



***Diamonds in the Rough***  
***A Literary Magazine***

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Editor: Dr. Melissa Knox-Raab

Our Winter, 2021 issue explores the paradox of home, in pandemic times a refuge as well as a prison. Feeling at home with oneself, one's body, one's culture, one's ethnicity—or feeling like an outcast—is the common thread binding these essays together. Ranging from Harry Styles' *Vogue* ballgown shoot to German-American differences in university education, student essays explore experiences with racism, sexism, and homophobia. We are also proudly presenting artistic responses to COVID, including a rapturous sunset, an art exhibit, and a poem. Expect humor, too.

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## **Get Rid of Manly Men**

By Smilla Batteux

“Playtime with Harry Styles” states the December edition of the US *Vogue*, showing the singer-songwriter Harry Styles in a ballgown by Gucci. For most of his fans the fancy clothes are nothing new according to Harry’s previous outfit choices over the last few years.

Between all the positive feedback Harry Styles and the *Vogue* team are receiving, there seems to be one woman concerned about the message this picture is mediating.

On November 13th, *Vogue* Magazine announced their cooperation with Harry Styles via Twitter stating how much fun they have had working together with Harry.

A day later Candace Owens, who is a political activist supporting Trump, retweeted the Tweet from *Vogue* Magazine.

*“There is no society that can survive without strong men. The East knows this. In the West, the steady feminization of our men at the same time that Marxism is being taught to our children is not a coincidence.*

*It is outright attack.*

*Bring back manly men”*

*(Candace Owens via Twitter 14th November 2020)*

She is not specifically criticizing Harry Styles alone, but the general social change that is allowing boys to paint their nails, wear whatever they want, including dresses and skirts. She advocates the return of the manly men, who are able to protect the country or their women.

Candace Owens is known for standing against the Black Lives Matter movement, Feminism and also supports the “Pro Life” side in the ongoing discussion in America about abortion.

Although earlier she was working for a left winged anti-Trump blog until she wanted to release a website in 2016 to reveal online bullies. Almost everyone working in that area was against that idea, and she received a lot of harsh criticism. During that time some strong Trump supporters publicly defended her, which has probably caused her to become Republican.

After her Tweet had gotten so much attention, she went live on *Instagram* to talk in even more detail about her Tweet.

She says again, that she was not attacking Harry personally but *Vogue* and the culture that stands behind men wearing dresses. She also mentions that people belonging to the left side of politics cannot stand the things that work and function, and they need to change these by turning men into women and women into men.

Just because a man is wearing a dress, he is not changing his gender or his sexual orientation. Just because a woman is shaving her head, she is not changing into a man. But if Candace thinks that putting on a dress as a man is making those men less manly, I wonder why there are so many occasions where she wore a suit although she claims to be such a loving feminine wife.

Later on in her video, Owens also says: “I believe people should do and live as they want but I think it is wrong for our society to pervert things.”

The dictionary defines perverted as: characterized by sexually abnormal and unacceptable practices or tendencies. She seems to be afraid that society is growing increasingly sexually abnormal, which does not fit into her concept of normal. Her concept of normal being a man in clothes that underline his male gender.

I see nothing sexual in the image of Harry on the *Vogue* cover. Other covers of women naked or in lingerie have included more sexualisation.

Before that she mentions that she does not find men in dresses to be attractive and after that generalizes her position by saying any woman that claims to find a man in a dress attractive is lying.

While I am thinking that it is totally fine that she does not find men in dresses attractive I do not like her generalizing things like sexual preferences, which is different for every human being. Everyone has a different taste and there are plenty of women that do find men in dresses attractive, including myself.

“If I see a man in a dress, I think he’s a crackhead,” she states after talking about imagining the normal world without the Hollywood glamour. Breaking down what she is trying to say is that if she sees a man on the street in a dress, she is going to think that man is on drugs. Her thoughts about every man in a dress being an addict or crackhead could accord with the fact that 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA+ in America and because living on the street is pretty unbearable, some people might become drug addicts to cope with it. But saying that people like Kurt Cobain, Prince or Freddie Mercury are “just mentally ill drug addicts”

that should not be seen as a role model is not solving the problem many young people that are part of the LGBTQIA+ movement are having. There are many gay men saying it really helps them to become themselves by seeing people like Harry Styles or Iggy Pop just embracing their love for fashion.

“I think you’ve missed the definition of what a man is. Masculinity alone does not make a man” is the answer of Elijah Wood to Owens’ Tweet. Putting a man in a dress does not take away his masculinity or make him weak.

Many people, including myself, felt like it was 1950 again hearing what Candace Owens had to say. To make this point clearer at the end of her livestream she says: Since the beginning of humanity, we’ve had men protecting and defending, we’ve had women nurturing. And once again I believe that to be a sign of insincerity considering her big career in politics and the lack of devotion to her duties as a woman, in the limited way she has defined womanhood.

## **Moving Out During a Pandemic and Why It Is The Best Thing That Happened To Me**

By Helena Wagner

What do you say to a 19-year-old student moving out? Maybe: “Please watch your candles while they burn! You don’t want to set the house on fire in the first week you’re living there.”

Well, this question should not be too hard to answer.

But what do you say to a 19-year-old student moving out during a pandemic, when the world she knew basically does not exist anymore and her plan after school turned out to be a lot more different than expected, her mother waving her good-bye with a package full of face masks in her hand? In the process of becoming an adult, moving out during a pandemic sculpted me from a teen into a hard-working individual who learned to stand on her own feet, teaching me more about the person I want to become – a responsible, independent woman.

The decision to move far away from your hometown, where you spend most of your life with your family and friends, is already a bold one at this age. You are going to leave the life you knew behind and start a completely new chapter after school, as a student in a completely new city. But the circumstances in the year 2020 are making the process of moving and finding new surroundings a lot harder. Finding a job in a new city is much more difficult than before because many companies do not look for new employees since the economy is decreasing due to corona restrictions. If you want to find a job, you either need to be lucky or really convincing about your qualities. But once you have a job, the risk of losing it due to a second or third lockdown is high, especially in the service sector where lots of students are working in addition to their studies. You really need to have a plan in hand for paying your bills and rent, especially if your parents cannot give you any financial support. That takes a lot of self-organisation and responsibility as well as self-esteem and courage.

But the coronavirus is not just controlling our work life, it is also present in our social life. As a young person in a new city, you usually do not know a lot of people. You learn about the city by discovering it with other students and maybe go to parties to connect, so finding new friends is not that hard. Seeing the new city as your new home is not difficult if you have people that you can spend your time with. But during a pandemic there are no parties and lots of fun things that you can do with new acquaintances are unavailable. Also, the people are

social distancing to stay healthy and prevent the virus from spreading, so meeting people is not easy at all. That leads to a lot of time spent alone, not having your friends and family near to meet up and talk in person. Feeling lonely and lost in the new city is the result.

