

englist

QUARANTINE EDITION

THE ENGLISH  
STUDENTS'  
NEWSPAPER



# **ENgLIST: The English Students' Newspaper, Quarantine Edition, August 2020**

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ISSN (tiskana izd.): 2670-4889

ISSN (spletna izd.): 2670-4897

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# EDITORIAL

by Karin Petko

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When life gives you lemons, you should make lemonade or drink tequila. Or so they say. And when life gives you COVID-19, you should stay at home, take online courses and make use of technological innovations to stay in touch with your friends and family. Jokes aside, the quarantine really did make a mess out of what we used to call normal. No more drinks with friends, no more walks in parks and no more college. Did you ever think that you would actually miss sitting in the lecture room? Yeah, me neither. Yet here I am, typing away this editorial and wishing that it will all go back to normal in autumn. But will it? Fingers crossed.

In the meantime, let me tell you how COVID-19 messed up the issuing of the 20th edition of *ENgLIST*. Oh, you've heard this one already? Still, here's a short recap: this year's second issue was supposed to be our 20th and we wanted to celebrate it properly. Since the virus kept us apart, the celebration was not possible.

Therefore, we decided to postpone both the publication and the celebration of the 20th issue to the next academic year. We didn't want to leave you empty-handed, however, so we compiled this in-between, half-quarantine, half-normal issue instead.

Thank you, dear writers and readers, for your articles and your patience, and thank you dear editors for working so well even if remotely.

Enjoy!

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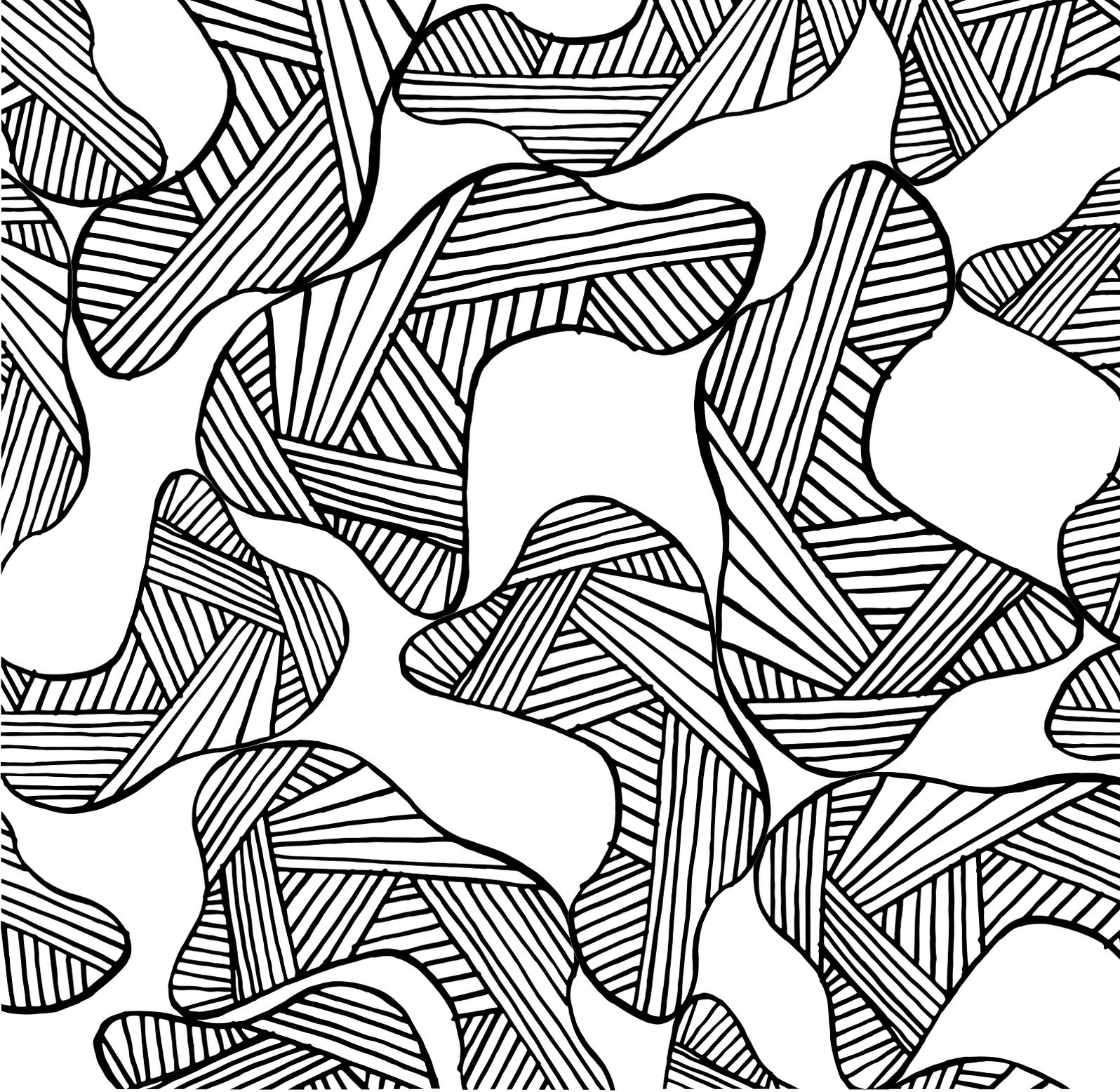
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# QUARANTINE PART

# HOME

Refuge.  
A safe place.  
Home.

Spending time with my family.  
A lot of time.  
24 hours a day.

Talking, laughing, singing, working.

Quarantine.  
A safe place.  
Home.

Trying to adjust our schedules.  
How different they are.  
How odd.

Talking, working, arguing.

Quarantine.  
A small place.  
Home.

Trying to hide from each other.  
It doesn't help.  
Nothing does.

Working, arguing.

Refuge?  
A safe place?  
Home?

# MISS QUARANTINE

Yes, he was taken by the quarantine,  
but there's no way I'll let her win.  
She might give him all the time  
but I'm not giving up on something mine.  
Yes, she's lazy and slow-paced,  
but he can't wrap his arms around her waist.  
She might make him feel relaxed,  
but she'll never send him a good-morning text.  
Yes, she's popular and trendy,  
yet never would she drink with him a brandy.  
She might seem to be the perfect spouse,  
but who'll do the talking? She's quiet like a mouse.  
Yes, he might enjoy her silence and peace,  
but give him a day and it's me that he'll miss.  
She might seem to serve his every need,  
but never will she make his heart skip a beat.  
Yes, she probably lets him sleep in,  
but she not me. She's quarantine.

Karin Petko

# QUARANTINE LONELINESS

It's been a month since you last kissed me,  
now, tell me, honey, do you miss me?  
Do you think of me before you fall asleep at  
night,  
do you want to hug me when I try to pick a fight?  
Do you shiver lying alone in your bed,  
missing my arms and all the words that could be said?  
Do you turn around meaning to tell me a story?  
But seeing I'm not there . . . I am sorry.  
I'm counting the stars and counting the days,  
every morning the same since we last parted ways.  
Do you stop yourself before saying my name,  
    knowing full well that it would  
sound lame?  
Do you ever cry at night in your pillow,  
wondering what life would be like as a willow?  
Do you wait for my texts and look at your  
phone,  
wishing you did not feel so scared and alone?  
I don't know when you will kiss me again,  
but in case that you do, please, tell me. When?

Karin Petko

# QUARANTINE RULES

Do you still remember the days  
when you could walk free,  
take a deep breath  
and sneeze in your sleeve?  
Don't you dare cough. It's contagious.  
Once upon a time  
social gatherings were run-of-the-mill,  
now you avoid them  
like a plague.  
You still feel the urge  
to pick up the phone and arrange a meeting.  
You do it – the first part anyway,  
but it all ends with a red button.  
Don't socialize. It's hazardous.  
You know how in your history class  
you were all ears  
about the wars and  
you remember running home  
to ask your grandparents about their memories?  
Don't reminisce. It's history you are living.  
You used to be a spur-of-the-moment person,  
no thinking ahead,  
no plans.  
You still don't have to do it.  
You really cannot do anything but stay home.  
Don't plan. All has already been planned for  
you.  
All rules. No freedom.  
The ungrateful have always been punished.  
You appreciated your freedom before?  
Liar.

Karin Petko

# FEAR

I heard we only get to live 115 years at the most,  
and that means my mother will not live  
forever  
and my body started feeling weird after I hit  
22,  
I guess it was protesting the time I let slip by  
without grabbing on tightly,  
and I am a linguist, so I know all about  
ephemerality,  
but I am afraid I won't have time to write about  
it –  
every year we let words die and we invent new  
ones to help us understand  
but the truth is, there is no absolute  
finite number of truths in the world  
and everything is a blank piece of paper,  
and all the books that have been written  
were liars.  
We don't have time to talk about this anymore.  
I want to touch people while I still can and I want to do so honestly.

Ariela Herček

# TOUCH, noun

1. the silky sunbeams on the bedroom floor, dreams swaying my body awake again
2. I have become a mathematical paradigm trapped between numbers and laws I cannot disobey; tell me there is an alternate universe where loneliness isn't quite so heavy
3. calling my friends to tell them I still remember their laughter and hearing them laugh in response.

# I AM OKAY

I woke up today and drank my coffee and  
I was okay.  
I had a virtual lecture and I answered some questions and  
I was okay.  
I donated blood and my head didn't spin and  
I was okay.  
I ate lunch and took an afternoon nap and  
I was okay.  
It's evening and it's still the same day – but  
I am okay.

we're drinking orange juice on the porch and even though the wind is stinging my cheeks, my fingers are warm where you're shielding them with skin. the hard texture of the chair embeds itself into my thighs but it doesn't matter, it doesn't go as deep as some words i have had to swallow before they could leave my mouth and make their way to you. our lives are now the bliss of listening to '90s music and baking and making fun of each other's bed hair and sitting on this creaky porch as much as possible. yesterday, we ate lunch outside and the sun was golden, and tomorrow we will eat ice cream for breakfast and maybe i'll gather the courage to tell you the truth about hope and how i hold onto the sound of your laughter like a slippery rope of a suspension bridge. and maybe, if i get drunk enough, i'll accidentally let slip some of those words that are always stuck in my throat.

---

if i say that my chest feels tight with homesickness, will anyone listen?  
if i dream about the supple sea tonight, is any of it real?

and

if i dig my fingers into the dirt of the empty pavements, will i be able to rid the world of its sins?

if i share my hollow voice by singing a hymn to my bones, does the sound carry over mountains?

and

if i cower in the bed because the noises are too loud, will anyone hug me until the shaking stops?

is anybody out there?

# INTERVIEW with Colin Carberry

by Karin Petko



‘[E]veryone knows everyone – and everything,’ says Colin Carberry about one of the places he called his home during his childhood. It is a saying that could be applied to the world in general – show me a person who could not outsmart me about myself and I’ll give you a diamond. Yet, the pandemic made us question: do we really know everything? Do we know better than others? Even during the interview, Mr Colin told me so many new things about himself, plenty of interesting opinions and ideas, plus things about our country (which I believed I already knew quite well), thus proving that even when we think we already know everything, there is still so much for us to uncover.

## 1. TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF – YOUR LIFE STORY: WHERE DO YOU COME FROM? DESCRIBE YOUR CHILDHOOD.

I was born in Toronto to Irish parents but we moved back to Lanesboro, a small town in the Irish midlands, when I was three. I grew up among my grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins. Lanesboro is pleasantly located on the northern tip of Lough Ree (Irish: Loch Rí), and less than 2,000 people live there, so everyone knows everyone – and everything! I have many happy memories of my childhood there, playing in the ruins of Rathcline Castle and the surrounding forests, or exploring the Shannon river and its islands in a borrowed rowboat.

I was a kind of Huckleberry Finn character, always outdoors, climbing trees or staring, mesmerized, into a dark pool or pond. I spent most of my time with my mother's parents, due to the fact that my mother's father was both my riding instructor and boxing coach. As a youth, I represented Ireland in international showjumping events in England and Scotland. I had a disconcerting habit of 'getting lost' when I was supposed to be performing or walking a course, but he quickly figured me out: 'Just find the nearest body of water and there he'll be, staring into a pool or a bog hole.'

Between the ages of twelve and seventeen, I attended St. Mel's College, a boarding school in nearby Longford town. My English teacher, Fr. Sean Casey, imbued in me a deep love of literature, and it was in his class that I first read works by Seamus Heaney, Walter Macken, and Padraig Colum.

At seventeen, we moved to Brampton, a suburb of Toronto. I graduated from St. Thomas Aquinas High School and studied literature at the University of Toronto, Mississauga Campus. There I met Dr. Richard Greene, a leading Canadian poet and biographer, and he invited me to join his literary circle in downtown Toronto. The Old Victoria Writers' Group became a haven for me. I was unhappy, working menial jobs, and drinking what little money I had, a lonely homeless uprooted from his Irish paradise.

Richard wrote the foreword to my first poetry book, *The Crossing*, and it was launched at Lanesboro Public Library in 1997. I began to publish poems in Canadian and Irish magazines and anthologies and give public readings at venues around Toronto, but mine is a restless soul and a sense of wanderlust was always in me. One night, in a Brampton bar, a friend suggested that I fly to San Salvador, to visit a mutual friend whose father was dying. 'He would like to have you there. For the support. You can pay me back later,' he said, handing me an envelope.

I arrived in San Salvador soon after and would spend the next three months backpacking around El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. Darryl Carlyle, a friend who was living in Linares, Mexico, at the time, studying for his doctorate, invited me to pay him a visit. 'You're in the area,' he assured me. Thousands of kilometers and two attempted muggings later, I arrived in Linares with only the vaguest idea which house he lived in. Then, I discovered I had left my passport in Hostel La Luna in Oaxaca – the other end of the country. The German owner smiled when I re-appeared: 'You owe me a mescal.' I took a night-bus to Monterrey, then back to Linares for a few days' rest. But by then I was running low on funds, so I bid farewell to Darryl and headed home.

Back in Toronto, I couldn't get Mexico out of my head, and over the course of that long harsh winter studied the country's history and literature in anticipation of my return. By the year 2000, I was back in Linares, writing poetry, learning Spanish, and working as an English teacher. I met my wife, Veronica, in my first job interview. She was the interpreter as I didn't speak any Spanish at that time. We now have two beautiful daughters: Kathleen, nine; and Emma, five. Except for a four-year stretch in Toronto, during which I finally graduated with an English degree, I have been here since.

**2. IF YOU WERE ASKED TO DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN FIVE WORDS, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?**

I'm a curious, nostalgic, idealistic, restless dreamer.

**3. HOW ABOUT DESCRIBING YOURSELF IN A RHYMING STANZA – WHAT WOULD THAT SOUND LIKE?**

What to do? Stay Green.  
Never mind the machine  
Whose fuel is human souls.  
Live large, man, and dream small.  
– R. S. Thomas

**4. WHEN DID YOU START WRITING?**

I started writing when I was about fifteen. They were silly, pretentious ballad-style poems about Irish mythical heroes, war, existential angst, and the destruction of the planet. Occasionally, I wrote Shakespearian sonnets to try to impress girls, but I was more of a nature worshipper then, lost in a private Celtic twilight peopled with Druids, goblins, demi-gods, and heroic warriors. The first time I felt I had gotten my feelings into words was back when I was about twenty; I wrote a poem for my father's father, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. It's not my best poem, but it was important to me because it was the first time I felt I had written a real poem, not just something that rhymed. It was a milestone on the road to finding my own voice.

**5. HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT? IS IT PURE INSPIRATION OR A CONSCIOUS DECISION?**

I tend to write out of my experience. I don't make things up or get too surreal. Even in my terza rima sonnets and cantos, in which I have 'dream encounters' (Seamus Heaney) with the shades of loved ones or historically important people, such as murdered Irish solicitor Patrick Finucane, I research my subject intensely, almost obsessively, before I begin writing. Most of the time writing is a hard slog for me; rarely does a poem just fall into my lap. I have to work hard at it, and I certainly don't believe everything I think or feel is poetry. I have come to the conclusion that if you find yourself thinking or talking a lot about a certain theme, then you should write about it. I don't think writers need to 'go looking' for material.

**6. DO YOU WRITE ANYTHING ELSE APART FROM POETRY AND SHORT PROSE? WHICH GENRE IS YOUR FAVOURITE AND WHY?**

Poetry is my favorite genre because so much can be said, half said, implied, or suggested in a poem or a song, but I am particularly interested in that liminal zone where poetry and prose meet – I love lucid journalism and travel writing.

**7. WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE TO WRITERS OR POETS EXPERIENCING WRITERS' BLOCK?**

I once asked the Irish writer Kildare Dobbs how to write a memoir, and he said, 'Just write it, and then go back and take out the shit.' (!) It's a wry comment, typical of Kildare, but it's true. Just write, and then go back and edit out what's not up to scratch.

**8. YOU ARE ALSO A TRANSLATOR. HOW MANY LANGUAGES DO YOU SPEAK? INTO HOW MANY LANGUAGES ARE YOU TRANSLATING WORKS?**

I studied Irish, French, and German at school in Ireland, but I can't really say that I speak those languages anymore, not having spoken them in years. I sort of fell into translation. Once I moved to Mexico and began to learn Spanish I discovered Jaime Sabines, one of the finest poets Mexico has produced.

When Veronica read me the opening lines of one of his prose poems one afternoon I felt a pleasing, visceral shock. ‘Who is this!’ I blurted. ‘And how come I haven’t heard of him?’

