
They'll find you when the times are tough,
Giving to you a happy song -
And if they stay, they'll hum along.

Let them learn this very lesson:
Don't waste your light on every person.



The Midnight Term Paper

a poem by Victoria Stembrik

It started simple, weeks ahead,
a term paper, the tutor said.
I smiled and thought, "I'll start tonight."
But somehow that just wasn't right.

The days went by in lazy streams,
lost in TikToks, chats, and dreams.
A title here, a line or two -
then snacks, a nap, or something new.

Each morning came with mild regret:
"I haven't started writing yet."
Each night I said, "Tomorrow's fine."
Until I saw the cursed deadline.

Now it's the day - the very last.
The hours tick, alarmingly fast.
My fingers type, my coffee's cold,
my thoughts are panicked, rushed, and bold.

I quote too much, I barely read,
I write with stress, not love or need.
No structure clear, no time to check -
this ship is sailing, what the heck.

The guilt is loud, my breath is tight,
I've done in hours what needs a night.
At 23:58, I hit submit,
too tired to care if it's real shit.

And there it is - that freeing glow:
"Your file has been received below."
Relief and shame now intertwine -
but hey, at least I met the line.

Tightrope

a short story by Franziska Rick

When I was a child, about ten or eleven years old, I used to like balancing on things – anything: ropes, walls, any kind of handrail. I raised my arms to the sky, and suddenly I wasn't this foolish child standing on a small wall anymore. Suddenly, I was an elegant tightrope walker. Gracefully and dauntlessly, I danced over to the other side. The thought of falling did not scare me at all. It rather gave me a thrill, and I enjoyed other kids looking up to me – literally.

One day during our break, I decided to balance on the handrail of our sports field. I proudly strutted to the other side, then tripped, started lurching and rowing with my arms, till, suddenly, one of my feet slipped. I fell off and my chest slammed against the steel before I landed in the soft grass. My friends stopped playing and ran to me to ask if I was alright. I wanted to tell them that I was fine, but I couldn't answer. I. Could. Not. Breathe. I laid on my back, eyes wide open, and gasped for breath, above me the worried looks of my friends. It did not last for long, and it turned out the hurt was only temporary. However, I never forgot the/that narrowness in my chest as I tried to breathe.

That was how I was feeling, as I was leaving the conference room. That tightness in my chest. My lungs seemed to have forgotten they were supposed to let air in and out. Although this time, I had not fallen, not really. My hands crammed around my briefcase. It seemed to have become tons heavier within the last twenty minutes. I went through the hall as if in a trance. I passed the desk of the secretary, Ms. López, who asked me something. I made a gesture that could be interpreted as both a nod and a shake of the head. I went on, placing one foot before another, till I finally passed the sliding door of the main entrance and went outside the law firm. Only then did my lungs remember their purpose, and I took a couple of deep breaths. The oxygen started to circulate in my blood again, but my chest still felt choked with whatever it was. Now that I was able to breathe, my head began to clear, which scared me because I then realised the whole dimension of what I just heard. I felt like running away from my problems, but my chest was too heavy, and my briefcase was too heavy, and there was no place I could run to anyway. So, I headed home.

Amie opened the door for me. My three-year-old daughter was excited that I had come home so early. It didn't occur to her that this could mean bad news. How should she know? When I saw her excitement and her impartiality, something burst in my chest. Whatever it was that had weighed me down, cracked, and there came a flood of emotion. I only managed to close the door behind the nanny, then, without warning, I started crying. I sat at the end of the stairs and covered my face in my hands, like they sometimes do in films. But there was no way I could hide it. I cried, and I cried, and I cried. And when I thought that there were no tears left, that I should have been dry as a bone by now, there were still more tears. Amie was standing in front of me and observed me quietly, concerned, as far as a three-year-old can look concerned. I thought about how this was the first time I cried in front of her, and how she probably had never seen an adult cry before, and how she probably didn't even know that adults could cry. This thought made me cry even more. Amie, my little Amie. At some point there really were no tears left. I still sat there and dried my face with the sleeve of my blouse. My makeup was completely smudged. The tightness in my chest was gone, and where it had been, it had left a hole filled with nothingness. Nothing. Neither happy nor sad, just a big hole. Amie looked at me with her big blue eyes.

“Mommy is sad”, she said finally. I nodded and then sighed.

“Yes, Mommy is sad. It is ok to be sad sometimes. Mommy will be alright.”

At that time, it felt like a lie. I hugged her and felt relieved and ashamed at the same time because I was the one who should comfort her, not the other way around. All of a sudden, a new feeling came up, something like anger. But not the kind where you get furious and start doing or saying things that you will regret later. It seemed paradoxical, but this type of anger made me feel rather calm, almost peaceful. I gained the certainty that someone had done something wrong and should receive just punishment. And it wasn't Amie. And it wasn't me.

After some time, Amie freed herself from our cuddle and ran to her room to play with her dolls and building bricks. This was fine by me since I hoped it would distract her and she would soon have forgotten about all of this. I went to take a shower, tried to wash off all the humiliation I had had to bear today. Of course, they had an explanation for everything. They were lawyers after all, what else did I expect? When my superiors told me that my position had been filled by someone else, they didn't once mention the term *single mother*.

