

We have to talk about the coronavirus. Despite the massive consequence it had on our lives, there seems to be a growing taboo about discussing it on a personal level. In this environment, the fatigue and boredom of a world without community easily incites a desire to use the arts as a means of escapism. Indeed literature (especially the time-consuming variant of long-form prose) presents a perfect opportunity to follow Erasmus' old command to turn away from the rather grim veil of this world and lose ourselves in another. Discussing the pandemic in an editorial like this may therefore seem unwelcome. Yet while we would all rather that this was not happening, we cannot pretend otherwise.

Writing as young people with no known risk factors to the virus, our lives are now defined around the impossible task of living somewhat normally during a pandemic. We muddle through online seminars that struggle to simulate once lively classroom discussions. We reminisce over time spent with friends now distanced by cyclical lockdown and pass through days spent without reason or meaningful opportunity to leave our home. This experience does not compare to the suffering and real isolation of those with high-risk exposure to COVID-19 and those who love them, nor the sacrifices forced upon healthcare workers. It does, nonetheless, add to an underlying feeling long governing many of our lives: disconnection. The enforced solitude of the pandemic confronts us with ourselves—something we may not have done in a very long time.

The external and social ways by which we have defined ourselves are gone. Without this structure of meaning, the tendency is towards distraction: whether in the Sisyphean tasks of work; streaming binges, or occasional bouts of fear. We hope to wait this pandemic out—and with the recent news of a workable vaccine, we may feel close to ultimate victory. In the meantime, at least, these distractions do not make us any happier, and they only distract from the thing that makes us unhappy. Ultimately, they lead to a sense of inaction and powerlessness.

What this pandemic forces us to confront is our own insignificance. Staying at home is our primary weapon against the virus, yet this inactivity hardly feels like activism. The effects of this encounter, and this isolation, may linger for the rest of our lives. We now reckon with a heightened awareness of our own unimportance in the world. Not only are we unable to visit the ones we love most, but the potential rescue is decided by mathematical formulae employed by NPHET. Progress towards the next stages of our lives is now ruled more by the stages of vaccine trials than our own ambition or discipline. To add insult to injury, our problems are small. Everyone is too worried for their own lot to bother with these faux-teenage melodramas about lost time and endless uncertainty. What's obvious to us now, perhaps the only takeaway, is that the old systems that confidently narrated our lives are as fragile as we are.

This fragility can make us feel a sort of powerlessness, but of a different kind to that which we may feel in everyday life. Our furious, egotistical reactions to the pandemic ultimately descend from an unwelcome awareness of the universe's indifference to us—yet another “so it goes” of cosmic change. Yet while the world can afford not to care about us, we must care about the world. At the end of an arrogant chapter of human history, where we have compressed time and space, knitted our globe together and built the capacity to beam our ideas instantaneously around the world, we have come to a humbling conclusion: that we

have not designed the world, but that the world designed us. This realisation, perhaps, belies the strange feeling of connection we now feel, knowing we are only human beings briefly bound together in a world not made for us. There may be a power, however, in appreciating the resilience of that connection.

Even in writing this editorial, it is obvious how different it will be to release an issue now than before. There will be no pub conversation with the writers found herein, no running into old friends at launch night. Our abiding memories around this issue will not be stacking copies together at the Trinity Publications stalls around a busy campus, but of scheduling a series of social media posts and sending this file into the online netherworld. However, it is still a living magazine. We feel that the work hereafter are excellent pieces of prose literature. In reading them, we felt a common thread in their portrayal of isolation—perhaps for you, they can offer a pleasant distraction. Trying to communicate through that feeling is the central task facing all of us now. These stories might suggest some idea on where to begin.

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