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European Dialogue



POEMS OF LIBERTY

Human Rights Edition '22



Imprint

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Foreword

When the first Poems of Liberty edition was launched exactly a year ago to celebrate the International Human Rights Day the aim was to feature well known or interesting poems that illustrate the importance of human rights, and warn of the dangers of neglecting them.

In the following months Poems of Liberty saw three other editions, and received much attention and support. For this reason we decided not to dust off existing poems to repurpose them for the topic of the editions anymore, as much as we cherished reading and rereading famous poems, researching their and their authors' history and background. It is time to take a leading role in driving poetry in furthering liberty in Europe and in fact the whole world. It is time to give voice to a new generation of poets, who reflect on the issues of the world today.

That is why we launched a competition among poets. The following edition features the best works in three topics: Press Freedom, Diversity, and Disinformation & Democracy.

We were delighted and not a little surprised that we received over 30 poems from 4 continents.

It is not only the number of poems that presented us with a difficult choice. The quality of the works exceeded expectations. The topics, imagery, style and background of the poems ensured that reading the submissions was a delightful journey but a devil of a choice.

In the following pages, you can find our choice for the best poems submitted for the current edition, celebrating International Human Rights Day. Our hope is that you will take as much joy in reading them as we did, but also that the poems go way beyond the entertainment factor and will call attention to the importance of human rights, and in fact poetry.

Poetry has a long history in shaping our world. Poetry predates literacy. Stories were told in verse as rhymes aid memory. The Epic of Gilgamesh or the Iliad are prime examples of this. Their influence is so vast that they are even read and taught today.

Poetry knows no borders. Even before the globalised world we live in today, cultures influenced each other through poetry. Shakespeare's Hamlet was probably played on a British ship off the coast of Sierra Leone for local dignitaries in the early 17th century, a couple of years after it was written. Persian poets and poems were much enjoyed in Europe over the past centuries and the seeming simplicity of Japanese haikus still captivate readers throughout the world.

Politics do not go without poetry either. Churchill quoted poems in his speeches, and even wrote poetry himself. Former British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson also admitted he reads poetry, and he caused an international scandal by reciting Rudyard Kipling's Mandalay in Myanmar.

Poetry is not always full of love and sensitivity. When the Roman poet Catullus was accused of being soppy, he wrote a poem of such fierce expletives, that it was censored for a long time. The fictional character of James Bond, who is far from being overly sensitive, also recites poems in the books.

Yet there are poems which sensitise people. They empathize the horrors of war, slavery and other issues that are still very much present. Despite the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is a great achievement in the history of humankind, there is much to be done. Rights of people are still trumped today and more efforts are needed to change this. This publication is a drop in the ocean. Without drops, however, there is no ocean. The poems within this edition can stir giant waves to call attention to problems, and motivate people to do more. Poetry is not a forgotten medium. Nor is it an ignored one. According to a survey conducted in 2017, the number of Americans who read poetry has doubled since 2012. In a globalised world, it can be true in most places. In a globalised world, it is easier than ever before to read poetry from all corners of the world.

As always, you will also find a few comics by one of our Animate Europe artists in this publication. Animate Europe is a project by FNF to make political issues more accessible and fun through the medium of comics. This time, we are happy to include artwork and insights by our artist Marco Tabilio. Finally, to introduce this edition of Poems of Liberty you will find a poem by one of the editors of this issues, Máté Hajba, after the editorial.

We wish you a happy reading, and we thank all the people who submitted their great works!



Máté Hajba

Director
Free Market Foundation



Jana Weber

Human Rights & EU Funding Manager
European Dialogue of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation

The Printing Press

Máté Hajba

Clickety clack
Tolls the great printing press,
With rickety roll
Flow the words,
Virgin white heaps
Of turgid tight sheets
Are bound to be bound
Into a book to be found
In all nooks and the crannies of worlds.

Whirling wide worlds
Of all peoples of earth,
What makes it whole
Holds the power:
With all reason and rhyme
Knowledge is prime.
It Covers all fora,
Adores the agora,
And doors of the ivory tower.

Sweet or sour
All nations devour
Information
Galore.
It's true or it's false,
Smooth, or it's coarse,
Pleasing or teasing
Easing or screaming,
Beaming men want all the more

Impressions press bore
On paper hands tore
Are impressed later
Under each man's hat.
It's interpretation
Is not up to a nation,
It's a blessing or curse,
Each man his own universe,
And that's what some people don't get.

