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ROMANTIK

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1. Amada Leduc Stories Are Never Only Stories

It is not the kind of fairy tale you'd see on a Disney screen. One day an old man comes to a miller and promises him untold riches in exchange for what lies at the other side of the mill. The miller, thinking he means an old apple tree, readily agrees. He returns home in jubilation only to have his wife confront him, horrified—lying beyond the mill when the two were speaking was not the apple tree but the miller's daughter.

"Oh, husband!" the wife exclaims. "That was the Devil. Our daughter was picking apples in the yard." (Grimm 1857)

In three years, the Devil returns. The daughter, however, is a pious woman and has washed herself in the river and so the Devil cannot take her. Furious, the Devil tells the miller to keep her away from water. The next day the Devil returns, but the daughter has wept into her hands, purifying them.

"Chop off her hands" (Grimm 1857) the Devil orders and the miller does as he is told.

But the daughter weeps into her stumps. Having been rebuffed a third time, the Devil retreats in defeat.

Her father promises to take care of her, but the daughter refuses. "Compassionate people will give me all that I need" (Grimm 1857), she says, and off she goes into the world.

Good people feed her and give her shelter. As with many fairy tales, she eventually meets and falls in love with the king. He gives her a pair of silver hands to don. However, the king's mother is jealous of their love and has the new queen banished while he is away at war. After his return, he spends seven years searching the wilderness for his wife.

The queen is cared for by the angels in a house in the woods. She remains pious and gentle. Eventually she and her husband and their young son are reunited. As an additional and final reward for her unwavering faith, God allows the maiden's hands to grow back.

"You see", the Brothers Grimm may well have said, "If you are patient and gentle too, as all good Christians ought to be, miracles will also come to you".

*

"It's only a story". As someone who speaks often on fairy tales and their deep connections with disability, this is something I hear often. People read stories like *Maiden Without Hands* or *Beauty and the Beast* and see them as momentary dips into fantasy, into simpler times when we had no Netflix to entertain us and instead had to make do with stories around the fire.

Yet were those times around the fire really all that simple? The stories in the Brothers' Grimm collection were collected from a mixture of middle class and peasant women. Influenced by the patriotism and teachings of Johann Gottfried Herder, who

1. Amanda Leduc – Stories Are Never Only Stories

championed *naturpoesie*—a way of storytelling that emphasized the fresh German countryside and ruddy health of the peasantry which was in direct opposition to the rapid industrialization of Cities that was occurring in Herder’s time—Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm took to collecting tales from the countryside as a way of preserving German faith and ideals. Subsequent editions of the tales show a marked increase in religious themes; gone are the witches and the wise women so prevalent in the stories carried over from France, having been replaced instead by priests or angels of God. It seems very deliberate now, looking back on the tales through the lens of several centuries. But at the time of their story-collecting, the Brothers Grimm must have felt that they were preserving something “natural” to the German life—some irrefutable, God-given state of grace. A state of grace that so many of us, for good or ill, long to return to even in this present day—a Romantic nostalgia for simpler times.

“It’s only a story”. But these are stories that shaped so much of German life as to be hugely influential. The nostalgic yearning that the Brothers Grimm nurtured with their tales grew throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. A story about a maiden who is faithful and rewarded by God also becomes a story about a woman whose body is made “unnatural” and then, miraculously, restored.

What could be more antithetical to the “natural” state, after all, than disability?

*

Stories that we tell around the fire become stories that live in the cultural consciousness. Stories in the cultural consciousness that heighten nationalism

and promote nostalgia for “bygone” days—regardless of whether those bygone days are fairy-tale fictional or not—do the insidious work of promoting a certain way of viewing the world, one that all too often sees disability in a particularly unforgiving light. In fairy tales, disabilities are often visited upon people as punishment—witness the Beast—or used as visible markers of one’s inner moral character (think Rumpelstiltskin.). Should a protagonist be made disabled at the beginning of a story, all too often their disability is eradicated by the end of the tale, usually by virtue of faith and hard work. A woman remains good and pious and has her hands grow back as a reward for her faith.

Here, something unnatural is made natural again by virtue of magic or God or

Simple human triumph—an idea that, carried forward into the twenty-first century, shapes much of society’s current thinking

around disability.

“Have you tried yoga? Have you tried drinking green tea? Perhaps, if you exercised more, your chronic migraines would go away. Perhaps you aren’t doing enough to combat your disability. Perhaps the fact that you’re disabled is entirely your fault”.