Missing friends and family and questioning the decision of moving is completely normal in such a situation. There is so much time to think about moving back and feeling nostalgic about the time in school where your life was organised and had a structure, that the urge to give in to this feeling is strong. But that is what makes this new episode in life so special. You now have full control and responsibility for your actions and your way of living. The new circumstances can be overwhelming at first. Overcoming this dark place in the mind is a strengthening experience, because once you have done so, you know you can manage many problems alone, and you know yourself and the way your mind works better. You grow as a person and slowly get used to adulthood.

Moving out from home is a crucial element in growing up and learning to stand on your own feet but doing so in a pandemic forces you to really spend time with yourself since you cannot escape the situation. Because of the amount of time you spend alone you will be struggling to find a way that makes this new episode in life fun. Even if this personal development is uncomfortable at first, it is in fact the same as it says: Diamonds are built under a lot of pressure. As you are forced to survive this episode in life, there will always be a better time where you can shine with the qualities you developed.

## **Different Investments, Better Results: Comparing American and German University Experiences**

By Nicole Feyerherm

The United States of America: land of the free, home of the most expensive universities in the world. Just take my comparatively affordable alma mater, Fort Hays State University (FHSU), as an example. One three-credit-hour class costs at least one hundred euros more than a semester's student fees at the University of Duisburg-Essen. And each full-time FHSU student takes twelve or more credit hours per semester, shelling out enough money for about five semesters of German fees plus a cheap weekend away on top. But although I'm now paying significantly less in cash, I'm paying more in time and stress. While pricey, the United States university system orients itself around student experiences. American universities offer a more structured education system, assistance with all bureaucratic facets of the university, and accessible professors. The German system, while monetarily cheaper, leaves students to fend for themselves in many aspects of their studies. Growing up in the United States, I was taught that higher education was an investment in one's self; therefore, the price tag was worth it. However, during my transatlantic university experiences, I've realized personal investment must not always involve dollars and euros.

Unlike their American counterparts, German universities receive around eighty percent of their budget from the government. (In comparison, FHSU receives about thirty percent.) German universities also maintain their low price tag by keeping administrative positions to a minimum. While this certainly reduces costs, it also increases student responsibility. Rather than simply writing the final exam with the rest of my classmates come semester's end, I must now wade through red tape to merely take the test in the first place. This is partially due to the modular study system popular in German higher education. Multiple graded assignments and tests throughout the semester plus a final exam, project, or presentation *for every course* is the American norm. The German system instead bundles courses together with one cumulative exam or paper at the end of the module, not semester. Students must then retain information for multiple semesters, as it is often impossible to complete a module the same semester one begins it. The odd presentation, essay, or homework quiz appears along the way; however, these are often pass-fail and usually offered as additional study material. This might sound deceptively easy compared to the American system. That is, until one realizes a single

massive exam determines one's grade for multiple courses, with minimal in-class opportunities to review the material.

My last full year at FHSU, I participated in an exchange with the University of Duisburg-Essen. During that time, I realized there were significant differences between the universities. Due to these variations, however, I simply needed a few Studienleistungen, namely, academic credits based on "homework" only. Now that I am enrolled full-time, I'm finding the German system more challenging than expected. To be fair, I chose to study in my second language, adding an extra level of difficulty. However, in the US, the bureaucracy that exists is highly navigable. FHSU students are given a map of highly advertised resources available to answer their questions about issues like enrollment, financial aid, tuition payment, and more. In the German system, I must draw the map myself.

Luckily, I can simply ask my faculty advisor for advice. But wait—German students only have faculty advisors while writing theses. Fine. I'll talk to one of my lecturers. They might not know the answer but could potentially know who would. But wait—they have literally one office hour a week, compared to the multiple office hours of my American professors. If I'm not stuck in class, I'm competing for time with a hundred other students. During pandemic conditions especially, email is an option, of course. But instructors still have limited time and energy. While there is probably an answer online, it is buried in a user-unfriendly university website. And although an office that handles my exact issue may exist, it is likely not advertised at all. I am majoring in Anglophone Studies and German; I will receive an unofficial minor in university bureaucracy and Google.

Two German student services thoroughly outperform the US, though: housing and food service. Sure, the dorms may be cafeteria-less and kilometers away from campus. There is no Pizza Hut in the Mensa, no Starbucks in the Yellow Café. But the on-campus meals are delicious, affordable, and healthy. And German student housing, at least at UDE, offers affordability, quality, and privacy. In the US, students pay thousands of dollars to eat overpriced junk food and share a shoebox of a bedroom with another human being. And the coddling of students seeps into residential life by way of "resident assistants" on every floor. These "RAs" exist to enforce the dorm rules, offer advice, and often act as stand-in parents to the students living there. In Germany, I pay three hundred euros a month for my own room in a shared apartment and the privilege of legally enjoying a beer in it. UDE student housing does have dormitory "tutors," but typically only one per building. They function primarily as

social coordinators and a point of contact for students rather than the Stasi reincarnate. (My experiences with RAs were, for the most part, positive. However, not everyone I knew was so lucky.)

While higher education in the United States focuses on supporting its students outside of the classroom, the German higher education system seems to practice the personal responsibility America preaches. For better or worse, I am treated as an adult, whether it's through developing my own enrollment plan or being left alone in the dorms. Instead of having information handed to me, I'm learning how to find it for myself. Despite the challenges, I am confident I will learn here what my American university experience failed to teach me: how to study independently, how to cope with high volumes of material, and how to find answers for myself both in and out of the classroom. While this all still requires a monetary investment from my parents and me, it is a significantly cheaper one. It still requires an investment in myself, however—an investment of time, thought, and self-discipline. German university offers me numerous learning opportunity beyond pure academics, and I'm excited to grow.

## **Please Don't Mistake My Kindness For Flirtation**

By Katharina Kalus

Person **XX**: “Wow, your hands are quite soft and gentle-looking.”

Person **XY**: “Why, thank you. Perfect for fingering, don't you think?”

Many people all over the world experience such a scenario on a daily basis. Google presents about 9.060.000 entries in under one second. That's how urgent this topic is. That's how important it is to talk about it and to pull it out of the dark hole of topics that are often not discussed because people are afraid of being seen as prudish, childish, or boring.

Person **XX** sends a sincere compliment towards person **XY**. Those words are meant exactly as presented. No other meaning is hidden between the lines. Person **XX** plainly thinks that person **XY** has a pair of “quite soft and gentle-looking hands.” It is as simple as it sounds. No deeper meaning, no further intention. A nice feature that the addressee thought should be highlighted and appreciated by pointing it out in the form of a simply stated compliment. However, person **XY** hears a completely different message. A sexualised one. An invitation, an offer of intimacy. Not only does person **XY** sexualise the addressee's intention, they objectify them by implying that sexual interaction is all person **XX** would be good to be used for.

Scenarios like this happen on a daily basis. One human being meets another, they get a coffee together, small-talk turns into a deeper conversation and all of the sudden, a completely harmless topic, an irrelevant subordinate clause is transformed into the sexualised elephant in the room. A sentence that used to be merely informative, like “I'll be right back, going to take a quick shower,” is understood as “I'll be right back, in the meantime please get turned on by the thought of my naked self showering.”