“We had to make some greater changes that some might question at this point, but they will be favourable for the firm,” they said.

“We've refined the culture a bit – more emphasis on flexibility and balance.”

“This will open up opportunities that are in the best interest of the firm, and this is what we all want, right?”

I knew that I had been absent a few times during the last months. Amie had been sick, like children her age always are. First, it had been the measles, then influenza, then something else – I have already forgotten what it was. Other than that, I worked as well as everyone else, maybe even harder. Everyone knew that I was good with clients; everyone knew this. The partner who was going to replace me was no doubt competent, with a professional smile and a pleasant, dark voice. He was something I would never be: Male. All at once I then remembered how a few years ago, Angelina Parker had left the firm after giving birth to her first child. I had always assumed that leaving the firm had been her own choice. Now I wasn't so sure anymore.

I put on some sweatpants and a hoodie and went to Amie's room to check on her. She had fallen asleep on the carpet in the middle of her room; in her tiny hand, she still held a toy car. I put her to bed, although it was way earlier than her usual bedtime. I guessed all this trouble had exhausted her, too. I lounged on the green armchair in the corner of her room. I, too, felt exhausted but calm, knowing exactly what I would do. I would sue them. It was possible that I would lose the trial and lose a lot of money, but I would do it anyway. What else was I supposed to do? What did they expect me to do – nothing? I was a lawyer after all, just like them. I would have to make several calls. But not today; I would be better off tomorrow. I looked at Amie, sleeping peacefully. She lay on her back, surrounded by pillows and her stuffed animals. Taking a closer look, I could see her little chest rising and falling.

I knew that even if I won the trial, it wouldn't be easy afterwards. I would always have to find a balance between my career and my life with my sweet little Amie. Oh, Amie. But I was willing to face this. I would take one step at a time, placing one foot before the other. I could possibly trip, lurch, then fall. Then I will get up again.

THE EDITING TEAM'S FAVOURITE GAMES

Lisa

★★★★★★★★★★



[Fiction Editing, Non-Fiction Editing]

My favorite game depends on what I am in the mood for. Scrabble and Yahtzee are always fun. For me, playing games is more about the company than the game itself.

Michel

★★★★★★★★★★



[Fiction Editing]

My favourite board game is *The Settlers of Catan*, where players compete in building the most settlements and cities. What I enjoy most is the constant communication throughout the game. A word of advice if you've never played before: control the grain, and you'll control the game!

Luca

★★★★★★★★★★



[Layout, Illustration, Graphic Design]

My current favorite game is the two-player co-op game *Split Fiction*. It's made by the same developers as *It Takes Two* and also focuses on teamwork. I really enjoyed the fun mechanics, great music, and the way the story can be played from two perspectives!

Jona

★★★★★★★★★★



[Layout, Illustration, Fiction Editing]

I would say *Legend of Zelda Twilight Princess* in a heartbeat but I want to give indie games love too, so *Subnautica*. There's something incredibly fascinating about the underwater biomes and the glowing plants as you discover this alien planet, you'll become so entranced by exploring and awing at the scenery that you forget the objective often.

Ronja

★★★★★★★★★★



[Fiction Editing]

It's hard to pick either a favorite board or videogame, as there are so many that I love... The one game that comes to mind first is *Red Dead Redemption 2*, though. I have never played a game where I was this attached to its characters and their story. The characters are so incredibly nuanced that there are still discussions online as to why they might have acted a certain way.

Kaja

★★★★★★★★



[Layout, Illustration]

I play a lot of fantasy role play games in my free time and my ultimate favorite is called *Baldur's Gate 3*. It's a turn-based and choice-based video game in the *Dungeons and Dragons* universe. I recommend this to anyone who's looking for deep character arcs, a compelling fantasy world and a fun combat system.

Kathrin

★★★★★★★★



[Non-Fiction Editing, Layout, Printing]

My favourite game is *Cascadia*, a fun tile-laying game for 1–4 players where the goal is to create the most harmonious ecosystem! I like that it offers different variations so it never gets boring.

Alexandra

★★★★★★★★



[Reporter]

I might sound boring, but I'm going to stick to what I know and say *Monopoly*! I love when my friends get mad. Some are trying to cheat, others are negotiating. It's always so much fun! As a wedding gift, my friends created a personalised *Monopoly* for me and my husband. Three years later, I'm still obsessed with it!

Lisa-Marie

★★★★★★★★



[Poetry Editing]

It might sound cliché, but my favorite game is *Pokémon*. Although I enjoy most of the games, if I had to pick one, my favorite would be the *Black Edition*. It's a fairly easy but lengthy game once you get the hang of it, and there are so many things you can do differently each time you replay it. It's always my favourite to come back to.

Jasmin

★★★★★★★★



[Poetry Editing]

I tend to be very lucky when it comes to games, and my all-time favourite is the card game *Uno*. It's especially satisfying to have multiple +2 cards, even more so when you get a +10 card in *Uno Show 'Em No Mercy*!