Where is the room in this kind of thinking, for the embrace not of bygone times but of now, and the future? A fairy tale that ends with a disabled woman’s hands growing back teaches us, however innocently, that happy endings do not come to those whose bodies are unnatural, encouraging the assumption that all those whose bodies

1. Amanda Leduc – Stories Are Never Only Stories

are different in this day and age must somehow be bereft of happiness. This thinking often leads to the idea that such people might even be “choosing” this unhappiness because they aren’t trying hard enough to overcome their disability, such as it is.

Stories are never “only stories”. The fairy tales we know and love in the West—the fairy tales that became the basis of so much Romantic thought and feeling and understanding of narrative—provide a crucial, yet flawed base for understanding how the world works. In order to build a new and better world, we need to move beyond these stories—even beyond their happier, Disney counterparts—and embrace a mode of storytelling that celebrates what might be possible—not through faith or magic, but through the collective work of acknowledging disability not as a flaw but simply as another way of being in the world—another way of being that has every right to participate in and be a part of society. This is never the happy ending that we get in fairy tales, but it’s the happy ending that we all deserve.

1.2. Bibliography – Amada Leduc

Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm: *Maiden Without Hands*, Children’s and Household Tales, 7th edition, vol. 1. Translated by D.L. Ashlimann, 2001-2002.

1.3. Biography – Amanda Leduc

Amanda Leduc is the author of *The Centaur’s Wife* (Random House Canada, 2021) and *Disfigured: On Fairy Tales, Disability, and Making Space* (Coach House Books, 2020), which was shortlisted for the 2020 Governor General’s Award in Nonfiction (Canada). She has cerebral palsy and lives in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

2. Interview with Andreas Speit

Anna Jehle (AJ) and Juliane Schickedanz (JS), directors of Kunsthalle Osnabrück, talk to Andreas Speit (AS), journalist, author and researcher on right wing extremism and neo nazism in Europe.

AJ: How would you describe the current sociopolitical climate in Germany?

AS: Over the past few years, we have experienced first-hand the social values and narratives of our liberal democracy, which we thought to be secure, being fundamentally challenged. Such challenges are brought about by a range of very different actors with very different backgrounds and motives. They appear to be very heterogeneous and to have nothing in common. However, what ultimately unites them is their fundamental attack on the basic ideas of the Enlightenment which aimed to create a better world for all people based on emancipation and equality. The fact that democracy as we know it is being subjected to such enormous pressure is an unexpected phenomenon. That being said, there have been precursors to this, one example being the authoritarianism of Donald Trump, who despises everything libertarian, along with the disinformation spread by his taunting Twitter rhetoric.

JS: You published the book *Verqueres Denken* [Twisted Thinking] in 2021. The German protest movement *Querdenken* [Lateral Thinking] claims to be acting out of “heartfelt love”. Would you say that today emotions and morals determine our thinking more than ever?

AS: Many people prefer relying on their feelings rather than on facts. They believe that the Enlightenment, with its logical and rational approach, will lead us further and further astray into a bleak world—a world devoid of love, but filled with reason, which is precisely what is being questioned. This represents an undercurrent of contemporary discourse that has not been receiving enough attention in political and media debates. It is an undercurrent which is contributing to the establishing of a third Lebensreform [live reform] movement and for good reason. Our way of life in the global North continues to cause further catastrophes and crises. For some time now, the global South has been suffering from the consequences of perpetual growth in the North—from famines to wars to movements of refugees. The Querdenken movement is driven by a heightened awareness of climate change and its consequences, including in our own country. It practices and demands a rethinking. It practices and demands a rethinking of our values and a change in our lives. Their attempts to be sustainable, organic and regional are only three aspects practiced on a personal level and demanded at a political level. However, such concerns were already raised by the first life reform movement at the beginning of the 19th century which saw the advent of industrialisation, urbanisation and capitalisation. At that time, the centre of society felt a great need to counteract the growing sense of alienation among people from themselves, their fellow human beings and nature. Its actors sought alternative ways of living, including educational, esoteric and

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spiritual or liberal pedagogical approaches. The *Lebensreform* movement¹ also had an impact on the medical field: there was a move away from academic towards a more holistic type of medicine. Equally strong were the efforts of people to develop spiritually and transcendently through yoga or meditation. Today, we continue to see such concerns being raised and efforts being made. However, what is dramatic about this movement—which was, by the way, never inclusive of the entire population, but rather was and always will be an elitist, white movement—is the fact that no distinction is made between the philosophical and the economic concept of materialism. A distinction would be made in this case between the idea that “we can know and change the world” and “we can market and exploit the world”.