Now, some people claim that whenever they experience such a scenario, the person receiving the sexualised response to a plainly informative action should feel honoured to be thought of that way. That person should appreciate the fact that somebody would want to have sexual intercourse with them, or rather would want to use them for the satisfaction of their own sexual needs. Furthermore, they should thank the instigator for thinking of them that way, to have the honour of being their chosen muse of relief or pleasure.

It is important to be grateful for honest compliments. But these scenarios are neither honest nor acceptable. They are a pure exploitation of dominance in the constellation of two beings. And to say that those actions should be taken as an honour or a compliment marks the attempt to excuse unacceptable behaviour in the form of manipulating the actual victim of sexual assault into feeling guilty for feeling assaulted.

What to do and how to act? Of course, people could be more careful about what they say, which words they use and which order and setting they put them into. However, instead of manipulating the person with the actual good intentions into feeling guilty for stating a simple nicely-meant compliment, I think the one receiving it should learn how to take a proper compliment and how to reply to it in a decently mannered way. Instead of objectifying and assaulting a person in the form of a sexual response, how about simply thanking them for the compliment? How about seeing a person for the human being they are with all their values such as their personality, their soul and inner state of mind? How about accepting and respecting someone's personal limits and boundaries? How about a sense of decency and the use of common forms of civility?

Person **XX**: "Wow, your hands are quite soft and gentle-looking."

Person **XY**: "Why, thank you. That's very nice of you to say."

This is how it should have ended. This is how you don't mistake my kindness for flirtation.

## ***Rubyfruit Jungle: Binary Gender and Homosexual Relationships***

By Anja Ende

*Rubyfruit Jungle* is Rita Mae Brown's first novel, originally published in 1973. The main character, Molly Bolt, is gay. Early on she has to learn, through meanspirited remarks, that this makes her different. But no matter how mean those comments, such as "You're sick and you don't belong [here]" (p. 109) or suggestions of seeing a therapist to cure her unhealthy sexual desires (p. 112), Molly always manages to laugh them off or get a comeback. Only after moving to New York does she discover the vivid LGBTQIA+ scene. Molly learns that among the lesbian scene, there are butches and femmes, and she feels pressured to pick a side, which she rejects. Molly believes that "the whole point of being gay is because you love women" (p. 130).

In essence, she thinks that the idea of one woman appearing as masculine and one woman appearing as feminine in a lesbian relationship defies the purpose of being gay, that is simply being a woman who loves another woman. Not conforming to typical gender roles in the first place, Molly refuses to take on either role.

In her novel, Rita Mae Brown points out the binary gender construct, which is not only reflected in society's expectation towards individuals but also relationships. The idea that a romantic relationship requires a male and a female part is based on a heteronormative, binary understanding of relations and biological gender. This idea, from today's point of view, is considered conservative and proven wrong. In 2000, Anne Fausto-Sterling had great impact on gender studies, when she published *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. In her work, Fausto-Sterling draws attention to intersex people, which are people who were born neither XX female or XY male, or who have other syndromes alternating their gender, like Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome. She urges that intersex is common and further emphasises the need to reconsider the binary gender construct. As Fausto-Sterling observes, intersex people often experience mutilation as infants to give their genitalia either male or female appearance, in order to make them suitable for society. Of course, the discussion opened by Fausto-Sterling about a binary gender understanding isn't limited to intersex people, but anyone not adjusting to their biological sex. Brown, having reproached this binary understanding and gender-conformity almost 20 years earlier, received harsh criticism from

within the gay scene. The critics called Brown out for rejecting the concept of *butches* and *femmes*, alleging her to not be an ally. In *Rubyfruit Jungle*, Brown merely points out how those binary labels are in fact discriminatory within the gay scene towards non-conformist individuals, thus making space for questioning the understanding of gender generally.

But not only are binary constructs in gay romances mentioned, Brown also questions general gender roles in her novel, which give a decisive basis for the discussion touched upon in the previous paragraph. For one, there is Leroy, Molly's cousin. Not being as progressive as Molly, Leroy does not like that Molly will not comply to being a traditional woman. He states "If you're doing what you please, out there riding around on motorcycles, then what am I supposed to do? I mean how do I know how to act if you act the same way?" (p. 56). The fact that Molly acts, in Leroy's opinion, like a man, wearing trousers and riding motorbikes, confuses him because he does not know how he is supposed to act around her. In making this comment, Leroy urges Molly to just be like any other woman at her time because he does not know how to deal with emancipated women that do not fall into the heteronormative category of dress-wearing, childbearing, obedient housewives. The feelings Leroy describes are still widely shared in today's society where gender non-conforming people are still not as accepted as gay relationships, like discussed previously. Especially men appear to struggle with non-binarity as they often are victims of toxic masculinity. The critique on her appearance is shared by other significant people in Molly's life, most of whom have grown up in the conservative South. Early in *Rubyfruit Jungle*, the reader is introduced to Leota B. Bisland, Molly's classmate. The two girls start dating and end up sleeping together the night before Molly moves to Florida. They lose touch, but Molly visits Leota several years later. This time, Molly isn't greeted with joy – Leota is married and has children of her own. She feels repelled by Molly still being openly lesbian, and moreover, has no understanding as to why Molly wouldn't get married and settle down. Leota even demeans Molly's appearance, asking, with regard to the main character's homosexuality, "You must have stayed that way. Is that why you're walking around in jeans and a pullover? You one of those sickies?" (p. 191) In other words, Leota is repulsed by Molly's epicene appearance and open sexuality. Even Molly's adoptive Mother, Carrie, cannot accept her daughter's sexuality. The two women regularly have arguments about how Molly goes about her life. It's no secret that Molly's been adopted, as Carrie brings this up when they have an argument. She's harsh on Molly, calling her a "heathen" (p.28) in response to which Molly locks Carrie in the basement, wherefore Molly gets a beating. Over the course of several years, mother and daughter grow to dislike each other more and more. Molly leaves for Uni after Carrie said she wasn't her child and doesn't

see Carrie until she's in her final year. For her senior project in film school, Molly decides to interview Carrie about her life. Carrie, who's gotten old and tranquil, seems to have changed her mind about Molly, affirming "You misunderstood me. [...] You know I'd never say a thing like that. Why I love you. You're all I got left in this world." (p. 200f) It is questionable if Carrie at this point accepts her adoptive daughter or if she has simply gotten senile. Either way, both women seem to have made peace with one another towards the end of *Rubyfruit Jungle*, symbolising that Molly can close this chapter and continue her life knowing the most important person in her life loves her as she is.

I believe that the struggles Rita Mae Brown addresses in her novel are very real and still relevant today. We live in a society that heavily relies on binary labels. One could assume that amongst minority groups like homosexual people, such prejudices are not shared because they can be counterproductive. Brown however shows that even within the gay community, binary labels based on heteronormative understanding of relationships are common and end up discriminating allies. Binary gender is as old as time, making it a lot harder for us to take a step back and question this reality. But this is not reality, as Fausto-Sterling and others have revealed. Since *Rubyfruit Jungle* was published, many things have changed for the better for LGBTQIA+ people. I'm hoping we continue this path, making way for more inclusive societies and better realities.