I bought two translations into English of selections of his poetry, one by W. S. Merwin and another by Philip Levine, and I quickly realized they were riddled with errors, misunderstandings, and excessive amounts of glib street English and idiomatic expressions. That was when I resolved to try to do justice to Sabines’s poetry. I have translated two individual volumes by Sabines to date – *Weekly Diary and Poems in Prose & Adam and Eve* (2004) and *Love Poems* (2011) – as selected by Mario Benedetti. I have also translated individual poems by Borges, Benedetti, and Roque Dalton of El Salvador.

**9. HAVE YOU EVER WRITTEN AN ORIGINAL PIECE IN ANY OTHER LANGUAGE?**

No, I have never tried. I tend to think in English, and I’m not sure how I would sound in another language. But I think I may do it, now that you put the thought in my head!

**10. IF YOU COULD HAVE WRITTEN ANY OTHER WORK BY ANY OTHER AUTHOR – WHICH ONE WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE WRITTEN?**

That is an interesting question. I am fascinated by Balkan writers, in particular writers from what was once known as Yugoslavia – Mehmed Selimović, Goran Simić, Semezdin Mehmedinović, and Danilo Kiš, among many others – but the book that I would have liked to have written is *Bridge over the Drina*, by Ivo Andrić.

**11. YOUR FAVOURITE POEM? YOUR FAVOURITE NOVEL? AND FAVOURITE PLAY?**

My favorite poem is ‘Long Distance II’ by Tony Harrison. Every time I read it I get a lump in my throat. My favorite novel is probably *Animal Farm*. (‘All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.’ Is there a better line in all of literature?) And my favorite play is *Macbeth*. Or *Happy Days*.

## **12. YOUR FAVOURITE WRITER?**

George Orwell, I think. But it could also be Joyce or Dostoevsky. Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott are my favorite poets. I think Kildare Dobbs is one of the finest essayists in the English language. In the category of travel writing, Graham Greene.

## **13. YOU HAVE MOVED AROUND A LOT – FROM CANADA TO IRELAND, BACK TO CANADA AND NOW TO MEXICO. WHICH OF THE COUNTRIES WOULD YOU SAY IS YOUR HOMELAND? WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST AT HOME?**

In my heart's deepest core, I'm Irish. Yet I was born in Toronto, and I have family and many dear friends all over Canada, so I am also Canadian. Despite that, I have lived in Mexico longer than I lived in either Ireland or Canada, and my wife and daughters are Mexican. Each of these countries has given me something that helped shape me and my outlook on life, and I am grateful to them all. However, I don't attribute undue importance to the concept of nationality, which Kildare Dobbs memorably described as 'a consoling fiction'.

## **14. YOU HAVE LIVED IN THREE COUNTRIES. HOW MANY HAVE YOU VISITED? AND, I BELIEVE, SLOVENIA IS ALSO ON THE LIST – WHEN DID YOU COME HERE, WHY, FOR HOW LONG AND HOW DID YOU LIKE IT?**

I have visited about twenty-five countries in Europe, North and Central America, and the Caribbean. Yes, Slovenia is on the list. While performing at the 2010 Sarajevo International Poetry Days festival, I met Marjan Strojan, a prominent Slovenian poet and translator, and president of PEN Slovenia. To my surprise, he translated five of my poems. A year or so later, I invited Marjan to participate in an international festival that I organized in Linares, and in 2012, he in turn invited me to participate in an international PEN gathering in Bled, where I reported on the murder of Mexican journalists by government-directed proxy death squads. I also read from my poetry. I was in Bled for about a week and the rest of the time I was in Ljubljana, Piran, and Škofja Loka. Everyone was so friendly and welcoming. I even got to meet the (then) president of Slovenia, Dr. Danilo Türk, at a reception event in Vila Bled, Tito's former summer residence. I had a wonderful experience in Slovenia. My one regret was not being able to spend a little more time. I plan to go back some day and do a walking tour of the country. That is a dream of mine. And perhaps do a few poetry readings while I am there as well.

## **15. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ABOUT SLOVENIA TO SOMEONE WHO HAS NEVER BEEN HERE?**

Everyone should visit Slovenia at least once in their lives. It's startlingly beautiful, water-rich, biologically diverse, crime rates are low, and it's one of the most heavily forested countries in Europe, if not the world. The people are welcoming and well-educated, English is widely spoken, and the weather is good. Everything is within close range: you could go hiking or water rafting in the mountains in the morning, and in the afternoon be sipping a beer in a bar on the beach in Piran, on the Slovenian Riviera. If I lived there, I might find a few things to complain about, but all things considered and factored in I imagine Slovenia is about as good as it gets. The literature is top notch. Then, there's the history and architecture – so much of it packed into a land mass the size of Wales. Many people swear that Paris is the most beautiful and most romantic city on earth, but I disagree: Ljubljana is for me. Bled is not like anywhere I have ever visited, Škofja Loka is a medieval dreamscape, and I remember, from atop a seawall in Piran, seeing the lights of Trieste burning in the distance, and feeling something akin to intense homesickness – though it wasn't home!

## **16. HERE'S A SHORT STORY ABOUT MR COLIN MEETING THE (THEN) PRESIDENT OF SLOVENIA, MR TÜRK.**

### **VILA BLED by Colin Carberry**

I was in Marshal Tito's Tearoom. A breeze with a hint of drying hay on its breath blew in from the Alps overlooking Lake Bled, stirred the bright white muslin curtains. Mozart mixed with a faint drizzling hiss issued from unseen speakers. Clad in Croatian marble, the walls exuded a cold, opulent luster. In a corner, on a heavy oak desk a bronze bust of Josip Broz, national liberation leader, gazed into the glorious, fading twilight.

Beneath reflected chandeliers, writers and PEN dignitaries lingered at tables laden with appetizers, fruits, and pastries, trading anecdotes and bon mots. At regular intervals, grave, inconspicuous waiters floated past, bearing trays of glistening red and white wines from Dalmatia, Istria, Mosel, Porto, and Mostar. Ostensibly unconcerned, plainclothes operatives did a passable job of effacing themselves into the background. As I reflected on the fact that other, less benign dictators, Suharto, Ceausescu, and Kim Il-Sung, too, stood here, admiring murals depicting snowy, blood-bespattered scenes of the heroic Yugoslav Anti-Fascist struggle, a tall, distinguished gent in a well-fitted grey suit and red silk tie to my left twigged to my presence. With grave courtesy, he extended his right hand, asked me my name, and welcomed me to his country.

Happy to have someone to exchange pleasantries with while I waited for my brother John to show up, I shook what I took to be a diplomat's hand:

'Colin. Poet and translator. Pleased to meet you,' I beamed. 'I was invited to deliver a report on the theme of *auto-censura* (that's Spanish for 'self-censorship', I added, helpfully), and the state-sponsored murder of Mexican journalists ... I am also doing a poetry reading tomorrow night, in Škofja Loka,' I went on, 'in an old mill that was turned into an art gallery, if you happen to be interested?'

'And what do you do?' I asked, satisfied he was suitably impressed.

And in carefully enunciated, unaccented English, he said:

'I am the president of Slovenia.'

#### **17. IN THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK, HOW DID/DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR FELLOW CITIZENS (CANADA, IRELAND)? DO YOU HAVE ANY RELATIVES IN OTHER PLACES?**

The pandemic in Ireland and Canada seems to be under control. Perhaps that is because these two countries have good health systems, the police are better paid and motivated, and broadly speaking their peoples respect the authorities and follow regulations and suggestions. All my immediate family are settled in the greater Toronto area, and they are all coping well. Same goes with all of my family members in Ireland, most of whom are concentrated around Lanesboro. I have an aunt in Texas, and some of my cousins live and work in Spain, western Canada, and Australia.

#### **18. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE ENTIRE COVID-19 SITUATION? IS IT AS SERIOUS AS SOME MAKE IT SEEM OR IS IT JUST A SCAM?**

I don't think it's a scam, but I don't think it's good to focus too much on it as it takes a toll on one's mental health. It seems we're all experts on this virus now – the volume of information out there is mindboggling. I'm not worrying as much as I did before, or at least my anxiety levels have dropped. I only go out when it's necessary and I wear a face mask, practice social distancing. I imagine we will find a cure eventually, and life will go on. I only hope that we will find a new way of living that reduces the damage to the planet. We need to crack down on corruption and on the wanton destruction of the environment by multinational corporations, oil companies, and the like.

## **19. HOW HAVE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR HOMELAND COPE WITH COVID-19?**

Well, here in Mexico maybe half the people stay at home, wear face masks, and practice social distancing, while others, the rebels and the conspiracy theorists, either dismiss the virus as an elaborate hoax, or they minimize the danger. But it isn't so simple, here, as the majority of Mexicans, maybe seventy or eighty million souls, have to make the choice between staying at home or working in order to feed their families and keep a roof over their heads.

Personally, I am enjoying spending all this time with the family, and I will miss them dearly when the world returns to normal. My daughters do schoolwork every day, they have karate classes three times a week (via Facebook), and they have a little pool in the garden, for when the weather is hot. They miss their friends and classmates, of course, but they are happy and healthy, and they have adjusted well to life under lockdown. I do a fair amount of reading and writing, we watch movies and documentaries together on Netflix, and I talk to my dad, who is apartment-bound in Toronto, at least once a day. Also, now that Bundesliga is back, after a two-month hiatus, I get to cheer on my beloved FC Bayern Munich again. Mia san Mia!

## **20. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE WORLD WILL BE? HOW CAN WE COPE WITH IT?**

In terms of the number of deaths, the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 was far worse than this one, and we got through it. This, too, must end someday. I worry most about the damage that is being done to economies worldwide. People are getting restless and if we begin to see shortages of food and medicine will this cause an upsurge in social unrest, looting, and armed confrontations? I'm not sure how long we can cope with it; I suspect many millions of people will be in poverty by the time this is all over – and, as always, there will be those who profit from that misery. At some level, I believe the planet itself needs a sustained break from our destructive activities. I hope we are wise enough to change course now. Otherwise, I fear we may commit auto-genocide.

**21. AS A POET AND WRITER, WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU CAN DO FOR PEOPLE DURING AND AFTER SUCH HARD TIMES?**

I believe the best way to change any country is through its education system – and, by extension, its political system. As an educator with an arts background and foreign experience I am in a position to influence my students in a positive way. Even in the little things – like when they ask me what Paris, Ljubljana, or London are like, I can tell them, as I have been there. This causes them to sit up and listen, and elicits a wide range of responses, which in turn improves their English. Generally, they come from relatively privileged backgrounds, and are likely to find themselves in leadership positions, and my hope is that they will be able to create a more just, less corrupt society one day.

I rarely discuss my own work, but they know I'm a writer and this gives me a bit more credibility when we discuss literature and the political ills in our society. Literature possesses the power to inspire and serves as a kind of skeleton key to unlock some of the mysteries of the human predicament. One of the books on the syllabus is *Animal Farm* – a classic study of linguistic/political manipulation and human corruption. I am also in a position to analyze and expose the evils in our society to my students without much fear of retribution. I wince when I hear some vain, sanctimonious writer in nice safe Toronto 'speaking truth to power' when journalists in Mexico and around the world are being tortured, assassinated, and disappear daily for doing just that. Would he be as brave if he lived in Syria or Tijuana?

I teach daily, via Zoom, and I find I am spending a large chunk of my time addressing the subject of COVID-19. This has the effect of allaying fears and anxieties concerning the future, so it is important to communicate openly. My hope is that when this pandemic is over we will adopt a greener, more humane outlook. We need to try to make politicians more responsive to ordinary citizens' needs and wishes, rather than operate almost exclusively in the interests of oil companies, arms manufacturers, and pharmaceutical companies. There is a huge disconnect between us and our leaders, and this needs to be remedied. I don't have the solution, but I support any plan that advances and enhances human rights and freedoms, while also providing for the basic needs of the earth's masses.

**Mr Colin, thank you. It has been a pleasure.**

# Notes of an Erasmus+ Intern

## A Viral Internship

by Urša Strle

Edited by: the very same Erasmus+ intern, with an emotional distance of a few weeks

**DISCLAIMER:** This text is loosely based on a true story. Events have been adapted for the purpose of this attempt at a literary product. Any similarities and connections with real people, institutions and internships are indirect and/or exaggerated.

### **DAY 1:**

It's day two already, if I'm being precise. It's half past midnight and I've only just arrived about an hour ago instead of in the evening. It was a long journey. I drove from my home to Ljubljana, from there to Salzburg, boarded a plane to Dublin, circled above the city for a while since we were unable to land due to storm Jorge, flew to Manchester instead, landed there, refuelled, waited for a long time, got back in the air, danced about in the wind a bit, had a bumpy landing in Dublin (yes, we clapped, you would too), waited a bit more, hopped on a bus and three hours later – voilà, Galway! I wanted to describe this trip in more detail, but I'm fit to drop right now, therefore this must suffice. Good night!

P.S.: Yaay, IRELAND!

## DAY 2:

My first day in Galway! I took things quite easy today. I bought some essentials, such as milk and coffee, prepared said coffee (Yikes, bad milk. Also, bad coffee.), found the shortest path to my receiving institution and went to the city centre. I checked out the Cathedral (of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St Nicholas . . . let's stick with the Galway Cathedral), the Eyre Square, the Lynch Memorial Window and the Spanish Arch. Then I walked on the lovely Salthill Promenade and went for a traditional dish of crispy potatoes and fresh cod, marinated in water and vinegar, powdered with freshly ground wholemeal flour and submerged in boiling butter until the crust turned golden and the saltiness of the fish blended perfectly with the butter's sweetness – best fish and chips I've had in a while. Later, I wanted to go to O'Connor's Famous Pub, where the video for "Galway Girl" had been shot, but it only opened in the evening, so I took my whiskey elsewhere. Hey, when in Ireland! Also, with the coronavirus floating about, one ought to disinfect on the inside as well as on the outside . . .

As the sun started to set, I went back to my home away from home for a quiet evening inside. I mean, I have three more months to experience the nightlife in Ireland!

## DAY 3:

I was caught in a storm today. My egg-yolk-yellow raincoat is worth every penny. If it were twenty centimetres longer it would have been too good to be true. I observed the dark clouds in the distance and couldn't decide whether to ignore them and go on with my plans, or to retreat to the house. I decided to stay outside. After all, if I hide from every shower in *Ireland* (!), I will be stuck inside all the time. Yeah, showers I don't mind. Ice pellets, on the other hand, sting like hell. I caught a bus (*notoriously* unpunctual, might I add) back to the house to get rid of the soaked clothes and immerse my cold limbs into tepid water, which felt hot against my numb thighs. Half an hour and a pair of dry jeans later, I

was good to go back out and brave the elements, though I didn't venture too far this time. Fool me once . . .

#### **DAY 4:**

Today was the first day of my internship. I thought I'd start the day with a big breakfast, so I went to a nearby café for the Full Irish Breakfast. Oh my. Scrambled eggs, sausages, baked beans, black pudding, bacon, grilled tomatoes, mushrooms, toast, butter and jam (though half of those things were not listed on the menu). I'm not a fan of mushrooms, so they gave me another sausage instead, for the total of *three* (3) sausages. For breakfast. For one person. Filled to the brim, I left the café. And half of the meal. You eat and you learn. I had a really good time at my place of work; everybody was very friendly and helpful! There was an awkward moment when I got to the institution and faced a locked door, with no way in and no contact other than an e-mail of a person who doesn't even work at that location. There *might* have been a bell next to the door. I *might* have completely overlooked it. It was later pointed out to me graciously. Never mind, it was a fantastic day!

#### **DAY 5:**

Dear diary, today I learnt that my colleagues for the next three months know of and have visited many a European country, including (in alphabetical order): Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Italy; Slovenia, however, was not really on their radar. Doesn't matter, it just means I got to be the first to tell them about it. I started by praising our nature and presenting our culture, but we ended up talking about health systems. Corona times require corona conversation topics. It was a sunny day, so my co-workers offered me to leave work a bit earlier and enjoy the sunshine as "you won't get a lot of that in Ireland." But I knew that Ireland is rainy. I knew there would be wind and grey skies, and I came prepared (remember the raincoat?). What took me by surprise,

though, is how you can get all four seasons not in one year or one day, but in a single hour. The speed with which the weather changes is just silly. I hate it. I also love it. It's complicated.

### **DAY 6:**

I got to see Will and Kate today! The Royal Highnesses were in town as part of their visit to the Republic of Ireland. I had no idea; I was told at my workplace (Co-worker: "Are you a fan of Will and Kate's?" Me: "Umm . . . well . . . not really." Co-worker: "They're in town, do you want to go see them?" Me: "Oh, yes, I'd love that!"). The streets in the centre were flooded with Gardaí and blocked with railings. I cautiously followed the people, found a spot where no one was in my personal space (COVID-19, it's on the news *all* the time, and the radio keeps rambling on about it. I kid you not, it's one talk show after another.) and waited. And waited. And got cold. And made a promise – if they don't arrive in fifteen minutes, I'm out. "They'll be here in twenty minutes or so," said a garda. And I made a promise – if they don't arrive in twenty-five minutes, I'm out. They arrived in twenty minutes. We clapped. They waved. Brilliant.

### **DAY 7:**

I'm doing laundry tomorrow, so I had to go buy a drying rack today. I went to a store near my workplace and was shocked at the sight. Dozens of people with trolleys overladen with canned food (people *love* their baked beans!), toast, milk and toilet paper. I've seen loads of memes about TP shortage, but I thought it's just some American joke we're too European to understand. Guess again. There wasn't a single packet of TP on the shelves. Not one. The feeling of apocalypse intensified. I left and went to another store, got the rack, proudly carried it through the city centre and thought I might give the bus a second chance. Not that it was too far to walk back to the house, but the wind had picked up again and the rack isn't exactly aerodynamic. So, I got on the bus on Eyre

Square and sadly stared out the window as we drove off in the wrong direction. I rang the STOP bell and nothing happened. I pushed the button again – nothing. The bus stops passed by and the driver kept on driving, while the passengers looked at each other funnily as their ringing went unheard as well. At that point I stood up to go speak with the driver, but thank god someone got there first and I didn't have to. Whew. "DID YOU RING THE BELL?" roared the driver. Yes, mate. We rang the #@\*%&! bell. I got home quite a bit later than I had hoped. Walking would have been much quicker, and this timeline includes chasing after the rack all over the beach after the wind would have ripped it from my arms. I'm getting waterproof trousers tomorrow and I'm walking *everywhere*.