If we do not draw a line between these two by criticising dominant structures as well as industry and capitalisation, we end up with a re-spiritualisation of thought and a re-mythologisation of nature. This is precisely how you end up with authoritarian patterns, the idea that there must be a force that directs and guides everything. This is the crucial point. This is how ambivalence develops, making it all too easy to slide into right-wing extremist ideas. This aspect of a misguided resistance manifested itself very early on. The dilemma is further aggravated by the fact that the Enlightenment, as a French movement, is also linked to the Napoleonic wars. The fact that the Enlightenment effectively arrived in Germany along with the soldiers meant that it was associated with the occupation which led to reservations and defensive attitudes.

This rejection of the Enlightenment, which at times also developed into a strong nationalism, can also be observed in a less pronounced form in German Romanticism. At first, people seek the native and the indigenous, a combination of nature with a sense of rootedness and things being unspoilt. This leads to a mythologisation of chivalry and to fairy tales becoming more relevant because they are now perceived as central, identity shaping cultural elements. This creates an antithesis to the Enlightenment with its “cold reason”. However, at its root, romanticising the past as a harmonious natural state of being—that supposedly existed—is dangerous because it always also means: no immigration, no diversity, only self-contained, supposedly naturally “grown” communities.

AJ: From a historical point of view, can you explain where this (vaccination) scepticism in German-speaking countries comes from and how it is connected to the age of Romanticism?

AS: The rejection of the Enlightenment that we witness during the age of Romanticism also implies a hostility towards science. In its essence, the search for origins and harmony was an antimodern impulse.

The possibility of vaccination went hand in hand with immediate criticism of it because initially—as with all medical innovations—there were strong and justified

1 [Translator’s note:] In German speaking countries, *Lebensreform* [life reform] refers to various social reform movements that started in the mid-19th century as a response to industrialization.

2. Interview mit Andreas Speit

concerns about possible after-effects. However, these concerns soon turned into anti-scientific arguments. Before long, rejections were being justified with the idea of a holistic medicine, according to which illnesses strengthened the body and had to be endured. There is also a social Darwinist dimension to this: if you do not make it, you are simply too weak. What is so dramatic about this is the fact that this criticism of “academic medicine”, in its most radical form, is a criticism of “Jewish medicine”. Why? Because antisemitic circles portray our entire modernity as a Jewish modernity.

JS: In your book, you also demonstrate how the *Querdenken* movement equates itself to the victims of the Holocaust—both symbolically and strategically. What is at the root of this self-romanticisation and self-victimisation?

AS: For people belonging to the *Querdenken* movement, there are two separate narratives. Central to both is the conviction that we are living in a regime or a dictatorship. Some think it is a Merkel/Scholz dictatorship, others think they are living in the GDR 2.0 and some even imagine themselves to be living in a fascist dictatorship. Following this logic, they perceive themselves as belonging to either a legitimate tradition of resistance or victimhood. In the former, we find the phenomenon of affirmative references to the resistance movement under Nazi Germany. For example, when a person like Jana from Kassel compares herself to Sophie Scholl. On the other hand, we have those who position themselves in a victim tradition by attending protests wearing a yellow star with the inscription “unvaccinated”. Their common ground is a relativisation of Nazi crimes, an instrumentalisation of victims and, of course, a mockery of the real resistance fighters and Jewish people who were murdered. With all due respect to critical debate, this is clearly crossing a line.

AJ: Would you say that the age of Romanticism can be compared to today’s climate, where we are caught between promises of diversity and rising nationalism?

AS: I am not so sure, because in such comparisons the social structure of that time plays a pivotal role: who was able to speak, who held the power of discourse and what relevance did media appearances have. Nowadays, we simply have different interpretive sovereignties and possibilities.

For example, at the dinner parties of Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, which at school I was taught were emancipatory events, Jews and women were not welcome. Despite having not only a long tradition but also a dramatic relevance for the present, this combination of antifeminism and antisemitism has long been ignored—even in research on right-wing feminism. The global incel scene is fuelled by it. If we take for example the assassin in Halle. He considered Judaism and feminism to be responsible for creating the world he despised. The public reaction to this attack was one of deep shock but the root of this shock was not examined more closely. The cause can be traced all the way back to the protagonists of Romanticism who spread such antifeminist and antisemitic ideas.

JS: Do you feel that people belonging to the *Querdenken* and *Identitarian* movement use art as a smokescreen to neutralise or whitewash certain attitudes in these movements? And how is the rejection of the Enlightenment being instrumentalised in other critical discourses?