"Toll this or that
Instead of clickety clack,
Muffle the sound of the great printing press,
Worm through the words,
Let one voice be heard,
That one is regal
So oppress the people,
And oppress the truth.
Democracy and diversity
Cosmopolitanism in a city
And thoughts that run loose,
They must be oppressed."

As hard as it is
It must not come to this,
Beware those who voice
The last verse with a hiss,
Beware who takes away choice
Whether it is
A burden or bliss.

Let the press run
With its free wit,
You can interpret it
The way you see fit,
But when the clacks of the press are shun
You can be certain that Liberty's gone.

About the Poem

"The Printing Press is an allegory for freedom of information, and freedom of press, how information is spread, how it is interpreted, which is up to the individuals, and how authoritarians want to silence freedom of press and tell people how there is one interpretation and no place for opinions."

Press Freedom

Máté Hajba

Where would we be without free press? The first move of any suppressor is to silence journalists who investigate violations of democratic principles, rule of law and human rights. Many countries still lack a truly free press. These are the places where people's rights are violated on a daily basis. These are the places that need help.

Even in Europe there are problems. People grew up in Eastern Europe under communist regimes that disallowed any critical voice, any investigative journalism, any diverse voice, and in fact any diversity. These people remember listening to the scratchy sounds of Radio Free Europe, which despite the efforts of the communist regimes to jam it, penetrated through the iron curtain. It was a beacon of hope and liberty.

People during communist oppression organised their own way to distribute free press. Even printers and typewriters were registered or banned for personal use, yet the strong will of people for free and truthful information finds a way. People distributed samizdats, which were underground publications of books, newspapers, and leaflets.

The fall of the communist regimes brought a respite and media outlets now operating in relative freedom spread news and opinions. This is in line with the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

No surprise that when the treaty was signed, the Soviet Union and its Eastern Block puppets abstained. The fall of communism presented a rise in human rights in the region, yet the struggle for human rights is far from over.

According to Freedom House, the past decade saw a downward trend in media freedom. Some Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, are considered only partially free. In addition, there is also a global decline in Media Freedom, thanks to the rise of populist leaders.

Nowadays, thanks to the internet, there is usually a way for people to read news, but it is not always known to all. VPNs are used to circumvent government bans on certain websites.

Without freedom of press people cannot get adequately informed, cannot voice their criticism and opinion. Without freedom of press, this edition would be impossible. Let the following poems be reminders that Freedom of Press is a main pillar of freedom and democracy.

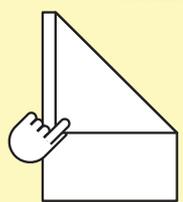
All three of them do this marvellously. One of them, *"The Flower of Press Freedom"* by Helen Wirth, is from the point of view of press freedom, how there are those who want to repress it and how freedom fights back.

Berfin Turan's *"About Courage"* shows how difficult yet necessary it is to be courageous, even if it is not a glorious feeling. Stepping up for press freedom is extremely difficult yet brave.

As a bonus, we decided to include Hoda Sarkeshik's *"Our Words Will Fly"*, which talks about how governments want to suppress words but how they are still spoken. In Iran where she writes from it is extremely true today. It is very brave of her that she decided to contribute to Poems of Liberty and we thank her especially.

rights
climate
politics

world NEWS



Fold this page this way.



Journalism is a dangerous profession

Worldwide, journalists face harassment, imprisonment, violence, or death simply for doing their jobs. From 2016 to the end of 2020, UNESCO recorded 400 killings of journalists. Nine times out of ten, the case remains unresolved.

Other threats against journalists, online and off-line, continue to grow. Numerous reports and studies confirm that threats inordinately affect women journalists and those who represent minority groups.

In addition to the brutal threats, "soft" menaces to the freedom of information include restrictions to access press conferences, legislation to counter "fake news", lawsuits intended to censor, intimidate, silence and burden journalists with the cost of a legal defense.

The Flower of Press Freedom

Helene Wirth

I have a pencil
You have a sword
You try to convince me
without a word

Instead, you try to intimidate
Against freedom, free speech
And any debate

Why are you scared?
Of words and free people's power?
Look, I am like a colourful flower:

People take care of me
to have a free life
But you cut my bloom
with a rusty knife

I have long taken roots
always sprout new blossoms
Despite all your helpless restrictions

My seeds are sown
People fight for my freedom
and for their own!