## **Germans Do Not Love Asian Food: Explained!**

By Long Do Hoang

One of the most heated debates I ever had was with a dear friend of mine about whether or not her “Krispy Chicken in Sweet and Sour Sauce” could really be regarded as authentic Asian food. “The food is cooked by Asian people! If it’s not regarded as authentic Asian food, then what in the world would you describe it as?” she shot at me. I gave the matter a little thought and finally responded: “It is the skill of smart early Asian immigrants to mask German food as Asian food to make profit out of it!”

When my father immigrated to Germany during the 1980s there were absolutely no hip and fancy Asian grocery stores or even Asian restaurants to begin with. Thank god my father brought the most essential Vietnamese cooking ingredients from home – airport border control was not that strict in the 80s – a bottle of fish sauce, some dried fish, and wrapped up in a local Haiphong newspaper, some essential herbs and dried bamboo shoots. Equipped with all the ingredients he needed, my young father started to prepare his dinner. But coming from a third world country in the 80s where the average person practically had to start an actual fire to cook food, my father did not know of the existence of an extractor hood. So, on his first evening in Germany, he blessed his whole neighborhood with the *authentic* smell of what our beloved Vietnamese cuisine had to offer. Right before he could even taste his meal a neighbor of his started banging on the door, shouting he should open the door right away. When my father did, the German lady – getting right to the point as Germans will – declared that the smell that my father had produced in the kitchen was a strong violation against her well-being and that he must never cook with whatever witchcraft he was cooking, ever again.

Disheartened by the comments and complaint of the mean lady, my father thought he would never be able to eat Vietnamese food again until a good friend of his decided to open an “Asian” restaurant called “Golden Dragon”. So, excited at being able to eat familiar food again, my father visited his friend only to discover that his friend served completely unfamiliar food. The appetizer: “Mini spring rolls” filled with only vegetables and the size of one finger of a toddler. The main dishes were filled with western vegetables like red bell pepper and broccoli which look like a miniature form of actual trees. On top of that were two pieces of deep-fried chicken cutlets which were more similar to German Schnitzels than

anything my father had ever eaten in Vietnam. And since the appetizer and the main dish were deep-fried, it came as no surprise that the dessert, too, turned out to be deep-fried as well! As dessert – a privilege people from Vietnam did not know about during that time – his friend served him three pieces of hot, gooey and of course breaded banana balls. As perplexed as my father was by the food, he could not help but realize that all the German customers that were surrounding him seem to thoroughly enjoy their food. And they did, because on the one hand the food was exotic enough – the biggest contributor of that was the foreign man who served the food – but more importantly, the food was not too exotic. They still knew all of the ingredients in the menu but were excited and ready to pay money to see their well-known local ingredients being prepared in a giant wok, a utensil that is used more for show than authenticity.

Now, you might wonder why my father's friend did not just use authentic ingredients to serve authentic Vietnamese food and nowadays, he might do so. But then, back in the late 1980s, authentic Vietnamese flavors like fish sauce and herbs – the aromas that horrified the mean neighbor of my father – remained unpopular with most Germans. We are talking about a time where taking a bite of an Asian pear was considered experimental, if not dangerous. There was simply no demand for authentic Asian groceries and so Asian people who wanted to open a restaurant had to use groceries that were available in German supermarkets. But once these immigrants had the ingredients, they actually had to come up with a method to cook them. If you ever had the chance to travel to Vietnam, you might have realized that Vietnamese people oftentimes eat their vegetables and herbs raw or use them in soups. We do not usually use a giant wok to stir fry them. But as some of you might be unfamiliar with how to prepare South East Asian ingredients, my father's friend was very unfamiliar with how to prepare Non-South East Asian ingredients. What he discovered was that everything could easily be stir fried. And with that, a new cuisine was born: westernized and not authentic, but tasty “Asian” cuisine. Also, he started to deep fry meat because buying meat in huge quantities was much cheaper and deep frying it prevented it from going bad quickly.

A lot, of course, has changed in the last 30 years. Germans have become more open to trying foreign food and Asian ingredients and groceries are much more accessible now than they used to be. And even Vietnamese cuisine, with its fish sauce, shrimp paste, and fresh herbs is gaining incredible popularity in Germany. But the “Golden Dragons”, “Asia Woks” and “Bamboo Gardens” are still going strong and define the idea of Asian cuisine for many Germans. The westernized Asian food scene has become one staple here and it is hard to

imagine that authentic Asian food might one day replace it. Westernized Asian cuisine is a product of an important part of immigrant history of this country. It shows the troubles but also the creativity and hard work of Asian immigrants that went into inventing these dishes. They were responsible for our economic survival.

Also, as a Vietnamese person myself I have to admit that, although extremely unhealthy and not authentic, this cuisine is quite delicious! But it is not a valid representation of what South-East Asian food really looks and tastes like. It might also take a while to convince the broader German population to challenge their view on Asian food. Until then, my statement stays! Germans do not love Asian food but a westernized version of it.

## Making a Place Feel Like Home

By Linda Baron

In writer Verlyn Klinkenborg's own words, "[there is] a big difference between feeling at home and being home" (Klinkenborg 2012). As people everywhere are forced to stay inside their houses, I frequently think back to this quote and wonder how many people actually consider their house to be their home. A news story about students who planned to study abroad and now are stuck there alone comes to mind. As does a documentary about grandparents who live at retirement shelters and cannot see their families because they are at higher risk of catching Covid-19. Examples like these make me think about how important it is to have a place that feels like home: especially while every public place you normally might enjoy going to is on lockdown.

In his essay "The Definition of Home," Klinkenborg distinguishes between feeling at home and being home. He argues that when a person is at home, he or she will not feel at home since home "is a place so profoundly familiar you [do not] even have to notice it" (Klinkenborg 2012). Home is something one only becomes aware of when it is absent. Most people probably know about this concept because of love: Numerous love songs are written about a lost love that could only be appreciated by the lovers only after it ended. In her song "Big Yellow Taxi," Joni Mitchell sings "don't it always seem to go, you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone" (Mitchell 1970). She uses a metaphor of a green area that gets replaced by a parking lot to emphasize that usually we only appreciate the worth of what we have once it is no longer available.

Klinkenborg also lists different types of relationships one can have with the concept of home: He writes that "[s]ome people, as they move through their lives, rediscover home again and again. Some people never find another after once leaving home. And of course, some people never leave the one home [they have] always known." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "familiarity" as the "close acquaintance with or knowledge of something" (Oxford University Press 2016). According to Klinkenborg's definition of home as a "profoundly familiar" place (Klinkenborg 2012), it thus should be possible to cause a place to become one's home with time. Since these days our house is the place where we spend the most time, we cannot help

but grow more familiar with it. Maybe right now is the time that many people re-define what home is for themselves.

However, people who feel deeply homesick right now are certainly uninterested in replacing their old home with a new one. When someone is holding on to the memory of a (temporarily) lost home, he or she is unlikely to want to change his or her opinion about it. For these people, feeling at home is probably a hard thing to do these days. Still, I believe that there are small steps one can take toward feeling more at home. Recreating certain visual aspects of one's home, talking to close friends and family on the phone or simply setting up pictures of loved ones might work. It did for me.