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AS: I think they employ several strategies. One strategy is indeed this romantic image of “going back to nature”, of finding one’s roots as a way to form one’s own identity. Then there is also still this habitus of seeing art as something educated and moderate. Art will always remain part of how the bourgeoisie presents itself.

Another strategy is the attempt to use critical voices that have spoken out on freedom and resistance in other contexts to influence today’s social discourse. However, the aim here is not to continue an emancipatory and progressive discourse, but to destroy it. In this way, they will readily instrumentalise quotes from renowned personalities such as Kurt Tucholsky, but also motifs from colonial contexts.

We are also experiencing this kind of instrumentalisation in the debate on political correctness. Nowadays, we can find various conservative feuilletons claiming that political correctness has been taken too far. In reality, accusations of cancel culture and political correctness are actually an attempt to evade criticism. However, if we are participating in public discourse, a reaction within this public discourse is democratic and legitimate. If we feel attacked by such statement, we should stand up and say: “No, this is your weapon to silence us. What you really want is permission to say whatever you want and keep our mouths shut.”

2.1. Biography – Andreas Speit

Andreas Speit is a social economist, freelance journalist, publicist and columnist for taz Nord, der Freitag, jungle.world and Blick nach Rechts. He is the author and editor of various books on right-wing extremism, including *Verqueres Denken. Gefährliche Weltbilder in alternativen Milieus* (Ch. Links Verlag, 2021).

3. Enis Maci und Pascal Richmann The University of Coffee Chains

The University of Coffee Chains, not being able to sit still, and, of course, skipping school—Helge Schneider talks about it somewhere. I can't find the video anymore. I still remember it very clearly though. The way he tells it like it's not funny even though what he's talking about is, of course, very funny—namely the compulsive act of always walking, on and on and on, utterly aimlessly, through the streets of Mülheim.

People were no longer going to coffee chains like Tchibo and Eduscho, Helge Schneider said.

They were going elsewhere, but where? Where were they going? Where to? Somewhere, anyway Later, as an inspector, he went as far as Neandertal Valley.

He whom God would show true favour,

He sends him out into the wide world

And points out His miracles

In mountain and wood and river and field.

For some time, I would often walk past the Double Burial of Oberkassel where, unlike in Neandertal, nothing was ever really going on. Only once, some post-excavations, as archeologists call them, were being carried out, that is when something's already been discovered. In this case it was a young woman and an old man with a dog. They discovered the oldest dog in the world to have ever been dug up, those workers, in that quarry there in Oberkassel, buried underneath blocks of basalt and clay, where they were now digging around to see if there was more to be found in the ground than just

After all, it's skeletons like these that tell a great deal, not like ghosts do, secretly, and not to us, but to a medium called the radiocarbon method.

“Going to school is like going to your death without knowing it, but who ever knows it, anyway? You can't speak about death after the fact.”

Elfriede Jelinek's text “School” as school reading

Or discovering East Germany with a *GDR Baedeker* travel guide (5th edition, 1990)

The beauty of the Stone Age is that school didn't exist back then and the terrible, the utterly horrifying thing about this Double Burial of Oberkassel is, of course, the DOG, the oldest ever domesticated WOLF.

To be called Uncle Wolf by anyone under sixteen.

What does Adolf Hitler want?

3. Enis Maci und Pascal Richmann – The University of Coffee Chains

BDM LTI MFG¹

Mit freundlichen Grüßen, Kind regards—the word processor I'm sitting in front of on this 12th of March, 1.34 p.m. doesn't accept M F G (which is why I sneak in spaces). It keeps on spelling it out for me, *Mit freundlichen Grüßen*, totally domesticated, a formality (the diminutive of FORM, so unnecessary)

Once, during my time of civilian service, I was picked up by the police in a compact, windowless van. Later at the station, they found a tiny lump of hash on me, at the very bottom of my trouser pockets, and while I was convicted of various petty offences, I misunderstood their *BTM*², sure, Quandt with DT, and—in my exuberance—raised my right arm and

My stomach hurts

I'm not going to school

The headmaster calls, what does he want to say to me?

What is it that only the headmaster can tell me?