About the Poem

"This poem is about press freedom. The perspective of the lyrical I is the press freedoms perspective and it addresses all the authoritarian rulers, who try to exert pressure on the media. Press freedom is compared to a flower, which is nothing strong at the first sight. However, it gives a confident impression, because of all the people who take care of that flower and fight for press freedom."



Helene Wirth, (formerly Übelhack), is a PhD scholarship holder of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom and is doing her doctorate at RWTH Aachen University in the Department of Political Science. Her dissertation deals with the influence of socio-structural characteristics on voting decisions in Bundestag elections in Germany. Democracy needs freedom. And freedom needs the press. Therefore, Helene Wirth would like to work as a liberal journalist in the long term, for which her participation in the liberal Media Academy of the FNF is an important cornerstone.

About Courage

Berfin Turan

Courage doesn't feel courageous at all.
One would expect to stand there
steadfastly with a proud chest,
head high, eyes straight,
but you feel puny,
hands and voice trembling
and simply try not to fall over.
Courage doesn't feel like courage at all,
but more like a sick stomach.
Courage is being naked,
to undress in front of others,
not knowing if they would do the same.
To stand in front like a crab without its shell
and speak out, speak up, speak loudly,
even if people judge.
Courage is then not to run away directly,
even if you are agitated and almost throw up,
but rather to command your reluctant legs
to stand still and withstand the storm
from within and from without.
Even if everything inside you is pulling you
to crawl under blankets and hide.
Courage is not a swelling chest.
Courage is overcoming and enduring.
Self-anxious, but self-confident.
For yourself and more for others.
Again and again I have to remind myself,
Courage is being vulnerable,
not disguising it.

About the Poem

"The poem is about being brave, even if it is not necessarily a pleasant feeling, as it is often embellished and expected. It is about the difficulty and the enormous effort to be courageous. Showing courage, speaking out about things and standing up for values that many people might judge you for or, in the case of journalists in repressive countries, might even put you in danger for, is hard and not always appreciated enough, but nevertheless vital for democracies. These are small battles, but they are battles that carry and move forward."

Über Mut

(German version)

Mut fühlt sich so gar nicht mutig an.
Man würde erwarten unerschütterlich
dazustehen mit stolzer Brust,
den Kopf gereckt, gerader Blick,
dabei fühlt man sich mickrig,
die Hände und die Stimme zittrig
und versucht schlicht nicht umzufallen.
Mut fühlt sich so gar nicht wie Mut an,
sondern mehr nach flauem Magen.
Mut ist, nackt zu sein,
sich vor anderen ausgezogen haben,
unwissend, ob sie es auch tun würden.
Sich gleich einem Krebs ohne Schale
vorne hinstellen und auszusprechen,
anzusprechen, laut zu sprechen,
auch wenn Leute urteilen.
Mut ist dann nicht direkt wegzulaufen,
obwohl man innerlich aufgewühlt sich fast übergibt,
sondern den widerwilligen Beinen befiehlt,
stehen zu bleiben und dem Sturm
von innen und von außen standzuhalten,
wenn wirklich alles in einem danach zieht,
sich unter Decken zu verkriechen.
Mut ist keine anschwellende Brust.
Mut ist Überwinden, Überstehen und Ertragen.
Selbstängstlich, aber selbstbewusst.
Für sich und mehr für Andere.
Immer wieder muss ich mich erinnern,
Stärke ist Verletzlichkeit,
nicht es zu verschleiern.



Berfin Turan grew up in Darmstadt as the daughter of Turkish immigrants and is currently studying Economics and German Studies at the University of Heidelberg. In her free time, she enjoys writing poetry and texts about topics that are important to her, such as growing up in two cultures, social justice and love.

She has been active as a poetry slammer and now publishes her art on her dedicated Instagram page @berfeels.

Our Words Will Fly

Hoda Sarkeshik

For all the times we wanted to say something but we couldn't.
For all the letters that were written in our mouths,
but their way was blocked before they came out.
But the hands that blocked our letters will disappear one day
We remove them.
And we wave our hands to them.
Our words will fly
And they will cross all paths
And they are heard in some part of the world they should be
heard.
So come and take my pen, I can still write in my head.
I will still write till the day I find a way to let it be heard.

About the Poem

"Freedom of expression is one of the most important rights we have to honor and I believe the journalists and press are the ones defending it the most out of everyone. That's why I wanted to write something on that matter and how governments violate this right from time to time."



Hoda Sarkeshik "I believe words have the power to do so much. We just have to let them do so."