But whether we feel at home or are home right now, this pandemic has changed the perception of home for lots of us. We learned to appreciate the advantages our homes offer us and got annoyed when these homes could not meet new exceptions we suddenly had for them. I myself have never been someone who likes spending time at home. But during this pandemic, I have learned the importance of having a stable home to return to at the end of a day.

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## **It Leads Me Home, this Winding Road**

By Julia K

It is a curious feeling, that feeling of home. It might sneak up on you, overwhelm you, or you might not notice it at all until you feel the vastness of its absence, when you find yourself lost in foreign lands. Home can be anywhere, really. It might be one, or multiple places. You might be lucky enough to have found it early on in life, been born and raised in one place, or you might have found home later in life, after the twists and turns of adolescence, once you had caught your breath after the restlessness of your twenties. Or maybe home to you is not a place at all. I have been fortunate enough to call multiple places home. Each one has been a little different, and each one occupies a distinct space in the cartogram of my mental map of home.

The first anchor point on my map, the first home I ever knew, was situated in a quiet townhouse complex just outside the city center of Frankfurt am Main. My family and I lived there until I was about five or six, and it is the place I have the least recollection of. My attempts at remembering it leave me with fragmented scenes of both quiet tranquility and vibrant liveliness. A scratchy yellow carpet in the living room, a susurrant creek, and a primary colored string of lights around an open garage door, oldie rock songs being played by the neighborhood band. The feeling of home permeating these images is but a faint impression, a subtle whiff of perfume lingering in the air, its strong scent faded and worn off after all this time. But still noticeable, not fully gone, yet.

The second anchor point on my map is my grandparents' home in Wiesbaden. It is where I lived for the first few months of primary school, before my parents had finished the renovations of our own new home in the city, and it is the place I return to, always. Wiesbaden is the first place I was able to navigate on my own. Its streets and corners and the connecting paths in between are known to me by name, affording me a sense of belonging, of agency even, by being able to find my way to where I wish to go. It is where I am free from the fear of being lost. The feeling of home is attached to every inch of my grandparents' house, radiating out into the city, a tangible, loud feeling, the certainty of which has been guiding my life for as long as I can remember. It is the North Star of my map.

The third mark on my map is Essen, the home I never wanted to have. We moved here when I was twelve and I wanted to leave as soon as I had arrived. With its utter lack of any and all obvious aesthetic charm, its ever-growing and ever-present construction sites and an honesty one might easily mistake for rudeness, Essen was hard to love – and I had no intention of trying. Yet after many years of twists and turns, the feeling of home crept up on me here. In this instance, the feeling of home is a defiant, triumphant feeling, manifesting itself quietly against all odds. It is one I finally allowed into my life, instead of having it chosen for me. And even though its coordinates were given to me, the mark signifying Essen as a place of home I drew myself.

We do not get to choose all the places we find ourselves in on our paths to wherever it is we are meant to be. Some of them we will keep with us, some of them we leave behind for good. Some of them become places of home, whatever that might mean or feel like. Some of these places of home will be readily apparent, a gleaming beacon on one's map. Others will be harder to identify, paradoxical places of one's biography, yet still undeniably etched into the cartogram of one's map of home. These are mine.

## **On Coming Home, Finally**

By Anastasia Glaser

Last summer, I visited my hometown. While the sunburn has healed, I still struggle with that word. Am I referring to the place where I opened my eyes for the first time? Or is home the town where I spent twelve years of my life before moving to Essen? Knowing something well does not guarantee fondness.

This past year, “home” has been a prefix to our usual activities and a state of limbo. Underestimating the duration of this pandemic, I chose to commit to Essen. I used to avoid staying in this city longer than necessary. Now, this self-imposed exile has either given me Stockholm syndrome or true comfort. I could not quite put my finger on it and it bothered me. Somewhere along the way, I must have taken the right path. But just to be sure, I obsessed over the hows and whys of it all.

The first city I ever knew shaped my concept of home, beauty, and grime. Stralsund harbors boats and memories as pale as me. The story of me walking out of kindergarten by myself and getting into a stranger’s car is a personal favorite. But home is more than the setting of a few questionable anecdotes. And certainly more than a “live, laugh, love”-poster on the wall.

In this period of isolation, I tried to recreate whatever home has meant to me so far. Never in my life have I felt homesick, only nostalgic. As if home existed on an emotional plane rather than a physical one. The best things about my home of choice are the windows and the rooftop. Every cool cloud I see makes up for every not so cool day. You can imagine my joy when April showers spiced up the whole scenery. It might not have smelt like teen spirit but the rain did remind me of a song. Soon, I compiled a whole playlist based on the scent of this midday rain. The songs’ common denominator was no specific genre or era but language. A compilation of Russian songs which my parents used to play on weekends as well as my own discoveries; all of them smell like rain and fresh laundry. Some even smell like the clothes I used to wear at home once my brother grew out of them.

I thought there might be something formulaic about feeling at home. Once I know where the local ducks reside, once I have go-to spots for different occasions, once I can find my way without navigation, then I would feel like I belong. People on bikes always seem to know

their surroundings. While I had no clue where I was going, I figured no one would suspect a thing if I just rode my bike fast enough. Fake it 'til you make it, I guess. I have made progress on all of these fronts by now. Still, it does not make me more of a local; I am a mediocre city guide at best.

September brought windy rain and with it more epiphanies. You hear stories about it, but you never suspect it could be you who slipped and fell in the rain. Humbled by the physical properties of water on metal surfaces, I developed a newfound respect for rain. I also developed a scar on my knee. Like a natural tattoo with Essen as the artist. I felt honored. This is when the epiphany set in. To merge with another entity you have to collide with it. To feel at home is to recognize something familiar in the other and vice versa. The city's air is a collective effort. The breaths I draw put down my signature as well. You do not interfere with the city's flow, things will always flow in spite of you. But some pigeons feasted on the crumbs of your falafel and cars waited for you to cross the street. You have been welcomed into other people's homes, you were fed and cared for. More than memories, this place harbors people who make space in their life for you.

I will always have my parents' native tongue to hide beneath. But I have found new places that speak to me and a common language with people who are dear to me. My knowledge of Essen may be ever so little. But every echo of warmth I recognize. Home feels like jokes you do not have to explain. Like facial expressions that seem familiar. You do not go home. You come home. You arrive by accident.

## **The Moments that Made Me Realize How Diverse Our World Is**

By Long Do Hoang

When I was a child, my perception of the world was so small until I understood what heritage meant. I was born in a small town near Stuttgart in Germany, Göppingen. Growing up there, the majority of my friends were German, the language we spoke with each other was German and the games we played were all in German. I was aware that the language that I spoke with to my parents was different, but I did not know about the concept – the social construct – of “heritage”. To me and my friends, the way we looked or where our parents came from did not hold any significance. All that mattered to us was that everyone in our group knew about the latest episode of *Power Rangers* or *Pokémon*. But our ignorance came to a halt after me and my friends entered elementary school.