### DAY 8:

One week in Ireland! Wow, that went fast! Except for today. Today just drags on. The plan for my laundry day, which I organised in advance, as the responsible adult I am supposed to be, was flawless. The realisation, however, less so. The laundry machine is constantly occupied, even though we made a *schedule* just *yesterday*! Ugh. On top of that, the weather is horrendous. I'm not going anywhere if it stays like this. I *could* go somewhere indoors, like the nearby cinema, but the entry is limited due to the coronavirus outbreak. Same with pubs, restaurants, museums, galleries. So, I'm not strongly inclined to go places in this weather. (NOTE: I'm not transcribing the rest of what I wrote down on this day. I was grumpy and no one wants to read more of that).

### End of the first instalment.





Musings, Debates,  
and Vocabulary Exercises

# THE "NORMAL" PART

# Active and passive complicity in “The Lottery” and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”

by Veronika Mikec

“Goodness restrained has never been a match for badness unrestrained,” writes Umair Haque, contributor to Medium, thereby claiming that being inactively involved in unjustifiable acts is still siding with the tormentor. This claim may be observed in “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (Ursula K. Le Guin) and “The Lottery” (Shirley Jackson), as the two stories show that neither passive nor active complicity is defensible in acts of injustice, as both give leverage to the oppressor.

The residents of Omelas all blatantly turn a blind eye to the injustices happening in their town; however, their acts of complicity are continually overlooked on account of their passivity. In “The Lottery,” on the other hand, inexcusable conduct is on the complete opposite side of the spectrum; the townspeople are all aware of the outcome of the lottery, but still choose to actively participate in it. It is only when Mr. Summers asks for help – “Some of you fellows want to give me a hand?” (Jackson 1) – that the people in the crowd hesitate. This reaction attests to their unwillingness to physically partake in the lottery; the participants realize the actions they have been condoning are immoral, whereas actually helping Mr. Summers would mean they are decidedly responsible for the consequences that will ensue.

What is more, the two approaches to complicity are explained by the reasons why each of the communities complied with the injustices in the first place. The characters in “The Lottery” appear quite orthodox as a society, wanting to keep the tradition of the annual lottery alive, despite not entirely knowing the history behind it: “Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual [. . .] they still remembered to use stones,” (Jackson 5). This mindless following of the crowd is a clear example of herd mentality, where individuals are influenced by one another; the entire town complies with the murders by actively participating in the lottery without giving the possibility of the aftermath any rational thought.

Meanwhile, the residents of the town of Omelas can be observed as selfish, as the predicament which they have come to terms with guarantees their happiness and ease. For them, the situation is convenient; they refuse to “throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of the happiness of one,” (Le Guin 7). Because of their complicit actions, or rather inactions, the people of Omelas are directly responsible for the torment of the child. Thus, the passive bystanders become active accomplices, again showing how even unconscious acts of complying with the oppressor cause dire consequences for those subject to unjust treatment.

Another argument in favor of equaling passive and active complicity lies in the guilt of those realizing their conniving actions. Not all responses to the sudden apprehension of the issue are the same, but accountability itself is equally present in both stories. In Jackson’s narrative, it is only when Tessie Hutchinson’s life is threatened that she speaks out against the lottery. Becoming aware of the complicity in her actions makes her as outspoken in her anger as she was in her humor. She dissents that Mr. Summers “didn’t give [her husband] time enough to choose” (Jackson 4). Moreover, it can be assumed she would not argue if someone else had been chosen, showing her hypocritical nature.

On the other hand, in Omelas, the immoral behavior is discerned sooner. While most citizens come to terms with the child’s suffering, some decide to leave in the hopes of their departure absolving them of the crime, perhaps even of guilt. It could be debated whether their decision equals others’ voluntary staying there. By walking away, they become accessories to the crime, proving yet again that complicity does not approve of nor differentiate between active or passive oppression.

Haque concludes: “A society doesn’t reach this point unless people are either complicit or cowardly, or perhaps both,” which is certainly the case in both narratives. By looking at the whole picture, we can surmise that through the portrayal of deindividuation, the short stories suggest the two groups of accomplices are equally responsible for the sufferings of the individual, despite the differences in how the people complied with the injustice – be it active or passive.

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# Edna Pontellier's emancipation to individuality and independence

by Veronika Mikec

Edna Pontellier was brought up in a male-dominated society, where her role as an individual was decided in advance. As a woman of the late nineteenth century, Edna is required to act according to a set of prescribed (though mostly unspoken) social rules, standards and expectations of the upper-class Victorian era. During the early stages of her marriage to Léonce Pontellier, Edna is “unaware that her oppression is founded on gender ideology [. . .] [which] works through the construction of female identity [and] defines women as weak, impotent and inferior to men” (Sittichane 2009, 43). She is subconsciously accustomed to living in a patriarchal society, where a woman is expected to view her family, i.e., her husband and children, as the primary focus and aspect of her life; this contributes to the justification of the domestication of women and prevents them from building careers other than motherhood. Because of this, Edna naturally assumes that she must live and die according to these rules, though she subconsciously does not necessarily follow them; already in the very beginning of the novel, the female protagonist does not act how one would expect an average Victorian wife and mother to behave, though she herself does not realise her actions are different from those of mother-women.

Because she was not entirely aware she had been feeling oppressed by the society's standards, Edna never outwardly expressed her own stance on marriage, motherhood and other Victorian expectations. That is until she meets Mademoiselle Reisz, a self-assertive woman who lives alone and relies on herself. Before meeting her, Edna might have been aware subconsciously of the society's conventions and rules but now she is slowly becoming consciously aware of her own desires, self-worth and the strains of the patriarchal society. She now “outwardly questions her existence within the system” (Sittichane 2009, 31) and refuses to take any steps back from freeing herself from the chains of conventions.

Even though the first stages of her awakening already show in her frequent meetings with Robert Lebrun, where she ignores social norms regarding marriage and fidelity, she unknowingly starts acting according to her own needs and desires, realising her happiness is her main priority. Soon she begins to notice she had been taking liberties she had never taken before. After refraining from the obligations and expectations afflicted onto her by the patriarchal standards, she notices her sudden fall on the social scale but does not try to uphold her previous status of an Angel in the House; furthermore, she refuses to follow the social construct which is today known as the cult of domesticity. Edna has no desire to go back to her old life because she feels her inner self is developing and thriving. She begins acting on her impulses and actively showing her inner emotions, expressing them in her everyday actions. She starts ignoring the social conventions and is now completely devoted to herself, her own needs and desires. She no longer contributes to the patriarchal ideals of marriage and what a woman is supposed or rather expected to be.

Collman (2016, 27) argues that Edna is not only fighting the patriarchal state of her marriage but also the social conventions and the general belief of women having little to no desire for a life beyond traditional marriage. This shows clearly in two aspects of Edna's life – marriage and motherhood. Despite respecting the intricate system of social rules and standards of a woman's behaviour, she does not show any genuine interest towards her husband and children.

After experiencing personal freedom, Edna begins seeing herself not as the wife of Mr Pontellier but as an individual: “In short, Mrs Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” (Chopin 1993, 13). This causes Edna's husband Léonce, whom she had married solely for the purpose of fulfilling her father's desires (yet another result of her patriarchal upbringing) and to meet the standards of society's expectations, to misinterpret the changes in his wife's behaviour. His misunderstandings are shown in his many comments directed towards his old friend and family physician, Doctor Mandelet: “She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women [. . .]” (Chopin 1993, 65). “She says a marriage is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth. Nice thing for a woman to say to her husband!” (Chopin 1993, 66).

In this section of the novel, Chopin explicitly addresses the rights of women for the first time. This blunt approach only emphasises Edna's sudden change in behaviour, which very much bewildered Léonce. As the mere idea of women's

rights was a relatively new, not widely acknowledged concept in the nineteenth century, the sole mention of their rights strengthens the notions that drove Edna into her emancipation. The changes in her attitude towards not only her husband but to her social obligations as well (i.e., abandoning the Tuesdays reserved for dinner parties and buying her own house), made Léonce consider the possibility of his wife being mentally ill, ignoring any other possible scenarios. Mr Pontellier perceives his wife's actions and change in attitude as mental issues and refuses to acknowledge Edna's lack of desire to please him and the society.

Edna thinks back to all the times when she was submissive and inferior to her husband as the result of the patriarchal society's expectations of marriage and the relationships between men and women in general. However, she now refuses to do as her husband wishes and resists his requests and desires, as they do not interest her.

From Léonce's second comment, we find out Edna believes that marriage is one of the main factors of female oppression. She accepted at a very young age that marriage would not bring her love and happiness, but rather stability, approval of the society and a chance to live a comfortable life, or, as Valkeakari (2003, 208) words it, “[h]er husband mainly signifies for her a safe haven, a harbor of financial security and a guarantee of respected social status.”

When denoting motherhood, Edna is not considered the perfect mother. At the time, motherhood was considered a sacrifice that gave meaning to a woman's life, however, Edna experiences it in a rather negative way, as a restriction of her own personal freedom. Chopin (1993, 18) writes: “She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. [. . .] Their absence was a sort of relief.” Even though Edna loves her children, she enjoys having time to herself, away from family obligations. Watching the mother-women prioritising their life around their husbands and children at Grand Isle fills her with pity – she is unable to comprehend their ability to see their role in the household as a privilege, despite having no actual freedom in society. When Edna buys a house only for her to live in, leaving the children with Léonce, she is doing so because she believes in her right to have her own independent life – she does not want the words “mother” or “wife” to determine her entire identity.

By taking a break from her social obligations, Edna finds satisfaction in things that do not include her family. She pursues her desire to paint, in which she does not strive for perfection; she is entirely happy with her small triumphs and accomplishments. Edna also begins to read and her choice of literature might indicate where she got her ideas of independence from; she begins reading the

works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who is well known for his essays on freedom and self-reliance.

Another huge step she takes to show her independence and liberation from the chains of patriarchy is buying a small rental house, where she is planning to move on her own. She makes all the arrangements by herself, without informing, let alone asking for permission or assistance of her husband. She has decided she will pay for the house out of her own pocket – with the money she wins in the horse races (which she recently started attending on her own) and by selling her paintings. Edna now feels completely self-sufficient and has no need for her husband's financial support, believing she is able to rely on herself: “I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence.’ [. . .] Conditions would some way adjust themselves, she felt; but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself” (Chopin 1993, 80).

After numerous triumphs and downfalls, Edna feels that only suicide would help her escape the patriarchal society, which she has both subconsciously and consciously been fighting against. She decides to revisit the sea, where she felt freedom, liberation and individuality all at once for the first time. She gives herself to the sea, leaving behind the issues and the oppression she had been facing for so long; she now finally feels at peace. This gives us a direct insight to the struggles of women from the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century, where the impossible and unachievable standards of the patriarchal society left a long-lasting imprint on the women's self-confidence, making them believe they were unable to provide for themselves and leaving them no other choice but to depend on the men in their lives. In this aspect, Edna was both brave and determined enough to let go of the conventional lifestyle, only to meet an untimely end.

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# George Lucas based the Galactic Empire on the United States of America: search your feelings, you know it to be true

by Veronika Mikec

With *The Rise of Skywalker* hitting the theaters last December, people once again began bringing up the political aspects and aspirations of the ever-so-famous *Star Wars* space opera. As Dyson points out, the films are “so culturally ubiquitous that no one interested in the relationship of popular culture to politics can afford to ignore it” (2019). He brings up a valid point, seeing how the *Star Wars* saga has always been very politically ambitious. George Lucas even tried rebuilding the frontier myth into a fantasy story they never realized was their reality by subconsciously entering the mind of his audience with a “consciously constructed escape” (McVeigh 2017). The duality of the saga is remarkable, reflecting America’s blatant disregard of the messages it is trying to convey – although based on real U.S. and European history, its social and political commentary, often discussed by both the left- and right-wing party supporters, does not distract the average moviegoer from the astounding cinematography and the action-packed duels between the Jedi and the Sith.

Despite Nazi Germany being most people’s first thought when discussing who or what inspired the ever-lasting franchise of the *Star Wars* films, the true force that impelled George Lucas to come up with a legendary story of good versus evil might be much closer to American history than initially thought. There are many reasons why people tend to overlook this fact, the main one being the inclination of U.S. citizens to identify with heroic protagonists. But before we delve deep into the real history that inspired the entirety of the prequel trilogy, it should be noted that it was, in fact, the fascist regime during World War II that Lucas kept in mind while writing and directing *Star Wars*. It also clearly influenced J. J. Abrams’s take on the sequels, seeing how some apparent Nazi-like memorabilia appears throughout *Episode VII: The Force Awakens*, which was released in 2015. “A thousand storm troopers raise their hands in a Nazi-like salute and shout something that sounds a lot like ‘Sieg Heil!’,” writes Dyson for *Politico* (2015).

The rally at which these words are spoken reminds one of Hitler's Nazi assemblies, and is used to both obliquely and directly portray the First Order as a totalitarian militaristic regime.

However, *Episode VII* has nothing on Lucas's *"Episode III: Revenge of the Sith"*, which Taylor describes as having "more political references than any other movie in the saga" (2015), and he does so for good reason. There are countless little allusions to be found in *"Episode III"* that indicate Lucas's primary inspiration for the films. Namely, his disapproval of America's involvement in the Vietnam war, in which the country sided with the French oppressors who occupied the colonized Vietnamese people, and his criticism of former U.S. President Richard M. Nixon.

But as it turns out, the 37th POTUS was not the only one that struck a nerve with the director. Another reason so many strong political analogies pervade *"Revenge of the Sith"* is because it was written at the time of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq (Hill 2014). Not only is this shown in the story itself, but also in the near-exact quotations taken from the then President George W. Bush's speech to Congress soon after the September 11 attacks, where he says, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." We hear echoes of this speech in *"Episode III"* when Anakin Skywalker utters a very similar line once he fully surrenders himself to the Dark Side: "If you're not with me, you're my enemy." Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin's master, then warns the padawan that "only a Sith deals in absolutes" (Lucas 2005). This last comment provoked conservative Bush supporters, who accused the director of "Bush-bashing" (Simon 2007), forcing George Lucas to publicly declare his disapproval of the president's politics, ultimately "comparing him to Nixon" (Taylor 2015). However, not many *Star Wars* fans picked up on this parallel, despite the film's being popular with the older generations as well. Funnily enough, this was apparently Lucas's aim all along – he purposefully took concepts from both the Vietnam War and Nixon and Bush's presidencies, and carried them over into what was to become *Star Wars*, as confirmed by his friend Walter Murch:

And he decided, all right, if it's politically too hot as a contemporary subject, I'll put the essence of the story in outer space and make it happen in a galaxy long ago and far away. The rebel group were the North Vietnamese, and the Empire was the United States. (Ondaatje 2004, 70)

Lucas explained his approach to creating the films by saying, "I was going to use and convert [the concepts] into space fantasy, so you'd have essentially a large technological empire going after a small group of freedom fighters" (Golding 2019), and even described the Empire as "America ten years from now" in 1973, notes Phipps (2014). From this statement it is clear that Lucas aimed to

recontextualize the Vietnam War in order to portray which of the combatants was to be criticized for their wrongdoings – in the case of this particular war, he felt the States were on the wrong side of history. For this reason, he repurposed the inspirations he had for *Apocalypse Now*, considering it too much of a controversy to put on film when the Vietnam War was still fresh in people’s minds.

All this imagery can be recontextualized once again, moving it from a fictional universe all the way back to reality. What is more, it fits nearly perfectly into what is today the political state of America – more than four decades after *A New Hope*, we can again find parallels between fiction and reality. When people are led by fear and act on impulse, their blind trust in the government is often taken advantage of by powerful politicians to advance their careers. Proclaiming national emergencies was the case with every single U.S. president, and it was the same tactic that brought Emperor Palpatine to power. Furthermore, *Star Wars*, in a sense, warns us of a democracy possibly becoming a dictatorship – it is, after all, a pattern present throughout history. (Consider some of the biggest dictators, for example – Hitler, Napoleon, and Caesar all rose to power in the same way Emperor Palpatine did – under the pretense of protecting the country against terrorism and by requesting emergency powers.) Is this what awaits America at the turn of the decade?

When it comes to fantasy and science fiction in film, Lucas sees the two as a way of talking about serious issues with an open mind – he comments on how the art of film is great for portraying certain problematics:

[Y]ou can take issues, pull them out of their cultural straitjackets, and talk about them without bringing in folk artefacts that make people get closed-minded. If you could look at these issues more open-mindedly [. . .], you could have a more interesting conversation [. . .]. [And I do that by] making the film “about” something other than what it’s really about. (Silberman 2005)

Despite placing the film into an alternate universe, he still refused to shy away from making blunt commentary on the real then-political situation, making sure to let his actors know who or what they were portraying in each scene. Ian McDiarmid, who played the part of the infamous Emperor Palpatine, recalls being approached by the director on set: “I remember when I sat there in the Evil Emperor’s swivel chair and George said things like ‘does it remind you of the Oval Office?’ And I realized that at that time Richard Nixon was in his mind” (Irvine 2005). Apparently, Lucas modeled Palpatine’s throne room after the actual Oval Office, as if to subconsciously invite comparisons between the Emperor and the president.