Diversity

Jana Weber

Diversity is a broad term and what comes to our mind right away will greatly differ, depending on our background, worldviews and lived experiences. Diversity, be it in gender, sexual orientation, ability, religious or national background, conditions and enriches our societies. However, not everyone sees it that way. Populists and right-wing forces today still regularly use hostile narratives towards migrants and LGBT+ communities.

In recent months, killings of LGBT+ members in Slovakia and the USA have made headlines and in the wake of an increase of similar incidents, this prompts the question whether political environments have been enabling such behavior. This can happen, for example, through implied impunity in political messaging, as we have seen in other cases, like the killing of Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, or outright hate speech, as in the case of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

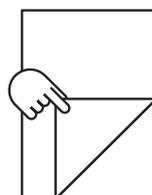
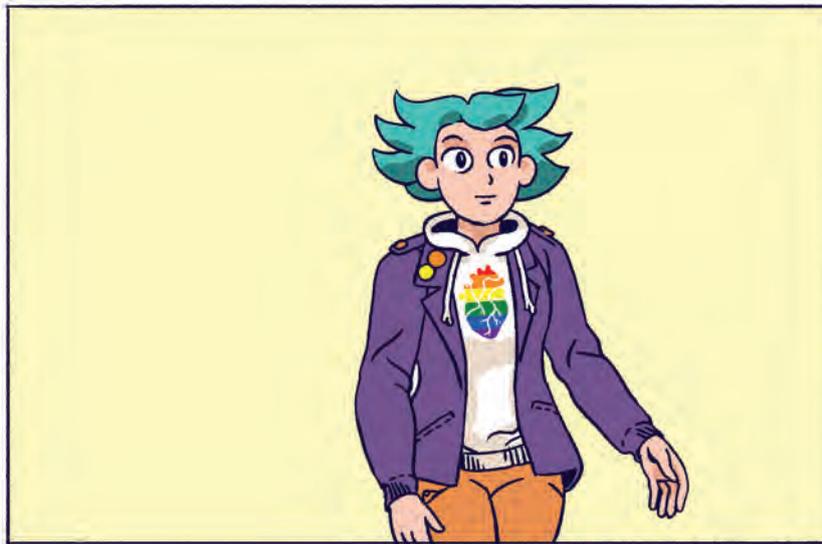
Imagine being afraid to hold your loved one's hand in public, or to open up about your sexual orientation to your family. While more and more members of the LGBT+ community in Europe are open about their sexual orientation, their level of discrimination and harassment they encounter often daily has not reduced significantly in recent years. As a result, many battle mental health issues. Today, many countries still see mental health services as social taboo or stigma and providers may not be (financially) readily available, especially in rural areas.

In his poem *"I wish"*, Janik Lober dives into what it means to grow up as a homosexual youth in a rural, Protestant region in the south of Germany. He explores the emotional world and social reality that LGBT+ people may face, to raise awareness and promote kindness.

Julia Christina Englén-Kemmerzehl chose a different approach in her poem *"The (F*) Fort"*, as she describes the encounter of an EU case-officer with an LGBT+ asylum seeker. She moves from the responsibility of societies and member states, to the EU as institutional guarantor and promoter of human rights within its borders and in its outreach.

Safeguarding LGBT+ rights in Europe has been an uphill battle for the EU in recent years. Initiatives like the LGBT-free zones in Poland (which Marco talks about in his comic), laws prohibiting comprehensive sexual education, and the "anti-LGBT law" in Hungary are only a few examples of state sponsored efforts that target the community. The EU champions the slogan "unity in diversity" as well as equality and non-discrimination as core values and fundamental rights, enshrined in its Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, in its LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025. Adopted in November 2020, this strategy is a big step in the EU's commitment to ensure fundamental rights of LGBT+ people, as it sets expectations throughout all Directorate-Generals of the European Commission (EC), to mainstream LGBT+ rights in their work across sectors. However, DG Justice has started most activities so far (like legislation on parenthood recognition). A clearer allocation of responsibility, resources and activity timelines across DGs, as well as the further inclusion of European LGBT+ networks in relevant mechanisms and processes is therefore necessary as ILGA Europe points out in their assessment. In addition, the EC's aim to not only protect sexual orientation, but also trans, intersex and non-binary people, is currently not reflected in the understanding of the legal protection in the EU Treaty (which only protects sexual orientation). The EC should strive to challenge this narrow understanding, to reflect its comprehensive approach.