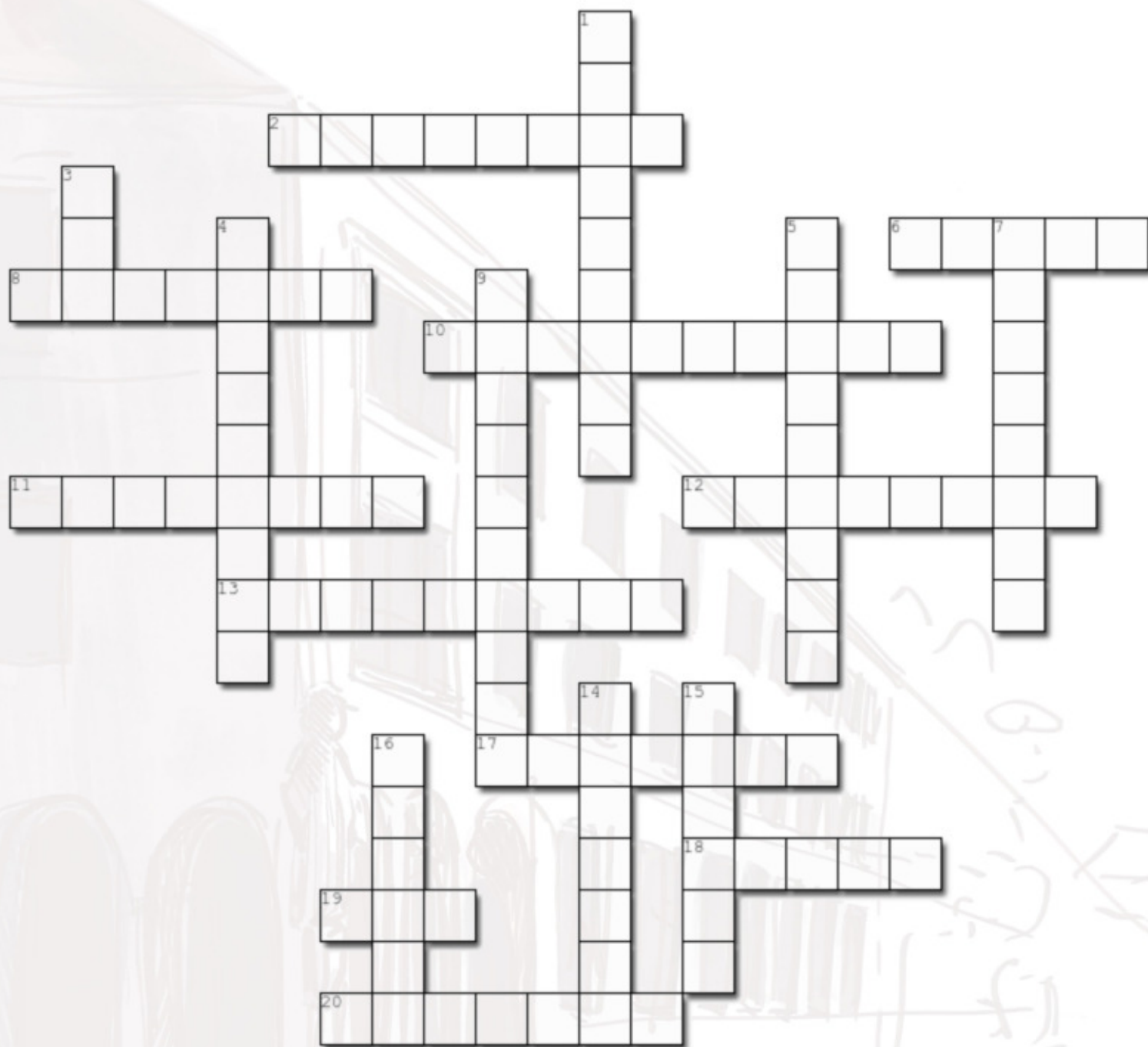
Annemarie

★★★★★★★★



[Fiction Editing]

My pick is *Harmonies* – a board game that nearly became *Game of the Year* in 2024! In this beautifully illustrated game, you build habitats based on the needs of your chosen animals. The player who manages to house the most animals and to complete the most side quests will win. What really makes this game special is the way habitats are constructed: using a variety of different tiles, you actually create a 3D landscape.



Across

2. Alexandra's favourite game
6. *Bulldozer* ...
8. Name of the Celtic origin of Halloween
10. What castle is visited on a trip to Stratford-Upon-Avon?
11. Name of the villain in *A Holy Lesson in Teamwork*
12. Which country fed Phuong's curiosity?
13. Amirhossein's home
17. Which inner literary icon is described as "strategic"?
18. Secretary in *Tightrope*, Ms ...
19. Cover artist's last name
20. 'This ... oils itself' (1,2,3,4,5 - *Breathe out*)

Down

1. Animal painted by Jules
3. Who spent four months in the heart of Canada?
4. *Am not I Your ...?*
5. Animals described by Lea
7. *Fumes and ...*
9. *The Harvest V3, L2, W2*
14. One of the characters in *The Wind Still Knows Your Name*
15. The character in Michel's story is not good at reading in ...
16. First name of the author of *The Student*