But despite the clear-cut parallels between the U.S. government and the Galactic Empire, both young and old generations of Americans still fail to see on whose side their country would be fighting in the *Star Wars* universe. “Like most young Americans then, I saw myself as a plucky rebel, a mixture of the free-wheeling, wisecracking Han Solo and the fresh-faced, idealistic Luke Skywalker,” writes Astore (2016), reminding us of America’s never-ending identification with heroic protagonists, such as Indiana Jones, Rocky Balboa, previous generations’ Princess Leia, and today’s generation’s Rey. What is it that inclines American people to identify so closely with the good guys? Whether it is the white savior narrative as thematized in the 1984 film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, or simply a child’s dream of becoming a superhero, the Hollywood film industry has always provided someone to look up to, as explained by Fraser: “The motion picture can be the most wonderful system for spreading national propaganda at little or no cost” (2003, as cited in Langley, 2011).

However, contrary to how most Hollywood films tend to “extol the virtues of the American way of life [. . .] and reinforce[] a positive national image” (Ibbi 2013), the *Star Wars* franchise somehow managed to set itself apart by painting the patriotic country as the villains. It seems as though Lucas wanted to recontextualize the issues he found with the States being involved in the Vietnam War, and show them in a new light; one that makes the audience realize that no matter how much Americans wish to call themselves rebels, the rest of the world doesn’t see them as such. Naturally, with *Star Wars* being written and directed by an American, the citizens of the United States have always had a hard time equating their beloved country with the Galactic Empire, stubbornly claiming that the founder of Lucasfilm was influenced only by the Nazi Third Reich. However, with Lucas revealing his main inspirations and the undeniable parallels between the films and real-life events, it is clear that in this scenario, those identifying with the oppressed are in fact the perpetrator.

What does all this tell us about American society and culture? Ibbi claims that “Hollywood movies are key cultural artefacts that offer a window into American cultural and social history” (2013). Can, then, there be truth found in fiction? Is *Star Wars* about more than just lightsaber duels? Are Lucas’s films illustrative of how dismissive Americans are of their country’s wrongdoings? Perhaps the space opera shows us the nation’s justification of their political leaders’ actions, or simply hints at the major ignorance of people. On the other hand, there might not be a grand lesson behind it – *Star Wars* may simply serve as evidence of consumer culture, which is in this particular case amplified by the nostalgia brought by the saga with the often-overlooked political subtexts.

*Star Wars* may take place in a galaxy far, far away, but its main mechanisms and the way it operates may be much closer to U.S. soil than the young American rebels ever imagined.

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# Most university degrees are theoretical and do not prepare students for the real world; they are, therefore, of very little value

by Veronika Mikec

“The degree tells others you have a strong foundation on which to build,” argues Steven Bradley (2012) in one of his blog posts. This statement alone can stand against the absurd claim that the majority of university diplomas are of little use. The intent of higher education is not only to prepare undergraduates for the so-called “real life.” But if its purpose is not to teach how to jump-start a car or sew a button, for example, then what is it? Surely there are other reasons why going to college is important?

The general belief is that the only value of a university degree lies in the fact that most companies would rather hire a candidate with a diploma. But why is it that they are less likely to employ someone without one? Quite possibly because a diploma serves as proof that you have learned about the trade, hold more extensive knowledge about the industry, and are certainly qualified for the position.

One of the reasons that contribute to this belief is that plenty of individuals tend to criticize the school system while overlooking many of its valuable aspects. Oral presentations, for instance, help gain confidence in speaking in front of a greater audience. Writing essays develops critical thinking and argumentative skills, while working in teams teaches organization, research, and work ethic. Not to mention that during your studies there is much less parental involvement; this gives the student no other choice but to think rationally and act as a mature adult responsible for his or her own spending habits, meals throughout the day, time management, and corresponding tasks.

Besides, people who decide to further their education *know* what college is about – I have yet to meet someone who expects to learn how to change a tire in their psychology class, or how to cook the perfect Sunday roast in Introduction to Chemistry. Have I met students complaining about having to study subjects that will never be of any use in their day-to-day life? Of course, but nearly all of those I

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met in elementary and high school; tertiary education is far more world oriented. Needless to say, I am speaking from experience – already in my first few months of attending university, I learned about institutional racism, historical background of the women’s suffrage, and became acquainted with politics. Similarly, taking part in the British Module taught me cultural appreciation of a country I might someday work in. Learning all of this made me aware of real-life issues that I never even noticed, let alone thought about before. It broadened my horizons and exposed me to hundreds of different world views.

Even though I might come off slightly biased, I genuinely believe our department in particular is very much focused on preparing its students for what lies ahead. This does not necessarily mean I will know how to fix a broken tile by the time I graduate, but I will develop better communication skills, learn how to think outside the box, how to balance my responsibilities, and so on. If nothing else, many of the courses I attend will prepare me for the job market. After all, I can always google how to replace a broken tile.

Now, could one argue that practical approaches hold more value in certain degrees? Without a doubt, especially when it comes to fields such as medicine, law, or chemical engineering. But no matter how accurate, this claim does not diminish the importance of theoretical foundations, which help a pupil grasp the philosophy behind certain concepts and understand the reasons why things are the way they are.

Steven Bradley (2012) concludes: “There is a theoretical side and a practical side to knowledge and both are valuable.” Consequently, whether the degree is practical or theoretical, neither is useless. If that were the case, people would have stopped attending college years ago; so, there must be some worth in the piece of paper you receive after finishing your studies.

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# O Shakespeare, Shakespeare, wherefore art thou Shakespeare?

by Kaja Peršolja

Are you tired of listening to the good old Bard of Avon, studying his works and analysing the stories? Can you simply not stand hearing the word 'Shakespeare' mentioned in any shape or form? Believe me, no one can blame you. Most of us have been receiving our yearly dosage of Shakespeare since primary school. Year after year, we listen to our teachers and professors talk about the same Shakespeare works, using the most common interpretations of the plot and characters. If we had a euro for every time we watched Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* or Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, we would probably have more 'monies' than Shylock and Portia (*The Merchant of Venice*) combined. Such amounts of Shakespeare can be hard to stomach even for those of us who consider ourselves Shakespeare enthusiasts. In this article, I would like to present a few interesting facts on grammar and semantics, which I've stumbled upon during my years of engaging in bardolatry (defined as 'idolatry or excessive admiration of William Shakespeare').

It's no secret that the English language changed over time. This is also the main reason we find Shakespeare's writing hard to understand and put the book down faster than Hamlet can say 'to be'. This begs the question, what about the pronunciation? In the words of Shakespeare himself: 'Ay, there's the rub!' Needless to say, there's no doubt the pronunciation was different. In fact, this is evident from his writing. Let's take the famous Sonnet 116 as an example. The last two lines of the sonnet read 'If this be error and upon me proved, / I never writ, nor no man ever loved.' In Present-Day English (PDE), rhyming 'proved' and 'loved' makes no sense whatsoever, but in Shakespeare's Early Modern English, they shared the same 'o' sound. Think about it for a second; this is just one example involving two words. What would happen if we were to apply the Early Modern English pronunciation to all of Shakespeare's works? Of course, this has already been done and the results were astonishing, to say the least. Among 154 of Shakespeare's

sonnets, 96 have rhymes that go completely unnoticed in PDE. When re-examining the entire canon, over 7,000 new rhymes were discovered, together with new assonances and alliterations.

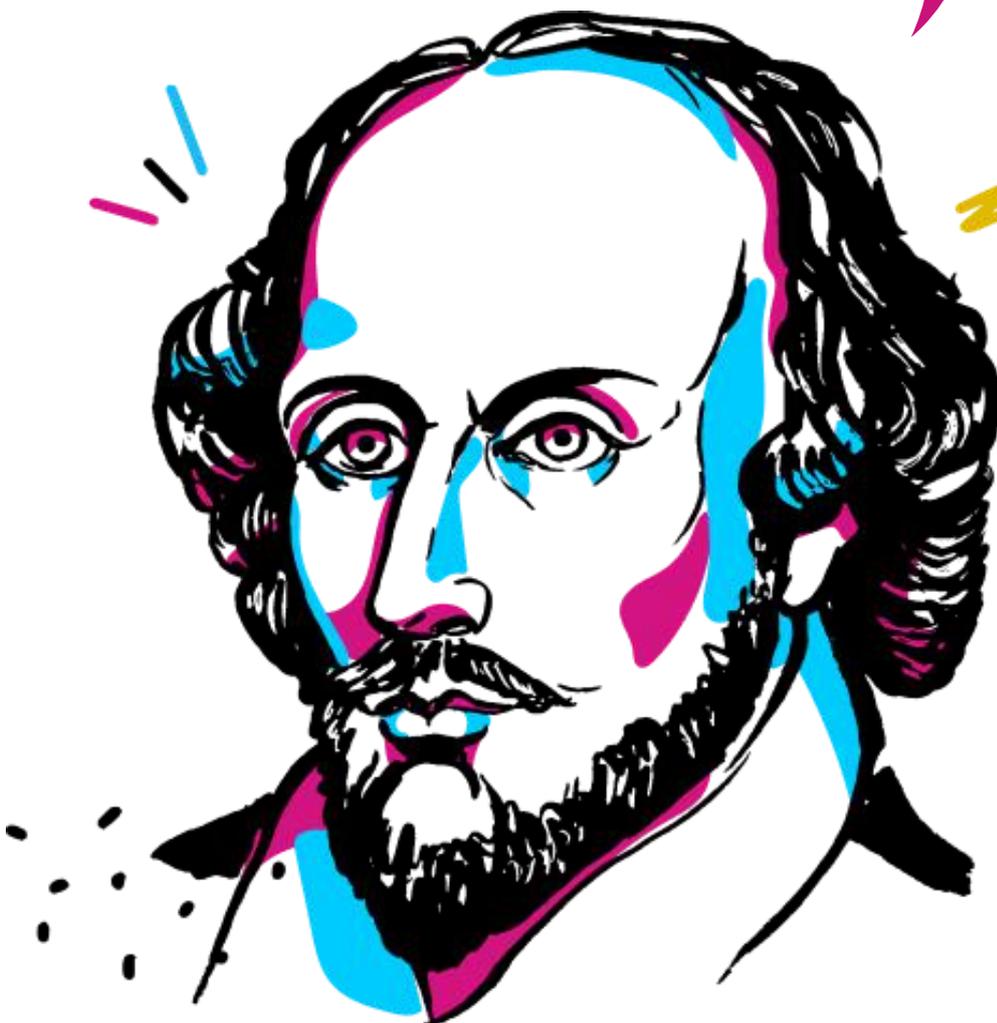
So, we've discovered new rhymes using different pronunciation, but what about new meanings? As those of us who have already learned about English historical grammar know, changes in a language often happen across the board. This way, the use of Original Pronunciation (OP) revealed several new meanings, most commonly in the form of puns. A wonderful example of this can be observed in this excerpt from *As You Like It*: 'And so from hour to hour we ripe and ripe, / And then from hour to hour we rot and rot, / And thereby hangs a tale.' The pronunciation of 'hour' would have been similar to today's pronunciation of 'oar'. In addition, 'hour' and the word (used only to illustrate my point) 'whore' were homophones (i.e., had the same pronunciation). The missing piece of the puzzle is the pronunciation of the word 'ripe', which sounded more like the PDE word 'rape'. If we put this dark joke in a historical context, we find that it's more or less a comment on certain habits and illnesses, possibly contracted as a result of the aforementioned habits.

You may be wondering whether the OP can be used in practice, and not just in theory. The answer is yes. British linguist David Crystal and his son, actor Ben Crystal, also known as the authors of *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion*, paved the way by staging Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in the Original Pronunciation at Shakespeare's Globe in London. Despite being difficult to understand at times, the shows sold out almost immediately every single time. Surprisingly, the OP version turned out to be ten minutes faster compared to the one in Received Pronunciation, proving that the OP does indeed have a different, faster rhythm. Since the first production in 2004, thirteen productions have been staged in the OP altogether. Unfortunately, no recordings were made of these productions, however, should you want a taste of the OP, a few examples can be found on YouTube, made by David and Ben Crystal, respectively.

As you can see, Shakespeare has many sides we often don't get to see or hear about in our classes. I hope this article sparks your interest and shows that even a topic we seemingly know so well can be explored further, revealing new and exciting details. From his lesser-known works, original stage practices and boy players (young male actors who used to portray women on stage), to modern productions, new studies of Shakespeare's canon, podcasts and videos; the options for exploration are endless. Remember this the next time you absolutely won't be able to avoid studying Shakespeare – countless fun facts that just might make your

studies a little less dull are merely a few clicks away. Now there's only one thing left to say: fare thee well and adieu!

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is so merit.





# **“A pop song is a condensed version of life in three minutes”**



**- Bruce Springsteen**

by Kaja Kacafura

Bruce Springsteen, an iconic American singer and songwriter, once said that “a pop song is a condensed version of life in three minutes.” As an eager listener and a big fan of pop songs and their artists, I can immediately think of a few songs that do exactly that – portray life in only three minutes, a period seemingly standard for pop songs. The three hits that first spring to mind are “Seven Years,” which tells a life story, “I Lived,” which paints an intense picture of a fulfilled life, and “Someone Like You,” which focuses on how the need and desire for love can shape one’s whole existence.

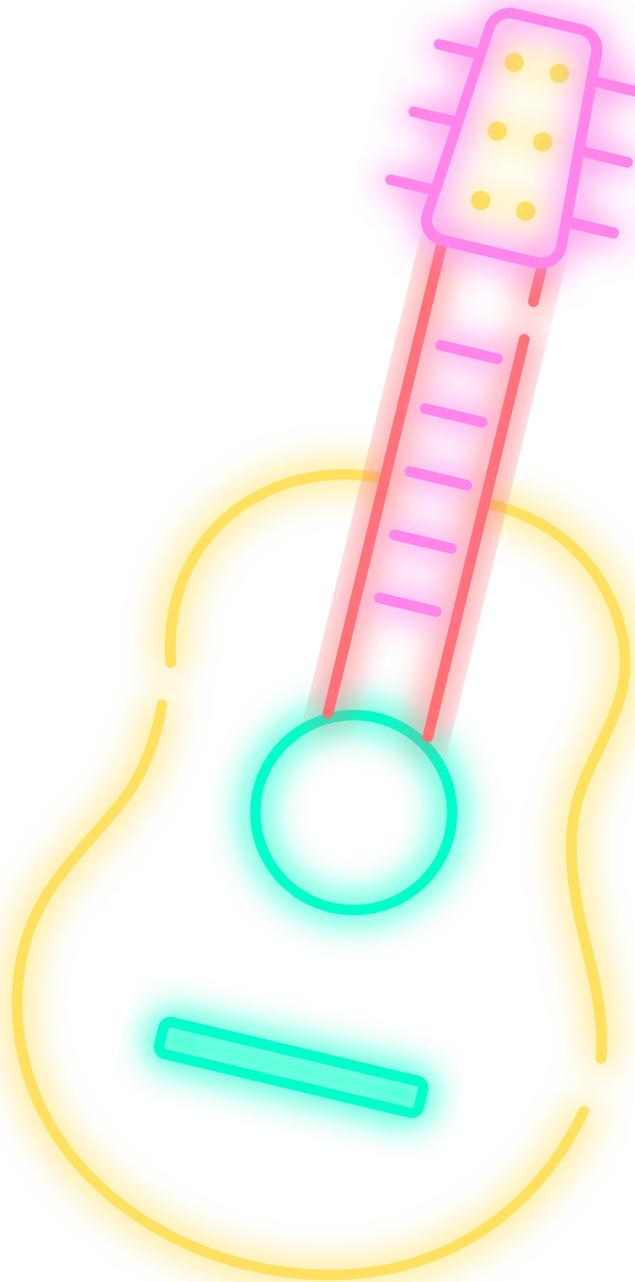
To begin with, in the song “Seven Years,” Lukas Graham narrates a life story from childhood to old age. The listener is taken on a journey, which is, in fact, the life of the artist. He begins by disclosing to the listener that he was a carefree, spirited, fearless child, full of life, hope and passion. He shows how fundamental youth is in life, since that is the time when we begin to form our identities and, with them, our lives. Then the author sings about how he eventually fulfilled his dreams of becoming a singer and a writer by keeping his focus on his goals, not worrying about failing. However, despite having such a remarkable life, he is still learning about it, which proves that the process of learning does not end when we finish school, but rather extends through our whole life. Lastly, the artist expresses the desire to remain cheerful and surrounded by loved ones in his old age, rather than becoming a bitter old man. He paints a vivid picture of the last stage of life, hoping to do what all people want – conclude life happy, surrounded by family and friends. At the very end of the song, he returns to the stage of childhood, emphasising that it is the best and the most important part of life, because our entire adult life depends on that carefree time when our personalities are formed.

Similarly, “I Lived” by One Republic tells a story of a fulfilled life. While the song “Seven Years” is essentially only a summary of a satisfying life, in “I Lived,” the performers also encourage the listener to live life to the fullest. They point out how important it is to be bold and courageous, in spite of the pain and the struggles you encounter every day. They summarise life in a few short yet powerful lines that tell us what it really means to live – to make the most of life, to take risks, to be audacious, not to fear failure or death, to dare, to take chances, to get out of your comfort zone and try new things, make new memories, no matter the consequences. If you want to feel the satisfaction everybody is searching for in life and have no regrets, you need to make use of every second that is given to you rather than take life for granted and live an ordinary, dull, dreary life. Even if this means you will get hurt, fail or suffer, it is better to live life to the maximum. After all, life is full of ups and downs and after a fall, it is up to us to pick ourselves up again and keep going. We also learn from our mistakes, so we should not be afraid of pain and failure, which are inevitable in life.