My stomach hurts

I don't want to go to school

You dog

You got me on a long leash

You dog

You got me on a long leash

You dog

You got me on a long leash

On a long leash

For some time, I did actually pretend that my stomach hurt. Imagining something for so long it feels real. That's the trick of Romanticism. Eichendorff's mill wheel that rushes and roars—pure imagination. And like any good reader, my mum believed me. Only that they couldn't find anything. Mum dragged me around doctors' offices, where I sat in waiting rooms reading *The Adventures of Tintin*, where I could do whatever I wanted, as long as I followed my script in the consultation room, saying things like 'Here, yes, exactly, yes, yes, that's it, OUCH'

1 [Translator's note:] *BDM*, short for: *Bund Deutscher Mädel* = League of German Girls, a girls only wing of Nazi Germany's youth movement. *LTI*, short for the German title *Lingua Tertii Imperii*—*Notizbuch eines Philologen* = The Language of the Third Reich by Victor Klemperer. *MFG*, short for: *Mit freundlichen Grüßen* = Kind regards.

2 [Translator's note:] *BTM*, short for: *Betäubungsmittel* = controlled drugs.

3. Enis Maci und Pascal Richmann – The University of Coffee Chains

One of the many doctors saw right through my romantic trick, PSYCHOSOMATIC, she said, infuriating my mum. And because this doctor was devoted to academic medicine, I, too, had to go back to school, where I stayed for a few more years, forced to use study guides

LEEKES NEVER LEFT ANYONE HUNGRY

The Oberkassel post-excavations were led by a professor named Ralf W. Schmitz. He had already found the missing parts of the Neanderthal in Neandertal, and was now saying: “The skeleton of the 35- to 45-year-old man shows some distinctive features. He had already lost many teeth during his life. Of particular importance are a malunion fracture of the right ulna and an ossification of the right clavicle, resulting in restricted mobility of the right arm—“

Texting on your phone elongates the tendons of your thumb

Ralf W. Schmitz said: “The Cologne Cathedral was built of stone from the Drachenfels.”

Ralf W. Schmitz said: “Six jet skis pulled Konrad Adenauer’s coffin from Cologne to the Siebengebirge—upstream, to the foot of the Drachenfels. On this day, the 25th of April 1967, the retired chancellor travelled in the opposite direction to that taken by the stone, 700 years earlier.”

Ralf W. Schmitz spoke of the imminent geomagnetic reversal

So Ralf W. Schmitz delivered this dramatic monologue, and I wrote it down and sent it to Osnabrück, the city of peace. Once invited to the playwrights’ award, I forgot about the post-excavations, hopped on a train, and Later, in the theatre’s basement, I met her, Enis, pulling a stern face and, in some way, a romantic trick

I do not remember this basement at all, by the way. What I do remember: Pascal standing in front of the city theatre’s entrance, wearing sand-coloured, field trip-friendly chinos, which he today denies ever having owned.

What I do remember: us, in a pub whose name has fallen into oblivion. Yellow light, Jever on tap

What I do remember: Pascal telling me about Ralf W. Schmitz for the first time, and me, having just returned from holiday, nodding, in the Eastern and Western styles simultaneously, me, clinging to the bar and letting my head loll back and forth in affirmation, as if I were doing that dreadful stretching exercise from gym class, the point of which I only understand now, as I consider buying an ergonomic chair

Pascal spoke of the professor’s jacket, of the downy hair on the top of his head, which he had managed to catch a glimpse of, sitting in the back row of the seminar room in Bonn. Schmitz, he said, Schmitz, and I understood “Schmidt”, the name of my PE teacher, that public servant who was absolutely convinced of the truths

3. Enis Maci und Pascal Richmann – The University of Coffee Chains

of racial science, who made us run in circles around the MLPD³headquarters. We are the sower, the seed and the field, I wheezed to my friends, and they nodded knowingly, for soon this whole charade would be over, seventh period, twelfth grade. But for now we were still running, that full-chrome Lenin statue not yet standing on the street corner we passed, sweating red, on our way to the military training ground where, under the watchful eyes of Schmidt, we would in all seriousness throw spears as if WE were the Neanderthals. And I wished for nothing more than a hand axe with which to crack open Mr. Schmidt's perfectly shaped Nazi skull like a tasty nut

So Pascal said Ralf W. Schmitz, and I had no idea that this name, someone else's obsession, would soon somehow belong to me, just like this someone

And years later, we're sitting in a '99 Honda Accord, in a parking lot in Las Vegas, sipping champagne from red cups, clouds of smoke rising inside the car, thickening like any good plot, like the impermeable surface of the planet Solaris, like the smoke of the Eurocity steam locomotive that took us to the city of Westphalian Peace for the second time, thus uniting us for good. On my finger, flashes of gold as I turn up the volume on the stereo. And what Cliff & Rexonah now sing, holds true:

Romance's greatest trick

With you on that train to Osnabrück

3 [Translator's note:] *MLPD*, short for: *Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands* = Marxist Leninist Party of Germany.