Even though the picture seems to be quite gloomy, there is hope, especially in youth. LGBT+ youth reports more support among their peers in school; they take to the streets when governments pass discriminatory laws; they flood the internet with solidarity and public pressure on politicians. The youth of today will not be silenced and we see them gaining ground. Here's to hoping and fighting for an EU that lives up to its values and in which every person, regardless of their background, identification or orientation can live safely and reach their fullest potential, to continue enriching our societies.



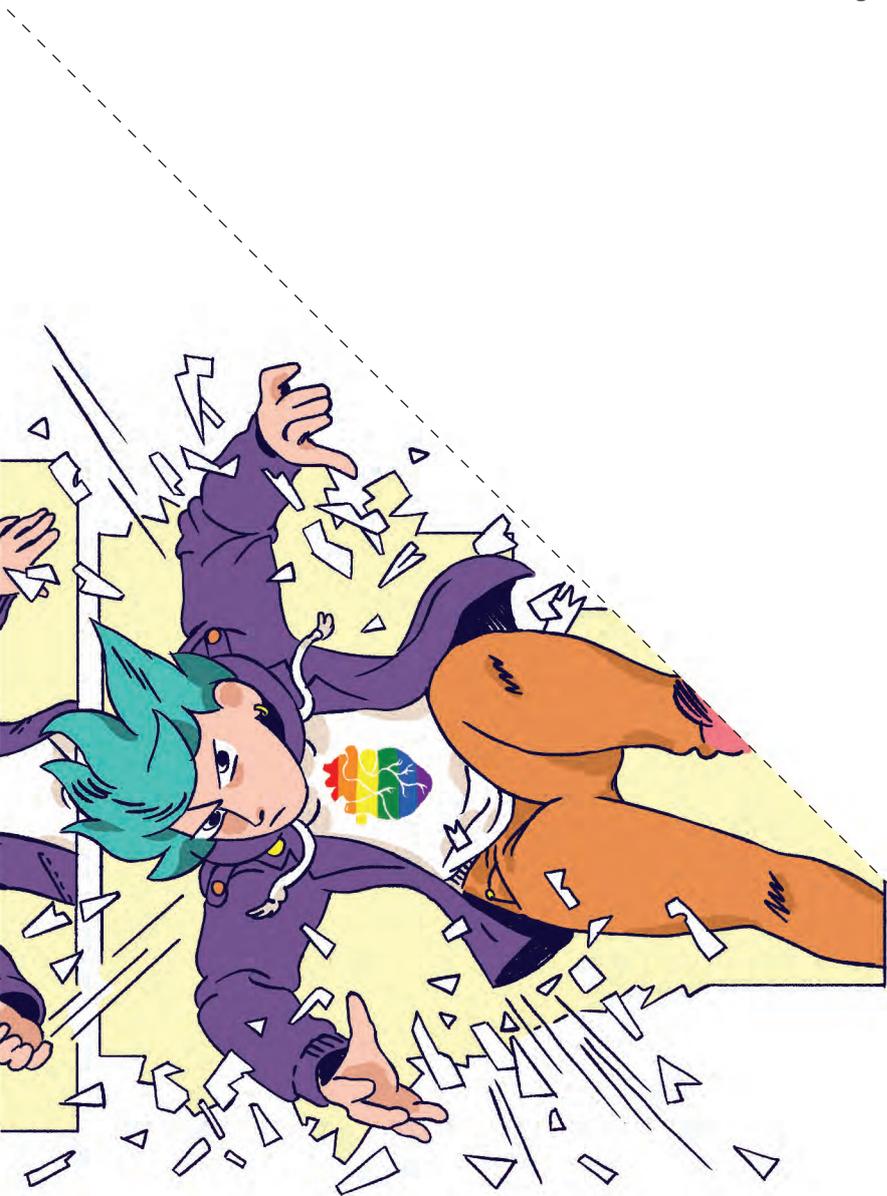
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LGBT - Free Zones

While LGBT+ rights and openness in society are on the rise in many Member States, governments in countries like Poland and Hungary have been actively countering this development, cracking down on individuals, as well as civil society.

“LGBT free zones” are municipalities and regions of Poland that have declared themselves unwelcoming of what they described as "LGBT ideology", in order to ban equality marches and other LGBTQI+ events. By June 2020, some 100 municipalities and five voivodeships, encompassing a third of the country, had adopted resolutions which have been characterized as "LGBT-free zones".