Once I entered elementary school, I learned that the world seemed to be a little bit bigger than what I had anticipated. What consisted of my street, family, community and kindergarten before expanded to a new school with hundreds of new faces. And these faces looked nothing like mine. And I was not the only child to realize that. It was then when other kids would come up to me and ask where I was from. At that time, I did not have an answer, or, at least no answer that was to their satisfaction. I would tell them the street I was living in only for them to move to their next question which was: “No, what country are you from?” Whenever I would try to explain to them that I was from a country named Germany they would get mad while telling me that it was not true. I would hear statements like “You cannot look like that when you are German” or “My daddy said you are from China” as if their parents were more competent to assess my valid identity. So, after accumulating a certain amount of confusion and frustration, my younger self decided to ask the wisest person he knew at that time: my mother. One day after my full first grade schedule, I went up to my mother and asked her: “Mommy, why do people keep saying that I am from China when I am German?” to which my wise mother replied: “Long, you are neither German nor Chinese. You are, like the rest of our family, Vietnamese.” That answer came as a great shock to me. I learned that day, that I was neither German nor Chinese but Vietnamese. I was from a country that was completely unknown to me and more importantly, to my German friends. How should I explain my identity to them if I myself knew nothing of the country I was from?

Once summer vacations arrived, my parents decided that it was time for me and my then 10-month-old brother to get to know the country they came from. So, at six years, I was seated in a plane and flew about 30h – there was no direct commercial flight to Vietnam back then – to our “homeland”. I remember quite vividly how excited I was. I was going to meet my grandparents for the first time! Maybe, I hoped, they would also be really into baking like the grandmas of my other friends. I was looking forward to a nice big suburban house with a garden full of flowers and trees and maybe even a German shepherd dog named Rex? But the reality was very different.

The first thing I recall was the intense heat that slapped me across my face once we left the plane. Back then, Vietnam was still economically struggling. The country had suffered a long period of war and the government was blacklisted by multiple countries that were allies of the United States. What that meant for my younger self was: No air conditioning, no real streets, no real cars, bad electricity and no flushing toilets or running water inside the house. Having lived in a country where people do not even question that a toilet should be able to flush, this came as a huge shock to me. My grandparents also, were no strangers to poverty. While the parents of my father had a big hole in the roof from a dropped bomb during the war, the parents of my mother shared one room with the siblings of my mother as well as the toilet – which was a hole surrounded by a fence – with the whole neighborhood. But here is the wonder of childhood. Even though I was shocked at first, my younger self realized two things: I realized that there was a place where everyone looked similar to me, a place where I did not have to explain my existence. And more importantly, that I had a huge family who exceeded my highest expectations. My family might not have had a house with flowers and a dog, but it had cousins who played with me, grandparents who loved me and uncles who would drive me anywhere by a motor scooter! I learned how to climb on palm trees to pick coconuts and how to sharpen sticks to catch some fish.

I learned that although my family was very different from the ones of my German families, there was nothing that I needed to be ashamed of. Seeing all my family members I realized that it was possible to have an identity that might be slightly different from the rest of the Blumenstraße in Göppingen. And now, after having lived in Germany, England and the United States I can confidently say that there are no similar identities. The world can sometimes seem small but take it from someone who had the privilege to see a tiny bit from it: This world of us is huge and the more we are ready to explore ourselves and our so-called “heritage”, the more special and interesting it will appear.

## **Gutter to The Stars**

By Anna-Lena Plett

Oscar Wilde once said that “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.” By this Wilde means that every person reaches their lowest point in life at one time or another, yet some still have hope for the future – they see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel.

A gutter is a place where a lot of rubbish is thrown; it is a place where the rain washes the dirt from the road. To be in a gutter means to be surrounded by dirt and filth. When Wilde uses this metaphor in his quote, he means that people can also feel like they have been thrown away. That no one cares about them anymore and that they have reached the lowest point of their lives. They feel filthy and do not see a way out of their situation.

Many people reach a point in their life where they do not see what could possibly lie ahead of them. For example, one of my aunts reached a breaking point some years back and never fully recovered. After she and her boyfriend broke up, she admitted herself to a mental hospital, but nothing much changed. She was still unfit to continue her job and shut herself off from the world. My family tried to help where they could to the best of their abilities, without much success. The first real change any of my family saw was when she met her current boyfriend. She is not completely back to the way she was before, but no one can blame her for having to take time to sort out her mental state first before making any other changes.

The second part of the quote, “but some of us are looking at the stars,” means that some people still find hope in a situation that seems hopeless at first. They can see the stars, and therefore have a different perspective on their situation. Not everyone can see things from that perspective, and I would argue that the majority of people do not. Some need help from others to see things from another perspective. Not everyone is an optimist that can see the light in dark times, to have hope when everyone else has lost theirs.

To be at one’s lowest point and still have the hope that things will get better takes a lot of strength. I have never experienced a situation like this so I can only assume what it would take to turn a seemingly hopeless situation around. Going back to my previous example of my aunt, she does not have that strength on her own, but thanks to my family and the other people around her she is finding the strength within herself. Not everyone is strong enough on their

own; some people need the help of others to discover their own worth and strength. This does not mean that they do not have the same worth, it simply means that they do not feel like they have the same worth as everyone around them. They need to be reminded of their own value and that there are people out there that need them as much as they need those other people.

“We are all in the gutters, but some of us are looking at the stars.” A message about accepting one’s current position in life in order to turn it around. Not everyone has the strength to make big changes on their own and they do not have to. No one can clean a gutter all alone, they need help if they want to get rid of all the rubbish. Mental issues are the same, people can try to figure things out on their own, but they are unlikely to heal without the help of others. Everyone needs the support that other people can provide.

In conclusion, whenever somebody reaches their lowest point they might not have the strength and feeling of self-worth to turn their situation around on their own. Most people need the help of others to get back up and see the stars again. It was the case for my aunt and surely many others as well. Anyone can be the one to help someone else back up, maybe without even realizing that they are helping. No one should have to go through life all alone and face difficult times without any help.

## **Raise Your Voice Against Racism**

By Hilal Sarikaya

During the last few months, the protests over the death of George Floyd and so many other African-Americans made me think a great deal: why did the policemen commit crimes when their primary responsibility is to protect everyone from any kind of brutality and violation no matter what color their skin is? Why does skin color and ethnicity matter anyway when it comes to safety? Even though I have always been a person who knew the power of raising one's voice, I was afraid of speaking up. So, I had to suffer several injustices and accept discriminating remarks until I decided to say what is on my mind.

As a daughter of Turkish and Macedonian parents, I have to admit that most people who know me by face rather than by name think that I do not have a migration background, such as the woman whom I used to meet when walking my dog. The woman, who has a dog as well, once told me to be careful because someone scattered rat poison around an apartment in our neighborhood to "kill" the dogs. I really appreciated her help until she added, "No surprise. Lots of foreigners, Turkish and Arab people, live here. They don't like dogs as we Germans do." At this moment, I could not believe what I was hearing. I had never felt such a rage and disappointment before. How could she blame innocent people for such an inhuman action just because they had another ethnicity? I had lots of questions going through my head, but I ignored her racist statement and walked away. Later in the evening, I could not stop thinking about the woman and the way she thinks about foreigners or, as she said, *Ausländer*. I recognized that it really affected me since I always regarded myself as German and not as an *Ausländer*, and Germany as my home. Also, I never forgot about my roots: I am German, Turkish, and Macedonian. But most importantly, I am a human being and I do not want to choose one specific country to identify with.