Lastly, in the song “Someone Like You,” Adele explains how the longing for one of the most profound emotions – love – can affect our lives. Adele sings of unrequited love, which causes her a lot of pain through all the years she keeps hanging on to it. She loves a man who does not reciprocate her feelings anymore and who therefore eventually moves on and creates a family without her. For years, however, she cannot let go of the devotion she feels for him, which shows the listener that sometimes love is very hard to leave behind. Although love hurts, she holds on to it, because of the fierce human desire to love and be loved. In this song, life is presented through love, the bottom line being the contradiction of (unreciprocated) feelings hurting us, yet us not wanting to let them go, because of our deep urge for them. This song illustrates what an important role love plays in our lives and what an enormous influence it has throughout it, even if the person we deeply care for is no longer part of it. Of course, love can be mutual, perfect and timeless, the kind of love we all yearn for, but we unfortunately often suffer because we are unable to find it.

To conclude, pop songs can illustrate life in many different ways. Some songs sum up life by narrating the story of one’s life, like Lukas Graham does in “Seven Years,” pointing out its most enjoyable and vital period – childhood. Other pop songs teach us that we should live full, adventurous lives with no regrets; “I Lived” by One Republic does so by depicting a truly fulfilled life. Furthermore, other performers focus on a particular aspect of life, like Adele in “Someone Like You,” which focuses on love, representing life through the sometimes hurtful but

everlasting human longing for love. All of these songs show that whichever element or way of life an artist sings about, a pop song is in its essence, like Bruce Springsteen said, a condensed version of life.



# WHY CHILDREN'S BOOKS SHOULD CONTAIN SHOCKING MATERIAL

BY KAJA RAKUŠČEK

Reading can be regarded as one of the first instances of children's exposure to art, which makes the choice of literature very important. The optimal books benefit imagination, teach moral lessons, and enrich a child's vocabulary. It is the plethora of literature that makes it hard for parents to choose the ideal book for their children. Children should not be wrapped in cotton wool and sheltered from reality; they must be faced with shocking and frightening material, which opens up the question what classifies as such. Literature of this type commonly contains problematic material, which is an umbrella term for topics such as violence, neglect, mental illness, substance abuse, and loss. These themes might seem difficult for a child to contemplate, but being familiar with them early on proves to be beneficial, especially if parents explain the more demanding topics. Therefore, I believe that children's books should contain shocking and frightening material.

Books have a great didactic value in teaching young ones what the problematic side of humanity looks like. When a child familiarizes themselves with a certain problematic situation through literature, they are more likely to recognize it in their own lives and know how to cope with the conflict. Shocking and appalling situations (such as violence carried out by the protagonist and substance abuse) in books should be presented as something wrong that has unpleasant consequences, thus offering a conclusion that contains moral lessons and promotes respectable social values. This prevents children from seeing violence as a solution to real-life problems, for instance. Hiding the reality of the state of affairs could restrain them from thinking about difficult themes, which does more harm than good since they will encounter such situations sooner or later. A child may identify their own problem with

those addressed within the book's pages, which allows them to confront their anxiety and understand their feelings as well as learn that their emotions can be positively modified. A crucial element in selecting the appropriate material is that the chosen book clearly defines evil characters that commit vicious acts in opposition to good ones. By being exposed to likeable characters that promote the right values, a child is more likely to imitate such principles in real life.

There is no denying that some children are more emphatic and soft-hearted than others, and their ability to handle shocking literature emotionally should be taken into consideration. Parents of such children should be mindful of what they are exposing their young ones to. Sensitive children should be acquainted with frightening elements in books more carefully. It is of tremendous importance that the problematic parts of the book are discussed to ensure that the material is understood correctly. If such difficult sections are not addressed thoroughly and in the right manner, a child might have an incorrect interpretation and consequently be disturbed and upset. Furthermore, no child should be prohibited from taking an interest in problematic themes. The latter intrigue many and restriction enforces their stigmatized value, making them even more attractive for curious children to pursue. Instead, such themes should be acknowledged and a child should not be shielded from reality. This ties back to choosing books in which the problematic material can be used as a starting point for discussion.

Relevant malevolent parts of humanity should be discussed through literature and in conversation. By familiarizing a child with such themes through literature, we can greatly diminish the shock value when similar situations are encountered in due course. Children must be aware of the good and bad reality, and literature is a beautiful tool that enables them to be well equipped to understand both sides of the same coin. I believe that books should contain problematic themes, but only if these matters are adequately explained, put into context, and approached in the right manner.



# JUDY: A FILM REVIEW

BY KAJA KACAFURA

In contrast to what people often see in celebrities – perfection – the biography of one of America’s best-known actresses and singers of the 20th century, Judy Garland, portrays her in a very realistic and authentic way. Through thought-provoking ideas, this film explores the real-life struggles and pain that lie behind the singer’s perfect façade and her cheerful smile. In this way, the viewer realises she’s not the perfect, ideal beauty she seems to be, but rather a scarred and broken human being with problems and traumas.

Taking place in London, in 1968, roughly a year before Judy’s untimely death at the age of forty-seven, the drama centres on a difficult time in her life, when she was away from her children. Due to her desperate financial situation, the star is forced to leave America and her children, and go to London to perform in a series of sold-out shows. Throughout the film, she struggles with the idea of being away from her son and daughter, however, she realises it is a necessity if she wants to be able to provide them with stability, safety and a home. While trying to be a good mother, she ignores her own problems – an addiction to pills as well as being underweight, among others – and does not take them seriously. Despite being scarred herself, all she wants is for her children to be happy and safe, making the viewer recognise that even though she may not be the mother of the year, she certainly tries to be a good one.

While Judy’s struggle to be with her children is in the foreground, the film also subtly explores the distressing theme of child abuse in the film industry in the last century. It delves into the pain and emotional scars that Judy hides and which stem from her adolescence. Through a few scenes of her teenage years, which are scattered throughout the film, the viewer comprehends why Judy is traumatised. In those very insightful scenes, Judy is shown as an innocent teenager preparing for a role in a famous musical, *The Wizard of Oz*. For her to look her best for the part, the producers force her to take sleeping pills and pills against weight gain as well as forbid her from eating. In her adult years, this develops into a subtle pill addiction, insomnia and a mild case of anorexia, all of

which cause her a lot of suffering. Even though she tries to hide these issues and scars behind her light-hearted persona, it is obvious to the viewer that their impact on her is bigger than she is willing to admit. In this way, the film does a great job of showing the sad reality of how profit and money in the film industry are, or at least were, more important than the well-being and the mental health of the actors and actresses, leaving them with traumas reaching far into their adulthood.

Both the love for Judy's children and her haunting past are shown in a scene where she talks to her ex-husband about where their children should stay. Due to her tremendous love for her children, she at first refuses to let them go and stay with their father, which just reinforces the viewer's already established firm belief in her endless love for her son and daughter. Only after talking to her daughter over the phone and hearing directly from her that they want to stay with their father does she let them go, proving she just wants to make them happy. Moreover, even though Judy wishes her children were with her in London, she states that she does not want them near the horrible, degrading film industry. Finally, her decision makes the viewer see that she may, after all, be aware of the damage it has done to her and the toll it has taken on her life.

The complex character of Judy Garland is brought to life by the talented actress Renee Zellweger, who does an amazing job at capturing the diva's emotional and personal battles as well as her spirit. Zellweger portrays her in such a real, raw way that the viewer forgets they are watching an actress in action, but rather has a feeling they are seeing the real Judy in the flesh.

All in all, the biography with Zellweger as its leading actress does an excellent job of portraying the world-renowned Judy Garland and the lifelike, authentic strife that hides behind her omnipresent smile. It makes the viewer accept the icon as merely a simple human being with issues and flaws, instead of a miracle worker or a paragon. It is, at the end of the day, food for thought for all those who wish to penetrate the surface and take a realistic, profound look at the life of an iconic celebrity.



# A REVIEW: THE LIGHTHOUSE (2019)

BY KAJA RAKUŠČEK

The foghorn sounds, seagulls shriek and the waves pound against the ship's bow — Robert Eggers's black-and-white second feature slowly drives you into sensory overload side by side with the two main characters. An old sea dog, Thomas Wake (portrayed by Willem Dafoe), and a young wickie, Ephraim Winslow (portrayed by Robert Pattinson), guide their ship towards a light, which slowly takes the shape of a lighthouse they will be tending for four weeks. This film explores the human experience of solitude and what happens to the human soul when it is exposed to excessive isolation.

Dafoe and Pattinson manage to capture the essence of insanity, and the visible chemistry between the characters exudes the horror of being trapped with a person that you, to say the least, are not fond of. They are forced to struggle in disturbing proximity, but instead of finding comfort in each other, tangible tension only escalates and the viewer is left on the edge of their seat, waiting for one of them to finally snap to resolve the tension. The relationship between Wake and Winslow stands on shaky ground from the beginning, and it slowly starts to collapse. The initial master-servant relationship slowly escalates into a power play between the characters. The storm and the sea's unrest seem to match the characters' growing internal struggle — the more the veil lifts, the more lies get revealed. The questions of how long one can keep a secret before going mad and what happens when you finally do are answered, but the answer is not soothing.

The symbolism is effectively used in the exploration of the behaviour of the human soul and its changes during solitude. One of the main symbols is the light, which also causes the characters' downfall. It ties to the idea of a saviour and is treated as a human entity since it is referred to as 'she'. Apart from the light, other symbols can be observed as references and parallels to Greek mythology. Winslow represents Prometheus who tries to defy a symbolical

representation of Proteus that is embodied in Wake, and pays dearly for it. Among many parallels that connect Winslow with Prometheus, one, in particular, stands out – Winslow meets his demise in a similar fashion as the Greek hero, but a slight variation is made in order to fit the film’s imagery.

What Eggers did is raise a horror movie to an art form. This piece of cinema is extremely intense, even nauseating at times, but the end still manages to feel cathartic, despite being neither moral nor happy. The viewers are captivated and struggle to process everything that is happening on the screen, and yet cannot keep their eyes off of it. The film can be understood as a complex system of allegories or simply as a story of two hallucinating men going insane on a solitary island. The myriad of potential interpretations shows how multi-layered this film is. This ambiguity allows this film to be interpreted in various ways, giving it an almost poetic depth.



# PERSON TO PERSON (TO PERSON... TO PERSON... TO YET ANOTHER PERSON)

BY VERONIKA MIKEC

If one had to further classify Dustin Guy Defa's 2017 indie drama, it would definitely fall into the category of those movies that value the journey more than the destination – unfortunately for everyone involved in the making of this motion picture, the destination is never actually reached and leaves the viewer with a lingering feeling of incompleteness. *Person to Person* introduces an ensemble of whiny and neurotic New Yorkers, whose insignificant life events create a very anticlimactic denouement. Defa's production does not reach the potential most Sundance films normally do, which was expected, to say the least. Fifteen minutes in, already more than ten characters are introduced, whose stories start merging together without any further development.

While this is exactly what a portmanteau film does, it was (in this particular case) executed very poorly. This leaves us with a collection of uneventful bits and pieces of unrelatable characters' lives: Phil and his intern Claire are investigating a murder mystery, collector Bene is insistent on hunting down a scammer who sold him a fake record, Ray is dealing with depression that resulted from a recent breakup, and young teen Wendy is pressured by her friend to explore her sexuality. What is missing in this anthology film is the theme that would tie these random stories together – the only link being characters living in New York City is a rather weak connection to make.

Furthermore, with the elements of New York City, the retro ambiance and barely any development of the stories, *Person to Person* comes across as a very amateur take on a classic Allenesque film. At some points in the movie, the viewers might even come to the conclusion that the execution is bad not by accident but on purpose; this thought crossed my mind during the bike chase scene, which was reminiscent of the cartoons I used to watch as a child.

Additionally, the film itself is not intellectually stimulating, though Defa's vision might have had some potential. In retrospect, the premise would perhaps work much better as a mini-series, where the director would find the opportunity to explore the characters and develop them further.

This brings me to my final point: the badly written characters. These become the biggest fault of the movie as soon as they are brought to life by the cast, which introduces a variety of lesser-known actors. Whether they are good, we do not know, for they are given no opportunity to show their acting range since the characters they are portraying seriously lack depth. On the other hand, Michael Cera is once again stuck playing the cliché, socially awkward and timid character he has been known to portray in most films. As a result, he does not bring anything new to the table, let alone enhance the cast or the storyline.

We do have to hand it to Defa, though – as monotonous as the story was, it portrayed real life, which is, admittedly, boring most days, even in cities as big and sleepless as New York.

However, people watch movies to escape their mundane lives. Taking this into consideration, the Big Apple has truly never looked so small and uninteresting, despite the film picturing a variety of different stories. Therefore, if you prefer not wasting your time, but are still curious about what makes this feature so disappointing, I recommend you watch the two-minute trailer, which will most likely encapsulate the story better than the film itself.

# JOJO RABBIT, AN ALTERNATE ENDING

BY ANDREJ NOVINEC

Jojo ran. After hearing the firing squad unload their guns at the lot, including Captain Klenzendorf, he zigzagged across the street, lost in his thoughts, tears filling his eyes. After all this time, Captain was a good person, like his mother. Jojo recalled what Elsa had told him, about her mistaking his sister's birthday date when the Gestapo came to search the house. It was Captain Klenzendorf who checked the passport, and it was him who didn't react in the slightest, although certainly realising the slip she had made. He had saved her life then, and he saved Jojo's life now – at the cost of his own.

“Elsa!” he exclaimed, half aloud, half to himself. As if he realised she was still in danger. He wondered how she must be feeling, not knowing the Allies had won. Jojo sprinted home, barging through the green door of his mother's house, nearly throwing it off the hinges. The house was full of light, as if the victory had miraculously cleared the grey, cloudy sky. But he didn't notice the vibrant colours of the tapestry, the green couch and the creamy china in the kitchen cupboard, surprisingly still intact. He ran up the stairs, jumping two or three stairs at a time. His heart was pounding, his pupils dilated in expectation of seeing the one person he had left; the one person he still cared about (alright, beside Yorki, but that was different). Jojo opened the door of his sister's room, illuminated by a ray of light penetrating through the roof window.

“Elsa! Elsa! We won. It's over. You can come out; you are free now. No more hiding!” he cried, expecting Elsa to come bashing through the secret, hidden door with excitement and joy, unfathomable to anyone else. But she never did.

Everything was silent, as though no one were crouching in the secret compartment behind the fake wall. “Elsa, you don't have to be afraid anymore. The Americans have freed the town. Come out.”

Still nothing. He dropped down to his knees and began looking for the hidden slit which marked the door to Elsa's hideout. He opened it and was welcomed by tiny rays of light protruding through the holes in the slanted wood on the inside of the roof. Elsa's room, if you could describe it that way, was bright, the dusty particles visible in the damp air. But there was no sign of Elsa anywhere. No one came to greet him, hug him and hold him tightly.

The euphoria Jojo had been feeling slowly began to wear off. He could feel his heartbeat again. And then he realised it. There was no window on the roof; no light should come to Elsa's room. That's why she had used candles and an old lightbulb for reading. His body shook. The little holes through which the sunlight was entering were bullet holes. And the entire wall was full of them. Like tiny cat's eyes staring in the darkness. And darkness was beginning to set in Jojo's heart. He crawled towards the end of the hidden room, an eerie sense rising in his stomach.

Something sticky touched his fingers. Jojo stopped, turned toward one of the holes and drew the wet finger near his eyes. He began gasping for air, and the beating of his heart picked up again. A cold shudder shook his body as he realised the thick thing on his fingers was dark red. It was blood. He felt all his life leave his body, as if someone had punched him in his stomach with the power of a German tank.

Then he spotted her.

Curled up in the darkest corner of her hideout, motionless, with her messy hair all over her shoulders and back. He leaped to her, scraping his knees, and hugged her. She lay there, still as a rock, but the warmth had not left her body yet. He turned her on her back and noticed dark, wet spots all over her body. Her green flowery dress was covered with dark purple stains, her soft coat sticky and her beige pants were drenched with blood. She had stood no chance. She had no clue. A rattling gun had shot through the wall, through her. At least Elsa's eyes were closed, and she looked peaceful. Jojo wondered what she had been thinking about when life was leaving her. Did she think about him? Did she think about freedom, about how she would go to Paris and live there? It didn't matter now.

Jojo wept. He curled his tiny body next to her, and he cried, tears trickling down his cheeks. He was afraid – like a rabbit.

# THE LAST SPARK

...the future was unclear. I  
signs of the island being brought back to life any

BY ZALA JAMBROVIČ HATIČ

The western horizon was ablaze with countless narrow pillars of light shooting skywards.

I turned my back to the window and the distant city skyline, struggling to pull the zipper of the over-stuffed bag closed. The unnatural blaze had burned downtown for almost half an hour. Breaking news inundated every single TV channel I'd switched to twenty-five minutes ago. The newspapers' websites had crashed with the number of panicked visitors looking for reassurance. It had taken me fifteen minutes to wrap my head around the reports and then something inside me clicked, shoving me into survival mode. By that time, the first of the screams had started outside.

Giving up on the zipper, I chucked the open bag over my shoulder, cursing myself for having taken so long to pack, and hurried downstairs.

"Dylan!" I barked in a half-whisper, careful to keep my steps soft. "Dylan, come on, we have to go!"

I found him staring at the colourful map on the wall of the living room, his blond curls sticking out every which way. I tried to remember if I'd made him comb his hair in the morning. A marker-stained finger pointed at one of the numerous tiny black dots we'd drawn on the map over the years. "Why don't we go there?"

"We can't, love," I moaned, painfully aware of every scream outside, every second that trickled past. The loud crashing sounds of cars running into things and alarms going off made my pulse rise. Our window of opportunity was closing rapidly. "We have to go south, to Gran's place. It's remote; it might still be safe."