Since July 2020, the European Union has denied funding from the Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund to municipalities that have adopted "LGBT-free" declarations, which are in violation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.



I Wish

Jannik Lober

I wish
I wish
you had
not kept silent.
I wish,
you had told me
what of love
was left for you.

You learned to love
in the corner of your eye,
To confess in whispers.
For you realised you were
like a whistling kettle in a silent movie,
written in lemon juice.

Your love, that was
the fear of shared showers,
of the wrong click,
of the bomb under the flagpole,
of a telltale word.

Your love, that was
the ring on Frodo's hand,
letters never sent, buried
in the heavy wood of a theatre box
and masks in the shape of faces.

Your love, that was
the summer screech of cicadas
the shadow scent of yew hedge
and nosebleeds behind lido walls:
"One wrong word and I'll kill you!"

Your love, that was
a sewn-up mouth
and the finger of the village priest
drawing a pink triangle in the air:
"The Lord made them male and female!"

Your love, that was
fetal position on the bed,
in your head a sea of blackness
without shore and without bottom and
Robinson Crusoe, stranded without Friday.

Your love, that was
a paper boat in distress,
white as shattered bones,
shards of pearl in the sand;
Mayday, mayday, mayday...

Your love, that was
January snow on bare apple branches,
fists clenched in your pockets
and almost spoken words:
"Mum, I have to tell you something."

I wish
I wish
you had
not kept silent.
I wish
I wish
I had listened.

Ich wünscht

(German version)

Ich wünscht
ich wünscht
du hättest
nicht geschwiegen.
Ich wünscht,
du hättest mir gesagt,
was von der Liebe
für dich übrig war.

Zu lieben lerntest du
im Augenwinkelblick,
zu gestehen im Flüsterton.
Denn dir wurde klar, du bist
wie ein Pfeifkessel im Stummfilm,
geschrieben in Zitronensaft.

Deine Liebe, das war
die Angst vor Sammelduschen,
vorm falschen Klick,
vor der Bombe unterm Fahnenmast,
vor einem verräterischen Wort.

Deine Liebe, das war
der Ring an Frodos Hand,
nie abgeschickte Briefe, vergraben
im schweren Holz einer Theaterkiste
und Masken in Gesichterform.

Deine Liebe, das war
Zikadenkreischen im Sommer,
der Schattenduft von Eibenhecken
und Nasenblut hinter Freibadmauern:
„Ein falsches Wort und ich bring dich um!“

Deine Liebe, das war
ein zugenähter Mund
und der Finger des Dorfpfarrers,
der ein rosa Dreieck in die Luft malt:
„Der Herr schuf Mann und Frau!“

Deine Liebe, das war
Embryonalstellung auf dem Bett,
in deinem Kopf ein Meer aus Schwärze
ohne Ufer und ohne Grund und
Robinson Crusoe, gestrandet ohne Freitag.

Deine Liebe, das war
ein Papierboot in Seenot,
weiß wie zerborstene Knochen,
Perlensplitter im Sand;
Mayday, Mayday, Mayday...

Deine Liebe, das war
Januarschnee auf kahlen Apfelzweigen,
geballte Fäuste in der Manteltasche
und fast gesprochene Worte:
„Mama, ich muss dir was sagen.“

Ich wünscht
ich wünscht
du hättest
nicht geschwiegen.
Ich wünscht,
ich wünschte
ich hätte zugehört.

About the Poem

"The poem *Ich wünscht* is about a homosexual youth growing up in a rural, Protestant region in the south of Germany and his close family environment. Central themes are loneliness, lack of understanding, violence, the desire for revelation, shame and remorse on the part of all involved - an experience that (too) many people are still going through all over Europe and the world."



Born and raised in southwestern Germany, **Jannik Lober** studied Japanese Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Tübingen (Germany) and Dōshisha University (Kyōto, Japan). Several of his short stories have been published in various German-language literary journals, anthologies and blogs. He lives and works in Tübingen.

The (F*)Fort

Julia Christina Englén-Kemmerzehl

You are standing in front of me
 black, yellow, orange, pink, red, blue sometimes even green.
 You ask me to be seen?
 You come from Europe, Africa, Americas, Asia,
 Oceania and the Poles.
 Asking me to behave like my promised role.
 You eat what I eat,
 You breath as I breath,
 Your heart beats.
 You are asking me to let you in
 You just want to love. Without restrain
 You ask me to open the gate. Wait!
 And to be equal mates.
 But the key has been lost in unconscious hate.
 You just ask me to relate. I am truly sorry, fate.
 You are just too late.