3.1. Biography – Enis Maci

Enis Maci studied Literary Writing in Leipzig and Sociology of Culture in London. In 2018, the play *Mitwisser* premiered at Schauspielhaus Wien, with which she was nominated for the Mülheimer Dramatikerpreis in 2019. Her work has received several awards, including the Max Frisch-Förderpreis (2022), the Literaturpreis Ruhr (2020) and the literature prize Text & Sprache of the Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft (2019).

3.2. Biography – Pascal Richmann

Pascal Richmann studied Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Heidelberg and Literary Writing in Hildesheim. He writes theatre texts, essays, reportages and novels and is a member of the Akademie für Letalität und Lösungen. In 2017, his first book *Über Deutschland, über alles* was published (Hanser Verlag, 2017).

4. Heike Geißler Dear Readers

Dear readers,

Christa Wolf wrote: “Please. Thank you. Centuries-old laughter. The echo, monstrous, bouncing off innumerable barriers. And the suspicion that nothing more will happen than this reverberation. But only greatness justifies the trespass of the law and reconciles the guilty with himself.

A man, Kleist, afflicted with this overly acute sense of hearing, flees on the pretext of excuses he does not dare to see for what they are. Aimlessly, it seems, he sketches with this eccentric footprints the lacerated map of Europe. Happiness is the place where I am not.”¹

But what about this place? What about me? I will tell you, dear reader—I blank it all out and write only to you, in a tone reserved solely for you. It is a tone out of letters and for letters, a tone that is entirely made up of farewells, only that I do not know to what or to whom these farewells belong. Then again of course, I do know – but I do not want to give a name to what it is I am saying goodbye to.

And yes, I am clearly not even really writing to you. I am not posting these letters to you. I am imagining them to and for you. What an imprecise way of working, but it’s the only one possible for me in your case. I do not even know where to send them, I don’t even know who you are. But I have been writing to you all these years.

But back to the question: What about this place? Really meaning: What about me? This is precisely the question I do not want to answer. I use many words to avoid it, gazing over an empty plot of land, a meadow that is being worked on by a competent robotic lawnmower, always seeking my proximity, or is it me who is seeking its proximity, just so I can say: Why do you always have to be where I am?

My gaze wanders out over the property to a field where cattle sometimes graze. Behind this field, there are trees surrounding a lake. I can still see the lake through the trees—the lake in which I almost drowned a few years ago due to everything getting out of hand.

I tell you: Nothing of what I can see right now belongs to me. I belong, however, to the meadow, to the trees, to the cattle grazing just out of my sight. I belong to the lake. You can’t see it and you notice it more at night than during the day. I have stopped being exclusively human.

Yours, H.

1 Wolf, Christa: *No Place on Earth*, translated by Jan Van Heurck, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, 1982, p. 3–4

4. Heike Geißler – Dear Readers

Dear readers,

Yes, it's the goodbyes, but also the hellos. The in-betweens, the at-the-same-times. I have not managed to escape any catastrophes and yet I have not died in any wars. What is the breadth of things that cannot be escaped? I do not have anything constructive to say right now, but maybe that's a constructive way to react.

You know, the place where I live from time to time is the one H el ene Cixous describes in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*—It is a place free from daily chores and usual demands. A territory unfamiliar with hierarchies. It is a quiet place shared with the dead, with souls, with ideas formulated too tamely or too soon. A place full of potentials and unknowns. It is a state of mind between life and death, outside of racing cognition or even having amplified cognition and complex sensory apparatuses which do not stimulate a pre-rehearsed inventory of words.

It is a place I had to leave as a child. Yes, the usual entanglement of everyday life, a unique biographical disposition and the general state of the world. It was a place I could never have claimed because it was not a place, because it was me, because I was the place, part of a fairy-tale, a very specific and pseudo-autistic affair.

If you were to ask me now how to climb up a descending ladder, I could not tell you, for I am busy climbing up a descending ladder myself and there are no more words left in me for a procedure which has taken me so many years to once again master.

I am not writing you a manual.

I am writing you this: "Writing is learning to die. It's learning not to be afraid, in other words to live at the extremity of life, which is what the dead, death, give us."²

I will now repeat what Christa Wolf had Heinrich von Kleist say, as an experiment, as thoughts which are subject to days, as a thesis: "Happiness is the place where I am not."