His blond brows were furrowed over the deep blue eyes and his lips pursed when he turned to face me, but neither of those things made me smother a curse. The giant lizard pressed to my son's chest turned its scaled head to fix a

russet eye on me.

“Dylan—”

“We can’t leave Bibi, Mom! I won’t leave her!” the boy screamed, his piercing voice too loud, too shrill, too audible. Skinny hands hugged the lizard closer to him, making Bibi twitch with discomfort.

“Okay, okay!” I raised my hands, showing him my palms. We didn’t have time for this. “Okay, sweetie, we’ll take Bibi with us, but we have to go. Right now!”

He hesitated, deciding whether or not to believe me, then nodded before pressing a soft kiss to the animal’s bright green head. His sneakers scuffed the floor as he shuffled to me, his jumper hanging awkwardly on his spindly frame, hands wrapped around the lizard as if he were cradling a child. I ushered him toward the back entrance of the house, praying the noise from the street had covered up his outburst. To my utter horror, I realised things had already begun to quiet down outside.

There wasn’t much the media outlets agreed on, but the one thing they all claimed was that noise caused the ripples, glitches, fissures, whatever they were. I had no idea if that was true – after all, the fact that all those reporters couldn’t even reach a unanimous decision about what to call these freak occurrences didn’t exactly speak in favour of their reliability – but I didn’t have a death wish, so I decided to leave the experimenting to others and keep quiet, just in case.

Sending a prayer to whatever god might have been listening, I gently pressed down the door handle. The hinges tended to squeak, but I managed to open the door carefully enough for us to creep outside in complete silence. I left the door open. Shutting it might have made a sound and there was no point in protecting the house anymore.

I grabbed Dylan by the hand, leaving him only his left arm to hug the lizard, and led him around the house on tiptoe. A fresh layer of frost covered the grass, the tiny crystals glinting softly in the distant orange light that had turned evening into infernal day.

We rounded the corner, slowly making our way to the street. A hedge of broad cypress trees blocked our view of the sidewalk, and it wasn’t until we passed through the narrow opening in the green wall that I spotted them.

Faint ripples blinked into existence here and there along the street, disturbing the smooth air for a fraction of a second before vanishing and

reappearing elsewhere. The street was empty, the only sounds coming from the billowing smoke rising from an overturned car some distance away and an alarm blaring in one of the nearby homes. Where was everyone?

The alarm went quiet, plunging the street into eerie silence. I waited, watching the ripples, waiting for them to disappear. They kept blinking in and out, in and out, the air undulating in a lethal yet oddly mesmerising way. I bit my tongue to keep from crying out. The news channels had said that noise caused the ripples, but there was no noise here anymore. Why hadn't they gone away? How would we get past them? It seemed like I was going to be the lab rat after all.

Dylan moved to peek from behind me and my hand shot out, clasping over his mouth and choking off whatever sound he might have made. He went completely still, eyes growing large as he took in the ripples in the firmament around us. Bibi flicked out her tongue, unimpressed.

There were so many. I hadn't thought there would be *so many*.

A gentle tug on my hand made me look down at Dylan, and he nodded at something down the street. A figure I had overlooked before was hobbling away in the distance. The hunched posture immediately betrayed Mr Pontello, the old gentleman that lived in the house next to the Turners. Bent over his walking stick, he moved with obvious difficulty. The ripples blinked in and out of existence around him, but they didn't touch him.

Ignoring the lump in my throat, I hurried after the old man, dragging Dylan with me. My grip on his hand was too strong, but I couldn't make my fingers relax. I couldn't risk losing him.

When we caught up with Mr Pontello, I slowed down, staying behind him. I was afraid to get too close. He was mostly deaf and his vision had deteriorated considerably in the past few years. If I surprised him and he made a noise . . .

Soon, however, it became clear that we were moving far too slowly. Dylan and I would make much better time if we weren't plodding along after the old man. I hated the thought of leaving him to fare for himself, but Dylan was my first priority. I had to get him to safety as soon as possible, and Mr Pontello would slow us down. Careful to avoid the ripples in the air, I quickened my pace and prayed the old man wouldn't notice us as we overcame him, keeping to the opposite side of the road.

Once we were well past him, I released the breath I'd been holding, desperately shovelling excuses down the gaping throat of the guilt rising within me.

And then it happened. He must have looked up, or maybe it wasn't even intentional, but a gasp escaped Mr Pontello, unnaturally loud in the surrounding silence. I froze, unable to keep from glancing back as the ripples close by swarmed him, all of them racing in his direction. As soon as the first one touched him, light ignited in his gentle brown eyes and flames consumed him from within, incandescence shooting upwards in a blinding pillar of white.

The glitches dispersed, one more to their number. I stared, tears running down my cheeks, my son's sweaty fingers clutching my hand.

Noise caused the ripples.

They were right. They'd just left out the how. I glanced around, taking in the countless glitches blinking around us. The realisation sent cold shivers down my spine. I had thought the street was deserted, that people had left. I'd been wrong.

No one had escaped. The street was full of people.

# IT TAKES A VILLAGE

BY HELENA FLAVIJA

“The rules of necromancy are quite simple, really,” the traveller explains, sitting in a dark cloak that hides most of their body, hides it so that anyone could be underneath it. A bright fire is crackling in the fireplace, and yet they sit, clutching their robe even more tightly. “A life for a life. Death doesn’t fuss too much about who it takes, as long as there’s a grave at the end of the day and enough life dust in its hands to keep it from starving.” Their voice is muffled by the scarf covering most of their face. For a second, I glimpse their eyes and think of a dead man. I shudder.

“You look afraid,” the traveller remarks. Not with sympathy, or pity, or . . . anything, really. It’s just a remark. “There’s no need for that, dear. Death isn’t all that bad, you’ll see. Dull as company, but it never cheats at cards.”

“You know Death?” I have to ask.

“We’ve known each other for a while now, Death and I,” they say, the slightest hint of a smile creeping into their voice. “It didn’t use to like me much, back when I first started, but I always bring it some spare bones and a cup of tea, which it seems to appreciate.” Their smile fades. “I am a bit worried about our next meeting, though.” The flames in the fireplace shoot a little higher, a little brighter, and yet the room somehow feels colder. “It will be pricey, to say the least,” the traveller says pensively, not looking at me. “And Death knows it can ask for just about anything in return. It knows how important this one is to me.”

“Why?” I half-whisper, half-ask.

“Why is it so important? That’s a long story, I’m afraid, and I don’t want to bore you. You’ve been so kind to me. Let’s just say I’ve lost someone terribly dear

to me. Someone I would very much like to get back.”

They grow quiet now, and in their silence I take in the unusual hush of the house. The usual hubbub of the children running around, crashing into furniture and each other, has died down. The kitchen is still in the absence of running water and dishes clinking away in the washing. Even the dog seems to have stopped chasing its own tail and gone to bed. It is rather late, I suppose. Perhaps the storm has tired them out.

“I’m so sorry to ask,” the traveller speaks again, “but could I possibly have some more soup? I’ve never eaten anything so delicious in my life.”

I smile and nod politely, take the bowl and go off on a quest to find more soup. There really is no one, is there? The children must be in their rooms, the maids are nowhere to be seen and even the gardener, who can usually be found in his armchair reading, isn’t there. I don’t call out for him. I don’t call out to anyone. I startle when I hear my own breath, just a little too loud, and hurry back upstairs, a bowl of soup in my hands.

Back in the fire-lit room, I peek through the windows onto the empty street below, slick and dark with rain. The traveller smiles happily and takes the bowl.

“This calls for a toast,” they say and point at my cup, the beverage half-drunk already. “To your generosity.”

“Thank you,” I say, “but really, I shouldn’t...”

“Come on,” they say and suddenly their eyes seem very cold. “Just a sip. It won’t hurt, promise.”

I don’t think I could have made it very far even if I had decided to bolt.

I clink my cup against their glass.

“To me,” I say, “and to life.”

Their sleeve moves up their arm a little bit, exposing a smudge of something dark I hadn’t noticed before.

“Yes,” they agree, “to life and to Death, the old bastard.”

I hesitate, still, with the cup in my hand. It’s so cold in here. The flames in the fireplace dance wildly, casting strange shadows across the walls and the furniture.

“You really should drink it,” says the traveller, and for the first time that night they sound somewhat sad, which somehow frightens me even more.

So I drink.

"You should tell me more about yourself," I suggest as I sit back in my chair. "How come you stopped here? You said you were only passing by, so where are you headed? Where are you coming from?"

"There really isn't much of a story," the traveller says. "I had to clear my head, so I went for a walk. It's been a difficult day."

"Why was it difficult?"

"I went to a funeral." Their eyes gloss over. "You'd think I'd be used to them by now but this one was important to me."

"Who died?" I ask quietly.

"A little girl," the traveller answers softly. "Wasn't even three yet. She went so suddenly, too. A real tragedy, of course, no one could have foreseen it. One second she's playing in the grass, a big smile on her face, not a care in the world, and the next she's stumbling home, holding her arm, so so pale..." Their voice cracks, they swallow and swirl around the drink in their glass. "Not even crying. You always know it's bad when they don't cry. 'Something bit me,' she says, already feverish. Gone by nightfall."

"I'm so sorry," I say when they pause.

"Why?"

I don't have an answer.

"So you see, a walk was in order," they continue after a moment. "I found your town by chance. Lucky, I guess."

"Village," I correct them. It's a point of pride. Not that many villages around anymore, just towns growing into cities and cities growing into a pain in the neck.

"Village, sorry," they repeat but they don't look sorry at all. "It's a lovely place, so many people around. I saw some children playing in the street, even when it started to rain. What a cheerful little bunch! I wonder how much Death would charge to get them back."

"Why?" My mouth feels like cotton. I lean back in my armchair and close my eyes. The traveller's voice sounds more distant if I don't see them.

"It doesn't always charge the same," they say. "Doesn't like feeling like it's been cheated out of life. Some people, it says, are more full of life than others, and I have to agree. You can see it sometimes, in their eyes. The people whose life has been stolen from them look kind of dimmed, a bit faded. It doesn't matter who stole their life, time or just the cruelty of others. The elderly, the mourners, the homesick students. Death doesn't care for them. It comes to take their souls away and leaves hungry still. You don't need to offer much to bring

people like that back. A bird, a doe, maybe an old man. Death isn't too picky with them. It's the ones still full of life that Death hates to release." They chuckle a bit. "You know, the starry-eyed teenagers who think their whole lives are ahead of them. The chatterboxes, the old women dancing in the rain. You'd have to kill five healthy teenagers to raise someone like that from the dead, and it still might not be enough."

They frown, I can hear it in their voice when they speak again: "That's the worst part, really, when you're kneeling on a grave, surrounded by bones, your hands covered in blood, and Death appears, its gravelly voice murmuring, 'More.' That's all it ever says."

For a second, I'm not sure anymore if it's still them speaking or if the Death they speak of has crept into their voice, seeping colour from it, wiping away any trace of life still there.

"I've gotten pretty good at estimating how much it will want to take, though," the traveller says, their voice so close to my ear I have to open my eyes. It hurts. I see their face now, impossibly old and pale, the skin thin enough to reveal the shape of their bones. They're kneeling next to me. It's so hard to focus on their voice, as they whisper: "A bird for an old man, a young adult for an old one. And still, sometimes Death takes more, and it takes, and it takes. It takes five old men for a young mother, a handful of healthy adults for a teenager, and for a child ..." I feel their breath on my skin, smelling of rot and dirt.

"Well. It takes a village to raise a child."

# WALKING ON AUTOPILOT

BY DOMINIK LENARČIČ

Left. Right.

Left. Right.

I walk past all the opportunities.

Left. Right.

Left. Right.

I walk past all the open hearts.

Left. Right.

Left. Right.

I walk past all the hearts still closed.

Left. Right.

Left. Right.

I'm walking on autopilot.

I'm living on autopilot.

# I STARED AT THE UNIVERSE

BY HELENA FLAVIJA

I stared at the Universe  
and she stared back;  
told me she loved me,  
so I asked her,  
*What's the point?*  
Maybe I was a little young to die  
but I thought she didn't want me anymore.  
She said there really was nothing  
after the end of summer.  
Maybe I was naive to fall in winter  
pretending there still were summers to be had.  
*What's the point?*  
I asked her  
and she blinked, ever so slowly  
(a ghost of a touch on my lips).  
She whispered against my neck  
all the secrets of summers I was bound to lose.

# TODAY I AM AFRAID

BY HELENA FLAVIJA

Today I am afraid,  
so I will snap my fingers like twigs  
and pray for forgiveness.  
I'll teach you to count between lightning strikes  
and hope to God  
the sky fears us too.

O, you wingéd wonder of nature,  
have you not heard about the end of the world?  
You intertwine my paper-dry bones  
to make your home  
and think you cannot die.  
They took the planes down  
and now you are the fastest in the sky  
and nothing will ever fly as fast as you.  
You think yourself immortal  
and you hide your brittle heartbeat  
underneath your wings.

You take flight under the beckoning bruise-blue sky  
and leave, unafraid.  
I snap and break and creak in my lonesomeness.

You wouldn't have chosen me.  
You must think me a felled tree trunk, a dead thing.  
I should feel the same.  
I wish I could feel the same.  
Oh, how I loved you,  
and oh, how little difference that has made!

It's all gone now,  
sewn together into a bundle of moments,  
a bundle of nerves,  
a restful place for the chirping angels  
of hungry stomachs and empty beaks.

You've never belonged to this world  
as much as when you watch it burn.  
It is lonely  
and it is scary  
and the beauty of it scorches your eyes.

# PIECE OF CAKE

BY KATJA STOJIĆ

I wish I were a simple person  
with humble wishes,  
perfectly reachable within my grasp.  
Wanting nothing more but a simple life  
with a husband, two kids and maybe a dog.

I wish I did not feel the pain of every story read,  
that my heart would stay ignorant  
of the screams and suffering of those  
whose lives are touching mine  
with the delicate touch of a razor blade.

I have grown used to  
the 'not belong anywhere' sign  
written on my forehead,  
as I have become accustomed to  
the letters R, E, S, T, L, E, S, S floating in my blood.

Some days I can almost  
step out, breathe in and say  
it will not kill me  
if I stay and live a life of ordinary measure.  
Then I feel the touch of panic slowly kissing my neck.

The thing is,  
no matter what I do,  
say,  
not say,  
I still want the things I want.

A love, imprinted in my veins;  
a life, written in novels;  
to be the person who dazzles you upon your first encounter

and leaves an invisible mark on your heart  
as a reminder of that smile painted  
on her lips.

Being simple seems like  
an easy get-away card.  
But I've learned long ago  
that nothing about me is ever  
a piece of cake.

# ROTTEN

BY KATJA STOJIĆ

Sometimes I'm drowning in loneliness,  
others I wallow in victory of self-sufficiency,  
the rollercoaster goes up, slowly, slowly,  
mind your step.  
Until it bursts down in agony.

One drop of water,  
hear the sound of falling,  
beating of my heart,  
cannot hear, too loud,  
fear does not allow me to be.

At night I am lying in bed,  
wide awake for my mind has its own coffee shop,  
not able to escape myself  
I listen to the sound of my thoughts,  
the silence is loud.

My eyes, closed, do not find what they search,  
the brightness of the night is killing me,  
the orchestra is playing loud,  
my involuntary presence does not bother them  
for I am their guest of honour.

The sound of silence, somehow so loud,  
my existence put on hold,  
my heart aching inside of me,  
tears invisible on pale skin,  
screams mute to my surroundings.

Does it show?  
Does my face reflect what lies beneath?  
Look in the mirror:  
vague reflections,  
only a girl with a mask on her face.

Wishing for the freedom of the night,  
the mystery of unclear lines,  
the sweet feeling of relief.  
Why do I wish for the sky to turn black  
when I cannot wait for dusk to return?

Thoughts, fuzzy in subconsciousness,  
cannot break through,  
waiting for them to catch me and say,  
Hey, you okay?  
I jump in my final gasp of despair.

# MORE THAN FINE

BY KATJUŠA PONEBŠEK

I have loved others  
And that's fine  
I have lived a life before him  
A life of happiness and sadness  
A life of love and heartbreak  
So has he  
He has loved others  
And that's fine

I have loved others  
Different people  
In different ways  
At different times of my life  
So has he  
And that's fine

I have loved others  
I loved the best way I knew  
Not as strongly  
Not as passionately  
As I now love him  
But I have loved them  
And that's fine

The ones I have loved  
Taught me to love  
I loved their smiles  
To love his laugh  
Loved their beauty  
To love his eyes  
Loved their humour  
To love his intellect  
Loved the talking  
To love the silence  
I have loved others  
And that's more than fine

I have loved others  
And that's fine  
They taught me to walk  
So now I can run  
I have loved others  
So has he  
He has loved others  
And that's more than fine too.