About the Poem

"The wings of freedom are rare and sacred. The EU is guarding freedoms, however, are we cutting the wings of freedom of people from outside the fort? Human rights of individuals from the LGBT+ community are still violated inside the EU. To fight against this injustice, the EU bodies such as the Parliament and the Commission are trying to address breaches to promote and protect the LGBT+ community within the Union. However, it is not only within the EU, that the LGBT+ community faces discrimination and marginalisation. To protect human rights (as the EU aims to do), it is important that the EU stands up for individuals from the LGBT+ community who seek international protection, as the LGBT+ community faces persecution in many parts of the world.

The poem is about the EU case-officers that meet the asylum seekers from the LGBT+ community from around the world in today's political climate in the EU."



Julia Christina Englén-Kemmerzehl

graduated from Lund University, Sweden in spring of 2013 with a law degree (LL.M). Since then she has worked as a migration lawyer in the field of asylum as well as a legal expert for a legal tech company. At the moment, she is pursuing a PhD at Regensburg University. Moreover, she is a fellow of Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation for Freedom since fall 2021. In her spare time, she loves to read and play with words.

Democracy & Disinformation

Jana Weber

The term „democracy” literally means “rule by the people”. However, a lot has happened since its origins in ancient Greece and history has seen the term more loosely or strictly applied throughout the world. In Europe, we nowadays most commonly find some form of representative democracy (with the notable exception of Switzerland), in which citizens are represented by elected officials and political parties, which form governments based on majorities, to put it in a simplified manner. To top it off, 27 European States have by now joined together in a supranational political and economic effort known as the European Union; an organisation with its own elected country representatives and different institutions. Democracy is growing, and yet we keep hearing that it is under attack.

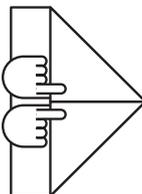
One major threat to our democracies are populists, which have the annoying tendency to turn into autocrats down the road. Their anti-establishment attitude threatens the integrity of the EU, and although populist like to present themselves as champions of the people against corrupt elites, more often than not they are corrupt themselves. One thing is clear; populism is neither a thing of the past nor a new trend. It is a challenge that liberal democracies face every day, which has shown to have a relatively solid following over the past decades, and that gains strength with every crisis, every little crack that it finds.

Especially throughout the recent pandemic, populists have been promoting disinformation to feed suspicion and distrust, therefore posing a direct threat to press freedom, democracy and the rule of law. Prominent leaders like Donald Trump, but also smaller parties that disguise themselves as “worried citizens”, like the German *Alternative für Deutschland*, have helped populist narratives, often driven by hate and at the expense of marginalising a certain group of people, find their way into our dinner table conversations and become seemingly more societally acceptable. In his poem “*I Used to Have a Family*”, Greg Beatty visualises this phenomenon in the example of a family that has been divided and estranged by disinformation in their everyday life in the USA.

The threat to liberal institutions and democracies is a real one. It is therefore essential for liberal thinking individuals, organisations and parties, to raise awareness on these issues and serve as a platform of open dialogue to address these concerns, so that populists cannot instrumentalise them. To this end, Lena Rüscher invites us to reflect and challenge ourselves, as we navigate the information space and learn the intent behind the messaging we receive, in her poem “*Disinformed, deformed, malformed*”.

Being flooded with news in the online and offline world every day can be overwhelming. While a lot of disinformation online (like clickbait) might seem obvious, there is a whole world of peer-to-peer disinformation on messenger services like Whatsapp (think of that one uncle that sends articles into the family chat), as well as more sophisticated disinformation efforts by foreign actors like Russia and China. Especially the latter is often erroneously thought of only affecting governments and important actors, while there have been intense and widespread operations to influence public perceptions and actions. A few examples in recent year include efforts to change election outcomes in the EU and the USA, as well as stirring negative sentiments against the war in Ukraine.

Beyond regulatory and governmental efforts at the national and EU level, media literacy is an important tool, which needs to be included in our educational system. It is vital to equip future generations, growing up as digital natives, with the tools needed to recognise disinformation and dangerous narratives. At the same time, the EU needs to continue its crackdown on countries like Hungary, which through its process of state capture of media has created an environment in which the public, especially in rural areas, can hardly access independent media and information. Disinformation has always been there and it is likely to stay. The answer to this challenge at this point is two-fold: On the one hand, we should continue pursuing efforts to counter its spread, be it through regulatory frameworks or the increased use of AI software. On the other hand, and this is a task we can all participate in, we have to promote access to information and the tools to navigate it effectively, to equip ourselves with a shield and sword to fight the threat of disinformation.