For me, however, after so many Cixous-ladder exercises, it's more like:

Happiness is where I am.

That's about as true as it is false.

I hope you're on the road.

Yours, H.

2 Cixous, H el ene: *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, translated by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993, p. 10.

4. Heike Geißler – Dear Readers

Dear readers,

So where are you, and where am I?

And why do I keep writing to you again and again, even though I have never met any of you. At the same time I can't help saying that I do meet you in everyone. I miss you by a hair's breadth by way of everyone I meet and I miss you—always, just.

Have we already met, or have we not?

I do not seek out traces from before my lifetime. I do not wish to go beyond it.

In which daily setting have we actually failed to see each other?

I always write myself into this state of wanting to say:

How I miss you! I miss you so very much!

I am writing to combat the suspicion that I am only writing to you to stay in contact with something that would otherwise escape me as it does not “climb up the descending ladder” with me. Due to the fact I am incapable of consistent farewells, of writing, of death.

I sometimes write to you as if you were God whose favour I am begging to win, but from whom one must escape, because he probably knows nothing about constructive interactions. Then again, I do not think you are brutal gods.

While I am watching the opening of *Das Traumschiff* to distract myself from ladders, meadows, fields and lakes, a book opens to my left and I start to read and write to you what Heinrich Heine wrote to the composer Johann Hoven on 22 June 1851: “Once again, Sir, I would like to express my sincere apologies that, for the time being, I can only offer you thanks for your kind delivery. I have at least been able to write you a letter that expresses something going beyond an ordinary courtesy, namely a friendly gesture of trust. I have not been generous with such letters in my life. May my letter today then demonstrate to you my most distinguished regards.

Please be assured of these sentiments and accept my most cheerful greetings.”³

Do write to me. I already know you won't.

I'm in a hurry.

Later more.

Yours, H.

3 Heine, Heinrich: *Werke und Briefe*, Band 9: Briefe, Aufbau Verlag, Berlin und Weimar, 1980, S. 407.

4. Heike Geißler – Dear Readers

4.1. Biography – Heike Geißler

Heike Geißler is a writer and lives in Leipzig. Her most recent books are *Saisonarbeit* (Spector Books, 2014) and *Die Woche* (Suhrkamp, 2022).

5. Marie Rotkopf Blinding

Back in the days, Americans used to proclaim that only a dead Indian was a good Indian. In today's Western world it seems not even a dead Russian can be a good Russian.

A good Jew is a Jew of ashes as far as the Romantics of the *Deutsche Tischgesellschaft*, the German Table Society, in 1811 were concerned.

Later, as a refugee in Paris, Anti-Romantic Heinrich Heine wrote of Achim von Arnim, the serious German: "A living German is already a serious enough creature, let alone a dead German."¹

You must take the German people and their romantics very seriously. Yes.

Those attempting to romanticise are already dead, smoke rising from a chimney.

The *Deutsche Tischgesellschaft* was founded in 1811 in Berlin by Adam Heinrich Müller and Achim von Arnim.

Its members were Prussian reformers, senior civil servants, military officers and university professors. Among them were Clemens Brentano, Carl von Clausewitz, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Karl von Savigny and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the most important exponents of philosophical and literary Romanticism.

Their shared stance was one of anti-French nationalism, monarchism and anti-Semitism. Among their most famous table topic speeches is von Arnim's *Über die Kennzeichen des Judentums*, On The Characteristics of Judaism.

In his speech, the aristocrat echoed anti-Jewish stereotypes Christian churches had already been spreading for centuries. Not only did he endorse such resentments and religious hatred against Jews, he also reinforced them with accusations of conspiracy, deception and economic plundering, pointing out their lack of fatherland.

He went on to claim that Jewish characteristics also manifested themselves physically as a result of their hereditary diseases.

To prove his point, he proposed an experiment which involved first pounding and grinding a Jew in a mortar and then heating them up until they fully combusted. An examination of their ashes would reveal that they consisted of 50 % wickedness, 10 % inhaled silver, 5 % swallowed counterfeit bills and 4 % Christian blood "acquired through sinful mixture". Similar speeches are also known to have been made by Fichte.

From this, we can see that the Romantics not only dabbled in metaphysical spheres,

1 Heine, Heinrich: *Die romantische Schule*, Third volume, Paris–Hamburg, 1833–1836.

5. Marie Rotkopf – Blinding

wallowing in melancholic inwardness. They were also engaged in an explosive mixture of politics, art, state officialdom and nobility that had a significant impact on society.