# CAT-LOVE

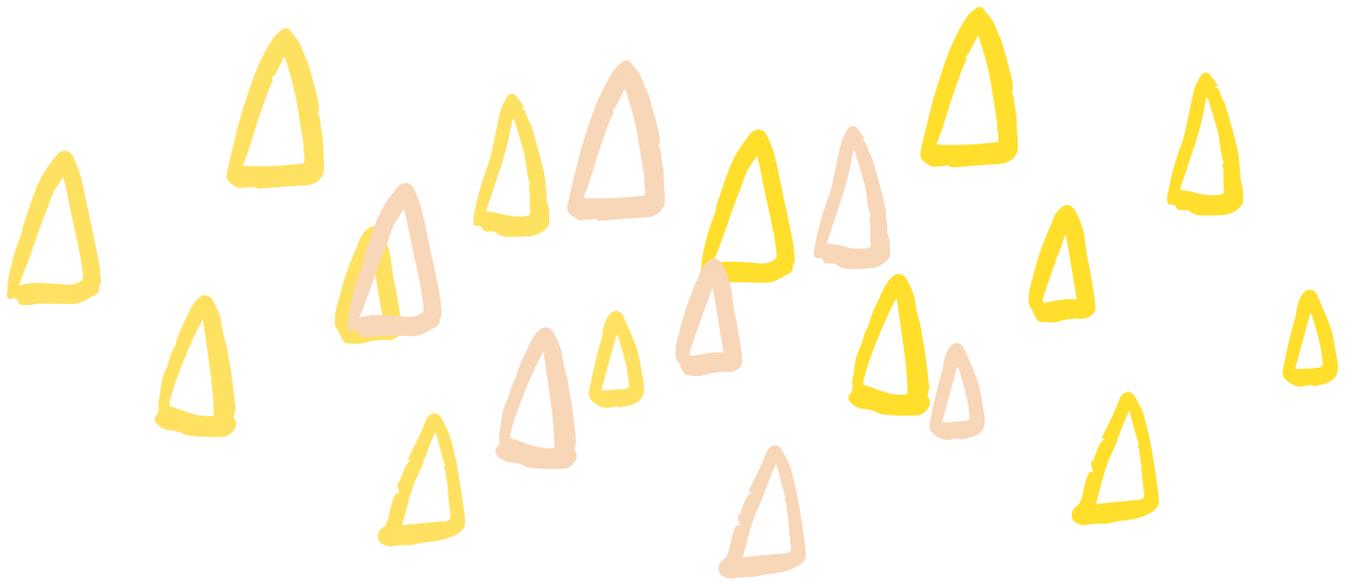
BY MARUŠKA SLAVEC

Your love is like a cat's,  
elusive and elite,  
you wouldn't love just anyone  
who found you on the street.

Instead, they must be patient,  
observe you from afar,  
and if enough time passes,  
you won't give them a scar.

Your love is like a cat's:  
scratches become love bites and  
a mouse corpse means "I'm yours!"  
An embrace is not a loving gesture  
if it's claimed by force.

Your love is like a cat's,  
I'll know it when you, from afar,  
look at me with eyes  
the size of emeralds  
and in them I'll see stars.



# THE WEF PROJECT

INSPIRING WOMEN  
OF OUR TIME WITH  
DYSLEXIA

Mentor: Prof. Lara Burazer, PhD

# INTRODUCTION

by Lena Fidel

This past February a group of eight students from our department, including myself, participated in the Women's Economic Forum 2020, which took place in Ljubljana for the first time. Being the enthusiastic young women that we are, we wanted our creative project to focus on important issues that women have to deal with in modern society. A few meetings into our collaboration, instigated by our mentor, Prof. Dr. Lara Burazer, we started working on the topic of dyslexia. I have to admit that we were not too eager to research this learning difference at first, but we came round to it when we heard about the amount of money we would raise for the conference by working with sponsors who were willing to support a project on dyslexia. We decided to combine this new theme with our initial objective of highlighting the struggles of modern women and the project 'Inspiring women of our time with dyslexia' was born.

At first, we studied the neurological and social background of dyslexia, discovering that it was mostly women who researched it and started having open conversations about it. We also came across a recent study that shows men's and women's dyslexic brains function slightly differently, which means that current methods of helping individuals with dyslexia might not be optimal for everyone, especially considering that most of the testing has been done on men.

After having already conducted extensive research, we realised that each of us would only have a few minutes of speaking time, which would make it impossible for us to properly present our findings. We agreed on restructuring our projects – each of us chose an inspiring woman with dyslexia and looked into her life. We listened to interviews, read articles, biographies, to try and see how these women view their learning difference and how it has influenced their lives.

Our final project was a mixture of biographies, different women's attitudes to dyslexia, the science and history behind this learning difference, as well as our own personal input. The message we wanted to convey was that dyslexia is not a hindrance or a difficulty and the women we chose to present show that it is actually a way of thinking and processing information in a completely unique way. It is a gift of imagining something bigger.

# AGATHA CHRISTIE

by Jesika Kustec

“Writing is a great comfort to people like me, who are unsure of themselves and have trouble expressing themselves properly.”

Agatha Christie

## **Dyslexia is . . .**

a type of learning disability (or learning difference) that affects how well someone can read and spell. Researchers have been trying to find out what causes it for a long time and are still working on discovering answers. However, we know much more than we used to. If someone has dyslexia, it does not mean that she or he cannot read. Most people with dyslexia have some words that they can recognize right away. These words are what educators call “sight words” or “sight vocabulary.” Also, many people with dyslexia are able to read words in stories better than they can read them in lists.

## **Agatha Christie’s Early Years**

Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie (née Miller) was born on 15 September 1890 in Torquay, Devon, South West England, into a comfortably well-off middle-class family. She was a novelist, short story writer, playwright, poet and memoirist. What made her upbringing unusual, even for her time, was that she was home schooled largely by her father, an American. Her mother, Clara, who was an excellent storyteller, did not want her to learn to read until she was eight but Agatha, bored and as the only child at home, taught herself to read by the age of five. She invented imaginary friends, played with her animals, attended dance classes and began writing poems when she was still a child.

## **Best-Selling Female Author's Life With Dyslexia**

"It was quite true, and I knew it and accepted it. Writing and spelling were always terribly difficult for me. My letters were without originality. I was an extraordinarily bad speller and have remained so until this day." Christie on her dyslexia (Sunderland, 2017)

Despite her clear success as an author, Christie often claimed herself to be the "slow one in the family," and always found writing and spelling very difficult (Sunderland, 2017). Christie was also challenged with dysgraphia and even dyslexia. Her dysgraphia was so troublesome that "she often could not balance her own check book" (Sunderland, 2017).

Her novels have sold about four billion copies and have been translated into at least 103 languages. According to Agatha Christie's official website ("Homepage," 2020), she is the best-selling novelist of all time, surpassed only by William Shakespeare and the Bible. *And Then There Were None* is Christie's best-selling novel, with 100 million sales to date, making it the world's best-selling mystery ever, and one of the best-selling books of all time. You probably would not expect that the person described, who found such success in the literary world, would have had problems reading and writing, but she absolutely did.

Christie often felt bored and was left with plenty of time to daydream. She also had some difficulty in communicating with her sisters. Her family knew she had a wild imagination and could not quite relate to her. Making up stories helped her pass the time and gave her an outlet for her emotions, so she began writing fiction.

She had problems with handwriting and spelling. As a result, she had to dictate all her novels. She also had difficulties with arithmetic and foreign language learning.

In no way did dyslexia stop Christie from learning to write well and establishing herself in a creative profession so dominated by men. By the time she was a teenager, she had written a number of short stories and one novel. By the age of twenty-one, she had finished the first book that she would ever publish, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. She focused her attention on weaving captivating stories, capturing fascinating characters and plenty of plot twists. Her works became instant classics. When her play, *The Mousetrap*, first debuted in 1952 at London Ambassador's Theatre, it was to rave reviews. It has been performed there to this day without a break.

## **"The Queen of Crime"**

It was during the First World War that Christie turned to writing detective stories. Her debut novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* took some time to finish and even longer to find a publisher. She started writing partly in response to a bet from her sister Madge that she could not write a good detective story and partly to relieve the monotony of the dispensing work, which she was now doing.

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British mystery writer Agatha Christie circa 1926. Hulton Archive/Getty Images

# DR. ELIZABETH BLACKBURN

by Kaja Peršolja

Australian-American biologist and Nobel laureate Elizabeth Helen Blackburn was born on 26 November 1948 in the city of Hobart in Tasmania, Australia. She was the second of seven siblings and her parents were both family physicians by profession. However, it was not just Elizabeth's parents that came from a scientific background – both her mother's father and his father before him were geologists, while her father's grandfather had studied beetles in Hawaii before moving to Australia. His collection was even bought by the famous British Museum of Natural History.

Elizabeth had always been an eager learner and would pick up random animals around her house or by the sea. The family later moved to Launceston, where she started attending kindergarten at Broadland House Church of England Girls' Grammar School. Elizabeth has fond memories of her life in Launceston; she would collect samples of plants and keep them in her room. She remembers her family having many pets during her childhood since they eventually moved to a bigger house which had a bigger garden. Supposedly, the animals did not stay in the garden for long, as they found accommodation for themselves inside the house.

**“Perhaps arising from a fascination with animals, biology seemed the most interesting of sciences to me as a child. I was captivated by both the visual impact of science through science books written for young people, and an idea of the romance and nobility of the scientific quest.”**

When Elizabeth completed her education at the Broadland House Girls' Grammar School, her family moved to Melbourne, where she enrolled in University High School and completed the last year of high school. Her interest in plants and animals had grown into a general interest in biology over time, which is why she decided to earn a degree in science. In 1970, she became a Bachelor of Science, earning an Honors degree in Biochemistry. The biochemistry of amino acid metabolism became her primary focus during the time she worked on her master's degree. Elizabeth was constantly encouraged to complete her PhD at the University of Cambridge, which she did in 1975. She worked

on the sequencing of regions of bacteriophage Phi X 174 and transcribing the fragments into RNA and DNA, as she was a member of a team of scientists who dedicated their time to discovering new approaches to the analysis of human DNA by combining already known methods with the existing ones. Her future husband, John Sedat, also worked in the Laboratory of Molecular Biology where the research was being conducted, which was how he and Elizabeth initially met.

**“The world of discovering DNA sequences was opening up and I was entranced by its possibilities.”**

Since her husband had accepted a position at Yale, the young couple moved to the USA. Elizabeth often said that it was love that set her on the path to her life’s work. She became a postdoctoral fellow in Joe Gall’s laboratory at Yale.

Not long after, her husband accepted another position, this time at the University of California in San Francisco. Consequently, Elizabeth had to relocate, despite wanting to continue her research. She applied for different positions at various universities in California but was rejected by many, so she sent out a couple of grant applications, hoping that they would enable her to continue her research. Finally, an offer came from UC Berkeley. Around the same time, Elizabeth came to an important realization – the telomeric DNA in *Tetrahymena*, which she had been researching, was packaged as something other than nucleosomes, something that nobody else had seen before.

**“It reinforced my love of the searches for the truth to which so many in research and academia aspire.”**

The aforementioned process, which became known as telomerase, remains Elizabeth Blackburn’s most important piece of work to date. To put it simply, it revolves around telomeres, cellular structures found at the ends of eukaryotic chromosomes, which play an essential role in the end-replication process, affecting the way our body changes through time. While we are not yet fully aware of the impact Elizabeth’s discovery will have in the future, it is enough to know that it will likely change the way we approach researching and treating diseases associated with aging. While Blackburn’s discovery probably will not be able to lengthen our life span, it might just make us healthier.

In 2009, Elizabeth, together with Carol Greider and Jack Szostaks, received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Their research is still considered to be revolutionary in the field of molecular biology. To this day, Elizabeth continues her research of telomeres and telomerase as a Professor of Biology and Physiology in the Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics at the University of California in San

Francisco. She was also a member of the President's Council on Bioethics from 2002 until 2004, when she was dismissed due to her opposition to President Bush's views on embryonic and stem cell research. Currently, she holds a position on the Science Advisory Board of the Regenerative Medicine Foundation.

**“I continue to believe that bioethics, done well and underpinned by the best available scientific evidence, can be an important part of our consideration, as a society, of the impact on people of scientific research in the biological sciences and medicine.”**

Elizabeth Blackburn has overcome many challenges in her life, one of them being dyslexia, which made the early years in school quite difficult for her. These difficulties did not last long, as she began working on her memorization skills, which proved to be especially useful in chemistry and biology classes. Her research partner, Carol Greider, also struggled with dyslexia in her childhood and cited Elizabeth as her inspiration and support when dealing with her reading disorder. Not only were Blackburn and Greider the first two women to share a Nobel Prize, but they were also the first two people with dyslexia to do so, proving once again that obstacles are meant to be overcome and that anything is possible if you set your mind to it.

**“One of the things I was thinking about today is that as a kid I had dyslexia. I had a lot of trouble in school and was put into remedial classes. I thought that I was stupid.”**

I see Dr. Blackburn as a truly remarkable person who learned to use her curiosity and her ability to look at the world from a different perspective to help improve the way we live. Her pioneering work in biochemistry is said to have the possibility to improve our lives and help us live a better life by giving us insight into age-associated diseases. She has shown us not only countless possibilities in the field of biochemistry, but also that challenges are meant to be faced and tackled, rather than feared or avoided. Her experience with dyslexia made me more aware of the lack of a supportive environment in most education systems and the importance of a positive mindset when it comes to helping and teaching those affected by this learning difficulty, especially in the early years. We should strive to create an educational environment in which all children have the chance to thrive, despite their differences.

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Picture: Boris Zharkov

# C H E R

by Lena Fidel

Cherilyn Sarkisian, better known as Cher, is one of the greatest singers, songwriters and actors of our time. She was born in El Centro, California, in 1946 and despite having a difficult childhood, she quickly developed many artistic talents. After dropping out of high school at the age of sixteen, Cher moved to Los Angeles and began her journey to stardom. She went on to become a global icon and has won multiple prestigious awards over the course of her long career.

Cher's life changed dramatically when she met Salvatore 'Sonny' Bono in 1962. Sonny worked at Gold Star Studios in Hollywood and enabled Cher to get her first experience as a singer. They became good friends and eventually lovers despite his being eleven years her senior. Her first success came with the song 'I Got You Babe', which she recorded together with Sonny in 1965. Unlike her contemporaries, she led a monogamous lifestyle and was against experimenting with drugs, which meant that she lost touch with the wild youth of the late sixties and her career consequently came to a halt. In 1969 she gave birth to a son, Chaz Bono.

In the early seventies, Cher gained many loyal followers thanks to her and Sonny's show *The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour* (1971–1974). Her popularity as a TV hostess also helped revive her career in music, this time as a solo artist. In the next few years she released some of her most widely known singles, such as *Gypsys, Tramps and Thieves* and *Half-Breed*. *Billboard* magazine even described her as a 'proven superstar who always sells records'.

Her individual success put a strain on her marriage, especially when it became evident that Sonny had little understanding for her ideas and abilities. They divorced in 1975 but remained friendly afterwards and even collaborated on a few projects later on.

The late seventies were the time for Cher to reinvent herself as a solo artist. She struggled desperately to lose the image of a simple pop singer, wanting to be seen as a real rock star. Despite her efforts, she failed in her subsequent attempts to boost her career.

She had another son, Elijah Blue, in 1976 and in 1978 she changed her name to Cher. What followed was a whirlwind romance with Kiss member Gene Simmons, which lasted for two years.

Because she now had two young children to look after, Cher decided to put aside her rock star dreams for a while and instead focused on releasing the disco album *Take Me Home*. This commercial success provided her family with a financial cushion big enough for her to dive into rock 'n' roll one more time, again to no avail – her next album was a flop and her rock band Black Rose received a negative welcome from both the critics and the public.

With her career in music falling apart, Cher turned to acting. Her big break came when she was cast in the Broadway production *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* as well as in its film adaptation. She was not taken seriously as an actress until she landed a role in the 1983 film *Silkwood*, which earned her an Academy Award nomination and the Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress – Motion Picture. She also starred in *Mask* (1985), *Suspect*, *The Witches of Eastwick* and *Moonstruck* (all 1987), receiving many awards.

Her career as an actress brought a large income which fuelled her already extravagant lifestyle. She began a series of love affairs and flings and gave her dream of becoming a rock star one last try, which proved to be the right choice.

Her next studio albums *Cher* and *Heart of Stone* featured chart-topping rock hits 'I Found Someone', 'If I Could Turn Back Time', 'After All', 'Just Like Jesse James' etc., finally establishing Cher as a true rock star.

In 1991, Cher released *Love Hurts* and followed it up with a world tour the next year. Because she was too cautious about the next step in her film career, she kept turning down big roles and was eventually forced to shoot infomercials to keep up her lifestyle.

In 1995, her next album, *It's a Man's World*, received excellent reviews for her covers of male songs, which she sang from a woman's perspective.

It was becoming more and more evident that Cher's career was slowly coming to a halt. Fewer successful filming projects and recurring medical problems meant that she was losing momentum. She worked on a few films, most of which received mixed reviews, but Cher was always praised for her performance.

In 1998, Sonny died and Cher performed at his funeral. She later released a collection of essays about her life, including her marriage to Sonny and their career.

Her next release was the album *Believe*, its title track becoming one of the best-selling songs of all time. The following Do You Believe? tour was also a great success. In 1999 she received the Legend Award at the World Music Awards for her 'lifelong contribution to the music industry'.

In 2002, Cher embarked on her supposedly last tour, titled *Living Proof: The Farewell Tour* after her last studio album. The tour concluded in 2005 and Cher seemed to have retired at the age of 61. She continued working in the music industry though,

never quite ready to let go of her stardom. She performed in Las Vegas for three years, starred in movies such as *Burlesque* and *Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again* and recorded another studio album in 2013. She remains active to this day, which makes her the only artist with a number-one single on the Billboard chart every decade from the 1960s to the 2010s.

### **Cher and Dyslexia**

Cher dropped out of high school when she was just sixteen, and part of the reason why was her inability to read and memorise facts quickly. While she excelled in some subjects and obviously had a lot of artistic talent and potential, she also struggled in some important areas, such as reading and writing. She wrote in her autobiography that she could never read quickly, learned almost everything by listening and could never quite make sense of numbers. Teachers mostly thought she was not trying hard enough, but she was never tested for any kind of a learning disability. So, at one point she no longer saw any meaning in trying and failing all the time and simply quit school.

Luckily, her career kicked off very quickly and she had absolutely no trouble in life due to her lack of education or her learning disabilities.