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Conspiracy theories

A conspiracy theory is an explanation for an event or situation that invokes a conspiracy by sinister and powerful groups, often political in motivation, when other explanations are more probable. The term has a negative connotation, implying that the appeal to a conspiracy is based on prejudice or insufficient evidence.

Often far from being harmless mythologies, conspiracy theories generate actual violence. It is the case of Q-Anon, a grown online belief system that claims the existence of a dark state ruled by infanticides, pedophiles and blood drinkers. In the context of Q-Anon, born and spread above all in the USA, murders and violence have been committed.

Conspiracy theories play on people's primary emotions and the hatred they generate, especially online, is often directed at marginal groups of people.



I Used to Have a Family

Greg Beatty

I used to have a family.
 We used to be together.
 We were not perfect.
 Cousins fought over toys.
 Aunts and uncles drank too much.
 Old crap surfaced over stuffing.
 But it used to be a family.

I used to have an uncle.
 I thought him suave.
 He drank dry martinis, told
 dry jokes with a dry laugh.
 Now he only jokes
 about owning the libs.

I used to have a brother.
 I thought him harmless,
 if feckless, a literal clown
 with dreams of performance.
 Now he "just asks questions"
 about alien sperm in vaccines.

I used to have a cousin.
 We played endless baseball,
 ran through creeks and fields.
 Now he shares blurry pictures
 proving Obama a demon,
 a Muslim, a prostitute, Satan,
 and his wife Michelle a man.

I used to have a family.
 Now I have Facebook
 message chains that throb
 with distrust. Algorithms
 offer us deals, blind us
 with mirrors of our darkest
 selves, funhoused without
 fun. We don't even share
 a reality, let alone pie.

About the Poem

"Disinformation is usually discussed related to politics and society. These public aspects of disinformation are crucial, but one area that is also important, and that I find under-discussed, is how disinformation affects the personal bonds between people, dividing family and friends. Since I had experienced this in my family, I wrote this poem about the experience."



Greg Beatty lives in Bellingham, Washington in the United States. He enjoys walking his dog and taking care of his grandkids. He has written everything from jokes about cows to poems about stars. Some of his short stories are available on Payhip: <https://payhip.com/GregBeatty>

Disinformed, deformed, malformed

Lena Rüsçpler

What is true?
Who is truthful?
What is trust?
Who is trustworthy?

Thin threads dictate the movements of so many,
Thin threads dictate the movements of the thoughts,
Thin and subtle and inconspicuous, yet highly dangerous.
Who holds those threads and for what purpose?

Who is right?
What is rightful?
Who is reliable?
And who is lying?

Thin threads enclose the newsfeed of so many,
Thin threads enclose the imagination, forming a distorted reality,
Thin, yet constricting and unyielding,
forcing into malformed shape the mind.
Why do so many not detect the apparent lies?
Why do they not dismantle the disguise?

What is hate?
Who fosters hatred?
What is help?
Who is helpful?

Let your reason be your scissors,
Let your rationale be your torch,
Cut the threads, however thin they may be,
Cast off your puppet's fetters.
Stop being clay in the hands of storytellers,
Don't be formed by being disinformed.
Let yourself be your liberating force.

About the Poem

"Democratic societies desperately depend on a certain "common ground", an agreement between their citizens of what is considered right and desirable. However, this "common ground" is exceedingly threatened by fake news, especially on the internet. Every information obtained – be it correct or a blunt lie – is automatically stored in one's memory and will ultimately affect one's opinions and actions. In my poem, I intent to demonstrate how intransparent the media has become and how powerful stakeholders – metaphorically "puppeteers" – can foster unsubstantiated opinions by spreading fake news which may lead to irrational hatred, agitation, societal unrest. To counteract this dangerous notion, I would like to encourage the people to question their sources, always reflect and challenge themselves when it comes to disinformation that is disguised as information."



Lena Rüsçpler, born in 2003, is a medical student at the University of Hamburg, Germany, and scholarship-holder of the Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation. During her one-year stay at the Truro High School for Girls in Cornwall, UK, she discovered her passion for the English language and poetry alike.

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