When I met the woman again, I did not dare talk to her about her remarks. I somehow pushed it to the back of my mind and tried hard to forget about it. I was not proud of it, but I wanted to avoid unnecessary conflicts. The woman and I were engaged in small talk and our dogs were playing together when suddenly my dog barked at a man who wanted to cross the street. If you knew my dog, you would also know that this was nothing unusual because my little dog is a bit fearful and therefore barks a lot to warn people not to come too close to us. Unfortunately, the woman next to me, who as a dog keeper should have known more about

dogs and their behavior, said that her late dog had always barked at *Ausländer* and added that she had not liked them at all. My whole body started trembling and I knew I could not keep silent anymore. I thought “now is the time to speak up!” and so I did. “You are being racist!” I shouted and went on “You cannot blame a specific group of people for everything bad. What you are doing here is not okay. You are also discriminating against me because what you don’t know is that I have Turkish roots!” She surely was shocked and did not expect my emotional outburst – well, me neither. Having turned red, she apologized maybe about thousand times and the whole conversation became awkward. The only thing I could do, and did, was to end the conversation and slowly walk away.

At home, I kept on thinking about her racist statements and my reaction. I remembered that a teacher once was not able to read my handwriting and thought that I wrote *au* instead of the French partitive article *du*. I knew that it was hard to distinguish between my handwritten a and d, so I told the teacher that it was supposed to be a *du*, but she did not change anything. Of course, I was angry, disappointed, and felt treated unfairly, but I was also convinced that it was not really worth my time and energy to fight for a few more points in my French class test. This time however, it was something different and I felt the urge to speak up and shout out what was on my mind. It was a great feeling and I slightly felt like Rasha, a character from a work by Moustafa Bayoumi who, after having been unfairly arrested during the times surrounding 9/11 just because she was Arab, sees the cruel counselor from Metropolitan Detention Center Brooklyn again and tells him that he “needed to learn a thing or two about respecting others.” Rasha emphasizes the importance of speaking up and, in the last few sentences, describes how anxious, but at the same time satisfying the moment was.

Raising your voice is easier said than done which is why a little anxiety might be part of it. But no one in this world should keep quiet about injustices and discrimination. Racism is and has always been omnipresent and lots of people are not even aware that their statements are racist since most of the time it is associated or limited to physical or verbal violence, such as racist words like the n-word. Racism, of course, is more than that and even the simple question “Where are you originally from?” is a form of everyday racism. It is therefore important to make people aware of their racist statements and behaviors, and not to tolerate racism and discrimination of any kind since underestimated racist comments may one day result in a bigger racial discrimination case. So, I am happy that I overcame my fears and dared to speak up. It was a good feeling and just felt right. I finally began to understand that not saying anything is saying a lot and accepting the situation as it is. If I had kept silent, I

would not have been any better than my prejudiced neighbor, and this is not something I want. So, if everybody dares to stand up to racism, there is at least hope that, sooner or later, we will see the changes we want to see.

## What do Social Media and the Sky Have in Common?

By BÜSRA ÖZGÜL

A few weeks ago, I, like many others, witnessed a marvellous sunset. I was astonished by the brightness of the colours, the fast change of all the different shades of orange to yellow and by the fact that it started from one second to the next and ended a few minutes later very abruptly. Being in quarantine, I had nothing else to do, and ran to my garden so that I could take a photo and several videos of the spectacle. Normally, when I capture nature with my phone's camera, I never have the impression that I could catch even a little bit of its beauty as it is in reality. Normally, it never seems magnificent in the picture on my phone; however, this time the sunset was just so beautiful that it was impossible to not to look at it. I was so proud of my sunset photos that I wanted to add them to my story on *Instagram* immediately. Having done so, I checked a few other stories of my friends and other followers only to realise that I had by far not been the only one noticing (and capturing) the theatre play of nature. That evening I could count more than ten stories that showed the same content, namely that sunset. It was a charming feeling to realise that so many people can be amazed by such little (or big?) things in life. I was happy to myself and my social environment that we could find joy in something so natural yet magical.

It occurred to me that we have all experienced the same moment, but in different ways. Independently from each other we all had experienced the same moment, at different places. Some might have felt like me, enjoying and admiring nature's play. Others could have been in a sad, stressed or cheerless position, which they could have forgotten for the few minutes in which the show took place. Others again, could have been in a hurry because they might have had an appointment, a meeting or just some place they had to get to and stopped for a second to watch (and photograph) the sky.

What I am trying to say is that we are all clueless about many people, but still under the same sky. Not only today, not only yesterday but for generations, since the existence of our kind. Many people before our time have looked up to the sky because of joy, because of sorrow, because of hope – some looked up to pray, others looked up to discover. Whatever the reasons have been and still are, the sky connects people. Under the same sky and on the same ground, where people suffered because of wars and hunger, there is now peace and felicitousness. Under the same sky where once families and friends could not meet because of distances, we

created reachability. This was not created by inventing planes but among others by inventing social media. By inventing a tool that connects people from all around the world we no longer have to remain so unaware of each others' experiences and feelings.

## War on Facts

By Jana Eismann

My brother recently had an argument with a delivery person who was trying to deny the Holocaust and literally said that the Holocaust happening was my brother's fact not his. More and more, our society is faced with a baffling and dangerous phenomenon: a war on scientifically proven facts as unfounded distrust in experts rises. The idea behind individual freedom has evolved in a way that has many thinking they are entitled to their own version of reality. And with Coronavirus deniers, "Querdenker" protests in Germany and the recent US presidential election, 2020 truly was the year of conspiracy theories and "alternative facts".

All the time now, remarks like "I do not believe in Coronavirus" and "I do not believe the Holocaust happened" ring in my ears. As if Coronavirus would magically disappear if we stopped "believing" in it. As if millions of Jews had just decided to vanish during Hitler's reign, and concentration camps are only visible to those who "believe" they are real. "Facts" and "beliefs" have become the same to some. But that is not how facts work. Scientific studies – and election results – are not subjective. We can come to different conclusions and argue based on that, but the facts themselves stand.

While the clash of conspiracy theorists and scientist has taken an especially grave turn in the year of Coronavirus, the concept of conspiracies being widely believed despite irremovable counter evidence is not new. In an [article from November 2016](#), *New York Times* opinion writer Farhad Manjoo observed this troubling phenomenon during the first presidential election with Donald Trump as candidate and points at earlier examples such as 9/11 truthers and birtherism. The fact alone that the ridiculous and disproven theory about Barack Obama's birthplace is widespread enough to appear not only in a newspaper column but in this essay by someone who has never even been to the US is concerning. It speaks volumes to the tenacity with which conspiracy theorists push their made-up stories and how easily conspiracies can spread around the world.