What we really ought to take seriously is the distinctive nature of German Romanticism.

We need to separate it from English and French Romanticism.

For the English, Romanticism showed elements of a social revolution that reflected on a new industrial age, even including feminist features (Mary Shelley).

French Romanticism had strong shades of shuddering sensibility, albeit blue-eyed, as Germaine de Staël sadly demonstrated in *De l'Allemagne, On Germany*, 1810. Unlike Heine, she did not suspect a thing.

Those not taking this seriously are already dead, smoke rising from a chimney.

German Romanticism clearly went against *Les Lumières*, which crystallised itself as the zeitgeist of a counter-revolution and going against the French Enlightenment—again, not to be confused with the German Enlightenment.

German Romanticism was an evidently blinded, anti-humanist ideology which stood in opposition to the early socialist, feminist and abolitionist values of the French Revolution which endorsed Condorcet.

2022: Carl von Clausewitz is being worshipped more than ever by the (camo coloured) Green Party and the SPD. Forget about Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a devotee of Baruch Spinoza!

To understand our present and future, we need to find common threads and examine the past with our eyes wide open.

And as you well know—it all leads back to smoke rising from chimneys.

How tragic it is to have had no history since 1945.

To discuss values with German History.

In his book *Discours sur le colonialisme, Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire proved to us at great length that a civilisation dies when it deceives itself with its own principles, applying this also to Nazism.

To talk about the sovereignty of populations and democracy.

The EU is a supranational union of states whose only powerful body—the EU Commission—is not elected by any of its citizens. Something which only Germany has profited from so far.

What unites the countries of the EU is their neo-colonialism and decadence:

be it nuclear energy, drained from French power plants, or labour from Ukraine.

To continue talking about Western values, double standards, freedom of speech.

5. Marie Rotkopf – Blinding

You dream of US re-education washing away your Nazi history, even though it was the Red Army that liberated Auschwitz.

You dream of being healed, along with your anticipatory obedience.

How dare you?

Iraq 1991–2003–2015, Afghanistan 1998–2001–2015, Yugoslavia 1999,

Yemen 2002–2009–2011, Somalia 1993–2007–2011, Libya, Syria until 2015.

The United States of America create the crises they subsequently fight.

Whataboutism of US hypocrisy.

The values you defend are unthinkable without German Romanticism, because they are no longer of any use. Your romanticism is called blinding, or propaganda.

After the Germans reduced the world to smoke and ashes during the 20th century, after 27 million Russians were killed during the Second World War, some Gerd Koenen goes on to write that “Germany is a perfectly normal country” in the German magazine *Spiegel* of 4 March 2022.

Romantic Revisionism under the guise of the free world, bastard rhetoric—the subtle goal is to erase the Shoah.

Those willing to trivialise this, meet me in Tulle, France, on 9 June 1944, with the 2nd SS Panzer Division Das Reich or today in Kiev, Ukraine, underneath the Stepan Bandera monument with Andrij “Azov” Melnyk.

To talk about identity?

Only in North American.

You think that imperialist words like People of Color will protect you?

Incandescent racists you are, drawing a distinction between a Somali and a Ukrainian woman whilst flaunting your lack of power in Qatar. R2P.

Or idealising the Jewish Actor’s Studio Selenskyj, while the Israeli *Knesset* won’t even see him!

Then afterwards hurrying on to read your articles about exemplary German Jews on your smartphones *made in China*.

2021. Coronavirus:

No other country in the EU—except for Germany—made it compulsory to show your identity card in front of a shop.

And you want to continue talking about identity.

As Germans.

Then return your IDs already. *Qu’on en finisse!*

5. Marie Rotkopf – Blinding

Germans! Don't laugh too soon. You are not *re educable* and the CIA is laughing its head off.

Can you go on living in diversion forever? No, you can't.

Oh God, make the Yellows come quickly!

Perhaps, German people, you will find the path to your bright destiny, breaking the yoke, and even if there is no mirror along the perilous shore, with which to behold yourselves, you will reject romanticism and find the freedom to love yourselves.

5.1. Biography – Marie Rotkopf

Marie Rotkopf is an author, poet and cultural critic. Her most recent books include *Antiromantisches Manifest* (Nautilus, 2017), *Rejected–Designs for the European Flag* (Wirklichkeit Books, 2020) and *Fetzen* with Marcus Steinweg (Matthes & Seitz, 2022).

6. Colophon

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6. Colophon

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