Cher later found out she has dyslexia, which happened purely by coincidence. She noticed her son Chaz had some difficulties reading and learning and decided to have him tested for dyslexia. When the doctors asked her about her own experience with reading (because the learning difficulty often runs in the family), they discovered that she too had dyslexia. Suddenly, everything made sense to her.

In her novel Cher wrote: 'I told them how my mind raced ahead of my hand, how I'd skip letters in the middle of a word. I told them how I kept transposing numbers, and that I'd get so cranky trying to dial long-distance calls that someone would finally have to take the phone and dial the number for me.'

Cher's career started approximately at the same time as the scientific research on dyslexia. Up until the 1960s, dyslexia was called 'word blindness' and not much research had been done on the subject.

In the early 1970s, mostly due to the efforts of some incredible women, major organisations were founded exclusively to help dyslexic children. Like Cher, many other mothers and teachers noticed dyslexic tendencies in their children or pupils and they took it upon themselves to finance further research and bring learning differences to light.

Cher now focuses a lot on helping eradicate the prejudices that come with learning differences. She supports medical research financially and is also a member of the Understood Board of Advocates. She still struggles with reading and numbers, but like always, no obstacle is too big for her. For example, she has to take more time to read the scripts, but she has no problem memorising her lines.

And to the question: 'If you could change one thing, would it be to not have dyslexia?' Cher replied: 'No! It caused pain, but it's me!'

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Photo: Mert Alas & Marcus Piggott

# ERIN

# BROCKOVICH

by Miona Dinić

**“My dyslexia was my gift. And in hindsight was everything I needed.”**

Consumer advocate and environmental activist Erin Brockovich was born in Lawrence, Kansas, on June 22 in 1960. Throughout her school years, Erin’s undiagnosed dyslexia caused her to be labeled as “stupid” by some professors while others were strongly convinced in her inability to advance academically. She was bullied by her classmates for not being able to process reading as quickly as they could, and all of these negative factors accumulated to greatly influence her self-confidence.

**“What I wanted to be when I was younger was a doctor. But, everybody told me I couldn’t do that because I am a dyslexic.”**

An important figure in Erin’s life changed her perception of herself. One of her teachers, Ms. Borseff, noticed that Erin understood the material well in class, but when it came to showing her knowledge in writing, she struggled to perform equally well. Ms. Borseff decided to present the exam questions orally to her, and as a result, Erin passed her exams successfully. Finally encouraged and realizing that it is the approach that matters in overcoming the obstacles, Erin continued her education and graduated with an Associate Degree in Applied Arts in 1980.

After two divorces, she became a single mother of three and decided to pursue a career as a legal clerk at a law firm in California’s San Fernando Valley in the ’90s, despite having no formal legal training. While working there for Ed Masry, she stumbled upon medical records documenting various types of cancer, respiratory, and digestive conditions that were prevalent among the citizens of the small town of Hinkley. Wanting to find out the cause of these illnesses, Erin initiated a thorough investigation which uncovered that Pacific Gas & Electric company had been poisoning the drinking water with hexavalent chromium, a cancer-causing chemical. Numerous medical records and legal briefs that had to be read didn’t stop her work. Her diligence eventually led to the

largest settlement in U.S. history, making the company pay out \$333 million in damages to more than 600 residents.

The impressive success was a turning point in Erin's life. After 1996, she became an environmentalist and an advocate for people whose health suffered because of environmental contamination. The case became well known and in 2000 her story was portrayed in the movie *Erin Brockovich*, starring Julia Roberts.

Since then, Erin has never stopped fighting and standing up for what is right. She runs Brockovich Research & Consulting, aiming to help people whose health is jeopardized by environmental contamination, and is involved in many environmental projects. She also provides great support for children with dyslexia by sharing her experience and empowering them.

Reflecting on her success, Erin credited her dyslexia as being the key factor that formed her as a person, able to understand better than anyone what it means to feel inferior: "I was a support for them. They were a support for me. [. . .] That struggle with dyslexia, and the suppression that was put on me because of it because I was different — that's precisely what got me to rise in Hinkley. Because I saw it happen to others."

**“What I thought would be my downfall has become my gift.”**

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Photo: Newspix via Getty Images

# KEIRA

# KNIGHTLEY

by Patricia Šušteršič

## Work and Life

Keira Knightley is primarily known for her roles in period dramas. Many of them have been both critically as well as commercially successful, granting her worldwide recognition and various award nominations, including the BAFTA, Golden Globe and Oscar nominations.

Born to two theatre actors, she has always wanted to act and requested an agent at the age of three; she got one three years later, at the age of six. Although she never intended to do films, she was unable to do theatre at the time because theatre productions normally took place during the school year and she was not allowed to miss class. She therefore auditioned for small film roles to generally work on one project during the summer break.

Her breakthrough film was *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), for which she anticipated no success whatsoever, but it really opened the doors for various major roles she landed afterwards. In an interview for BAFTA New York she jokingly said: 'From that point on for five or six years I was just on a film set.' Knightley was sent to Hollywood to audition for Elizabeth Swann in *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), landing her first role in a film with such a big budget.

In 2005 her first collaboration with Joe Wright arose — *Pride and Prejudice*. The eponymous novel had been her favourite book ever since she was little, so the idea of being rejected for the role of Elizabeth Bennet was so frightening that she actually did not want to audition at all but was persuaded to do so by her agent. Wright and Knightley's first meeting was awful; directors were nonetheless very keen on Knightley and eventually, the two found common ground, which led to more successful collaborations, namely *Atonement* (2007) and *Anna Karenina* (2012).

*A Dangerous Method* (2011) was another period-drama project where she portrayed an incredibly difficult character Sabina Spielrein, Carl Jung's patient, student and mistress. Spielrein was diagnosed with what was at that time known as hysteria, so Knightley, having nothing in common with the role, had to do an extensive amount of research in order to be able to build the character completely from scratch.

In *Never Let Me Go* (2010) and *The Imitation Game* (2014), she had supporting roles: Ruth, a character driven by jealousy, and the famous Joan Clarke, the cryptanalyst who helped decrypt Nazi Germany's secret communications through the Enigma project. In one of her interviews in 2012, she said: 'If it is an interesting role, I will take it.'

At the age of twenty-four, she took part in her first theatre production, *The Misanthrope* (2009-2010), and in the following years performed in *The Children's Hour* (2011) and *Thérèse Raquin* (2015). In her interview for BAFTA New York she explained that her dad was the final push that made her seriously consider theatre. 'My dad said, "You know you have not actually done what you have meant to do and what you have wanted to do your entire life, you have not actually been on stage, so you should do that."' She knew she had to do it then or else the fear of the unfamiliar theatre acting would have overtaken her and she would have never done it. Theatre helped her realise that she had stage fright, which was also present on film sets, and that she had to work on relaxation in order to really become her character and perform better. It was also fascinating to her to see how other actors prepared for their roles from the very beginning since for the film roles, each actor would do their research and the vast majority of the preparation for the character on their own.

### **On Dyslexia**

Keira, who would have been Kiera, funnily enough, had her mother not misspelt her name, was diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of six. She was at the top of her class until she was given a book she had not heard of before to read in front of the class and failed, realising all her previous reading was actually not reading at all but rather reciting the lines she had learnt by heart. She was lucky to have such a supportive mother and teachers who helped her deal with dyslexia, as well as to have acting as a major motivator. In 2012 she spoke with BBC and said that it was like a carrot that was being dangled in front of her because she had to be able to read those lines in order to do it. Knightley remains an inspiration as a successful dyslexic with her love for books, despite tackling challenges with reading. She once stated: 'I am a slow reader. I always loved words, which is a strange thing given that I could not always read them.' She has read lengthy books such as *Anna Karenina* for the preparation of her roles. Dyslexia inspired her to find creative solutions to prepare for the roles, for example listening to stories over and over again on tape to become well acquainted with who her characters were and what life was like in their time. It is her love of history, literature and art that drives her, and alongside her imagination and creativity it has allowed her to develop into so astonishing an actress that it is a pleasure to see her perform.

# ANN BANCROFT

by Petra Ramšak

Ann Bancroft is an American teacher, explorer, author and public speaker. She is best known as being the first woman to trek to the North Pole together with the Norwegian Liv Arnesen. She is also the first woman to cross both polar ice caps to reach the North and South Poles.

Ann Bancroft was born in September 1955 and spent her childhood in rural Minnesota. She spent a great portion of her childhood outdoors – Minnesota winters are a good starting point for future polar explorations. In school, she struggled with reading, spelling and mathematics (Dyslexia, n.d.).

“For someone who was struggling in school, the natural world was a perfect place to feel at home and express myself,” she once said (Bancroft in The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity, n.d.).

She got help from her parents and tutors but she and her family moved to Kenya when Bancroft was about ten years old. Bancroft describes the two years she spent in Kenya as a positive experience, an adventure. She was diagnosed with dyslexia when they returned to the United States and Bancroft fell behind in her studies. She put a lot of effort into her schoolwork, but the results were not stellar. Seeing this, two of her teachers suggested for her to get tested for dyslexia. She was diagnosed in seventh grade. At the time, special needs education support was not widely spread. Bancroft was given tutors and was pulled out of non-academic activities to not shift focus from what her family and her teachers deemed more important. She disliked that, saying: “Those were the lifeblood things that kept me going, and they were yanked from me. They didn’t know that art is a fantastic environment for kids with learning problems [. . .]” (The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity, n.d.). She transferred schools and graduated not long after. She continued her education at the University of Oregon, where she completed her Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Education. She worked as a special-education teacher before embarking on explorations.

Bancroft made the news in 1986 when she became the first woman to cross the ice to the North Pole. In 1992, she led the first American women's east-to-west crossing of Greenland and a year later she led the American Women's Expedition to the South Pole. With the latter, she became the first woman to cross the ice of both the North and South poles. Her latest major accomplishment in the field of exploration took place in 2001, when she and the Norwegian explorer Liv Arnesen became the first women to sail and ski across Antarctica's landmass (Ann Bancroft Foundation, n.d.). These actions make Ann Bancroft the most accomplished polar explorer alive.

Bancroft also founded the Ann Bancroft Foundation, a non-profit that has programmes that celebrate and ignite the potential in adolescent girls in Minnesota. "We strive to build confidence and offer tools that will allow a girl to go after her dreams and feel supported along the way. Through grants, mentorship, and ongoing development opportunities, the Ann Bancroft Foundation is giving Minnesota girls strength to achieve their full potential," is how they describe themselves (Ann Bancroft Foundation, n.d.).

Bancroft was honoured in the National Women's Hall of fame in 1995.

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Photo via Ann Bancroft Foundation Webpage

# BELLA THORNE

by Teja Ščelkov

Bella Thorne is an exceptional young actress and one of the most prevalent dyslexia advocates in Hollywood today. She has helped destigmatize it in various TV programs, commercials, and books, spreading the following message to dyslexic children everywhere: “You can do it!” (Forrest).

## **Early Life & Dyslexia Struggles**

Bella Thorne is an American actress, dancer, singer, and former child star who was born Annabella Avery Thorne on the 8th of October 1997 (IMDb).

Following her father’s untimely death when she was only seven years old, her mother was left to raise Bella and her three siblings as a single mother. Although Bella had been diagnosed with dyslexia since the first grade, she remained in public school until she was eight years old. Later, she dropped out and was home-schooled for the following four years, as the children at school had bullied her relentlessly and called her “stupid” because of her dyslexia. Her mother later enrolled her at a Sylvan Learning center, where Bella massively improved her writing and even began reading a year ahead of her grade (Jones).

## **Anti-Bullying**

Bella Thorne visited the students of Carpenter Avenue in 2012 on behalf of an anti-bullying foundation called “The Power of One.” There she spoke at an assembly about everything she’d been through regarding her dyslexia, from her personal struggles to how it also affected her studies. This was to help anyone who was going through something similar and to educate people in general about those who are differently abled (Szymanski).

Bella is also a global ambassador for “Stomp out bullying” and a spokesperson for The Dyslexia Foundation. Bella also often makes it a point during her interviews that dyslexia doesn’t affect your intelligence, but rather just makes people learn in different ways (Coleman Tucker).

## **Acting & Overcoming Difficulties**

Bella said that people during her school days (including teachers) would tell her to give up on her dreams of becoming an actress and a writer as “that could never happen to her because she can’t read” – but Bella decided to prove them wrong (Forrest).

Bella later revealed that she had gotten better at reading once she began landing acting roles, as she often had to read scripts to learn lines, which could be changed the day of shooting and at the last minute. She also improved her counting skills by counting her father’s money and later her own, which led to her having a fascination with it in general (Raven). Her family also helped her improve her reading as a child by making her read everything from menus to cereal boxes and road signs (Jones).

Bella also vividly remembers how her father once told her that “a disability is a disability only if you let it be one,” and that has stayed with her ever since (TigerBeat).

## **Her Work with Disney Channel Regarding Dyslexia**

During her time working with Disney Channel, Bella Thorne starred in a commercial about dyslexia, which explained what having dyslexia is like. A couple of days later the commercial was even followed by an episode of *Shake it up*, where Bella’s character CeCe is outed to everyone as dyslexic. She breaks down because of this and cries because she’s afraid people will look down on her or bully her, saying she knows how mean people can be (TigerBeat).

This really opened my eyes at the time and made me sympathize with her as I realized dyslexia is no laughing matter. As a child, Bella even had to leave public school because the bullying got so bad. Sadly, in today’s world many children who are bullied due to learning challenges can develop a lack of motivation for studying, low self-esteem, and even depression. Thankfully, CeCe is later reassured by her best friend, Rocky, that dyslexia actually makes her twice as tough as she thought she was and that everyone has something they have to deal with in life, and her thing just happens to be dyslexia. This episode was later widely praised among dyslexic fans of the show for helping destigmatize dyslexia and showing that it is nothing to be ashamed of or to hide. They often even wrote fan letters to Bella thanking her for making them feel better about their own learning challenges.

## **Her Book Featuring Dyslexia**

By the time Bella was nineteen, she had already written her first book titled *Autumn Falls* (Forrest). The book follows a girl named Autumn who has dyslexia and is trying to fit in at her new school. In the story, Bella includes auto-biographical elements from her own experiences as a teen with dyslexia (Coleman Tucker).

This book has proven to be especially helpful, as recent psychological studies have found that children’s literature featuring protagonists with learning challenges

motivates children experiencing such challenges not to be ashamed of them but rather to deal with them instead.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

I found that we should portray characters with dyslexia in the media not as people who are flawed or defined by it, but rather people who are facing a challenge that they can and will overcome. This way we not only empower children with dyslexia, but also teach those who don't have it to be more sympathetic. I also believe that having a young and popular star, such as Bella Thorne, portray these characters already makes people of my generation more compelled to watch it and can reach us on a level where, perhaps, other traditional educational programs could not.

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# W H O O P I G O L D B E R G

by Tinkara Uršič Fratina

Caryn Elaine Johnson, professionally known as Whoopi Goldberg, is an American actress, comedian, author and television personality. She is one of the few entertainers to have won an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony award. Most people will recognise her from films such as *The Color Purple*, *Ghost*, *Sister Act* and *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit*, or as a co-host of the talk show *The View*. She is one of the most beloved and well-known celebrities in American pop culture, and she has also been diagnosed with dyslexia.

She was born on 13th November 1955 in Chelsea, New York. She was raised by her mother. She did not find out until she was an adult that her difficulties with reading and writing were attributed to dyslexia. Her self-given diagnosis was that she was abnormally slow. “I knew I wasn’t stupid, and I knew I wasn’t dumb. My mother told me that.” She grew up in an era where no one thought to tell her that she could not achieve her dreams. She says that she knew from birth that she wanted to act. She got her first paid gig at the age of fourteen, but her big breakthrough came when Steven Spielberg saw her in her one-woman comedy show *Whoopi Goldberg* and cast her for the role of Celie in his film *The Color Purple* in 1985. Probably the most prolific part of her career was the ’90s – AC Nielsen EDI ranked her as the actress appearing in the most theatrical films in the 1990s with twenty-nine films grossing \$1.3 billion in the U.S. and Canada.

As a child, Whoopi loved it when people read to her – she still loves it today. “If you read to me, I could tell you everything you read.” That’s how she and her mother knew that there was nothing wrong with her; she just learnt things in a different way. In an interview Whoopi pointed out: “When I was a kid, they didn’t call it dyslexia. They called it, you know, you were slow, or you were retarded,” but her mother and her knew that Whoopi was dealing with a phenomenon that had not been defined yet. What crushed her the most was how people around her didn’t see that she was smart, she just could not figure out in what way they learnt and saw things. “What I remember about being a kid was that I felt pretty protected, I wasn’t afraid, and I had a mother who understood after a while that there was something different about the way I learned.” But nevertheless, school got harder and she continued falling behind until she eventually decided to drop

out. Her mother gave her money to go to museums and attend lectures to try to continue her education that way. At the time she developed a drug problem, but as she said, she knew that “[t]here had to be something more and despair makes you believe there is no more.” She got clean and started her career as an actress. She found out that the best way for her to learn a script was by someone reading it to her. As for her books, she likes to dictate instead of write them, and then she sits down with an editor to tweak the language.

When asked in an interview how she thinks dyslexia affected her, she said that it had a large hand in getting her to where she is now. “I think perhaps it made me more introspective. Made me more thoughtful, maybe slightly slower in how I do things because it takes me a minute sometimes to figure things out.” Acting, pretending to be someone else, helps her mind expand. It helps her escape real life, which is sometimes quite difficult for “normal” people. The advantage of dyslexia in her opinion is that her brain sees and puts information in her head differently, sometimes more interestingly than if she saw it like everyone else. “Dyslexia is less challenging now as we have some idea about it, but what the challenge will always be is how we see ourselves – not as folks with a handicap, but as folks with an interesting perspective on everything.”

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