Manjoo attributes this rapid spread of falsehoods to the internet and modern media, which have fundamentally changed the way information is circulated. I agree that the range of different media to choose from is both a blessing and a curse. While unlimited freedom of speech online sounds great at first, it becomes a problem when a random guy with a blog is given the same credibility and reach as professionally researched newspapers. Apart from

designated opinion pieces, newspapers exclusively *report* news – their reporters do not argue for a certain point of view. There are codes of conducts in place specifically to ensure the objectivity of reporters – so their facts match reality and cannot be “alternative”. Your average Joe is not held to any standards, meaning he can handpick what to focus on and influence readers whichever way he likes. The difference between these two should be glaring, yet in recent years many people have accepted both as legitimate means of information.

Unfortunately, it is natural for people to gravitate towards stories that confirm their own preconceptions. Reading an article that validates someone’s own beliefs is much more comfortable than reading one that challenges them. Nobody likes the feeling of being proven wrong – having beliefs confirmed, however, feels like a nice pat on the back. It is hardly surprising that people prefer to be confirmed by the Media they consume when given the choice. A member of my hometown’s city council recently drew public ire when she did not wear a mask in a council meeting. [To a local newspaper, she defended](#) her move by exclusively citing sources making light of the Coronavirus while ignoring the overwhelming opinion of leading health organisations countering this belief with substantial evidence. This biased selection of information has become even easier with modern media and its infinite options, as Manjoo points out. He aptly writes: “Whether navigating Facebook, Google or The New York Times’s smartphone app you are given ultimate control – if you see something you don’t like, you can easily tap away to something more pleasing”.

When it is so easy to switch platforms, people form groups exclusively with like-minded people on like-minded platforms. This way support is easy to get and challenging views are non-existent. People create their own “bubbles” where an informative exchange of views is impossible. Having beliefs constantly confirmed by others not only deepens those beliefs but also drives people away from anyone who disagrees – a tactic eerily familiar from cults. Eventually, people’s glasses are so tinted that there is a rupture between their reality and the actual reality. Evidence no longer matters when any belief is automatically real – and anything countering that belief is inevitably fake. The mistrust in undisputable facts only spurs the “whoever disagrees with me is lying”-attitude that has now become common, especially online. This has been most recently shown by the number of people who still firmly believe that the US election was stolen from Trump despite there being no supporting evidence.

It is truly disturbing that with more access to information than ever before people seem overall less informed. It is also dangerous: Coronavirus has now killed more than a million people worldwide but still there are people who believe the virus is a hoax and nothing will convince them otherwise.

Referring to the Sisyphean task of fact-checking – where with every false claim debunked a new one takes its place, much like Sisyphus pushing a boulder up a hill only to see it roll back down – Manjoo grimly suspects that “soon, that boulder is going to squash us all”. Sadly, I agree.

# Poetry

## fire

By Katharina Kalus

By the time I stepped outside,  
the leaves were on fire.  
The sky—a glowing red,  
matched my heart of desire.

Beware of bewitched wilderness,  
longing for every breath of air.  
Beware of bold blindness,  
for it will leave nothing but fear.

Blissfully, the time flew by,  
for light flickered and faded.  
The sky—a burning red,  
as a heart of desire deflated.

## Art Exhibit

### A New Coat of Paint On This Locked Down Town, or Why You Should Draw On Walls

By Anastasia Glaser

The silver lining to a week full of *Zoom* meetings were practical seminars that some art students had the privilege of experiencing. Until that fell through as well. The tables turned when a friend, Antonia Koball, shared her ideas for an art project with our group of fellow art students. Her seminar on wall art did not require an actual wall. Yet she acquired a spare one.

While museums were closed, Antonia's vision would allow for accessible art, nevertheless. She painted several frames in different sizes on the wall and let us all participate in filling them in. We came in groups of two and masks. We stayed outdoors and apart. We were met with buckets of paint and cups of tea. It was freezing but the compliments of passersby kept us warm.

Little did we know that fame and fortune was also on the way. Jobs were offered and journalists called. It was absurd to have a look behind the curtains and see how staged it can be. Some of it was benign like pretending to be left handed for the sake of a better picture. Some was borderline propagandist. We were asked, take after take, to emphasize how bad we had it in this desperate situation. "Not to put words into your mouth but...", was the professional advice when our answers focused on the perks of it all. At least some passersby took actual interest in our work and thoughts. And the infamous 15 minutes of fame that Warhol predicted will surely pass. At least we have the footage and the wall to commemorate this point in time. A visual representation of our group, a collection of bodies and faces in different styles. A bit of art for all eyes to see, no closing hours or entrance fee. Time spent in the cold but at least not spent alone.

Feel free to take a walk through Gelsenkirchen, Ückendorf. Come by Carl-Mosterts Park if you can, perhaps you will spot the wall. Otherwise, enjoy the pictures of the process. In any case, stay healthy and creative. You never know where drawing on walls might get you.

*Special thanks to Antonia Koball and her parents for organizing everything. And to Leonie Czogalla, Elena Görtz, Julia Karkosz, Gamze Palabiyik, Lisa Rolf and Kim Süß for their work.*

# Last Word

By Melissa Knox-Raab

As we embark on our second semester of *Zoom* conferences, social distancing, and FFP2 masks, I'm delighted to see one positive effect of the pandemic: those who have to sit home write more. When there's nothing else to do, paper is remarkably patient. While no substitute for jovial dinner parties and casual encounters with friends, writing counters a remarkable number of everyday frustrations.

I also find cooking a pleasant way to forget COVID. Here's one of my latest recipes. Call it "Boomer Chicken."

Content warning: contains meat.

## *Ingredients:*

One corn-fed chicken

One pack of REWE fennel sausages

At least eight cloves of garlic

One or two red onions

Olive oil

Salt and pepper.

1. Remove the bird from plastic-wrap. Season it—salt and pepper will do; any flavored salt is fine, too. Place the chicken in a dish and leave in the fridge overnight. You can omit this step if you're in a rush, but the skin will be crispier if it spends the night in the fridge.
2. Preheat oven to 220°. Remove skin from around eight garlic cloves. Set aside. Remove sausages from package. Slice each one into four or five pieces.
3. Stuff chicken with garlic and sausages. Sew shut with twine, binding legs as well. Again, you can skip the twine if you're in a hurry, but the bird will be more flavorful if you don't. If not all the sausage and garlic cloves fit, that's okay—they can mingle with the onions in the dish.
4. Slice red onions into four-five pieces each. Put in a medium-size baking dish and add about a tablespoon of extra-virgin olive oil. Toss. Place the bird on top of the onions. Insert dish into pre-heated oven and let bake for about an hour (longer if it's a big chicken). About halfway through, you can turn the chicken over, and if it looks like it's getting too brown, place a sheet of aluminum foil over the chicken.
5. Serve with white wine, the vegetable of your choice, and rice or potatoes.

*Dr. Melissa Knox-Raab teaches American Literature and writing at the UDE. Read more of her work here: <https://melissaknox.com>*