



I'M SORRY THIS IS LATE
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I am late in delivering my yearbook entry. This is in part because I kept putting off writing it, and in part because I wanted to wait to write it until I had missed all that was good about the Wiko and had forgotten all that was *nicht sehr gut*. It has been long enough now that I cannot remember what it was that I was supposed to have forgotten. In this state of amnesia, I can begin.

Andrea, Vera, Maike, Daniel, Katharina, Daniela, Dunia, Petria, Ursula, Eva, Thorsten, Barbara – it is hard to know how to praise this extraordinary group of people. When my family and I arrived, they made us feel like we had come home, only this home was nicer and cleaner and better equipped than ours, and everything in it ran smoothly. If asked to name the one thing I am most grateful for, it would be Andrea’s organization of our children’s schooling at the Johannisches Sozialwerk Kita, in a large and lovely building on the other side of Herthasee. What I will always remember is sitting on the balcony of our apartment one morning in September and hearing the voices of our boys carry across the lake. They speak German beautifully and secretively now – in whispers to one another, so that we don’t understand, and to their German-speaking babysitters, who are responsible for making sure they do not lose the language. Even if I had accomplished nothing at the Wiko, this would have been enough to justify my year there. (For me, at least.)

But I did manage to accomplish some things, even with lockdown and the intermittent school closures. I finished two new annotated editions of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which were both published in September, shortly after we left the Wiko. I wrote three chapters of the book I was supposed to be working on, *Post-Discipline*, and two scholarly articles related to it. But what my time at the Wiko really allowed me to do was to pursue a second and complementary career as a critic. I wrote six magazine pieces for *The New Yorker*, gave a lot of talks on Zoom, and started to assemble a non-fiction book that I have been calling *Love and Other Useless Pursuits* – among them, the pursuit of beauty and the pursuit of literary criticism. I thought a lot, as T.S. Eliot put it long ago, about the function of literary criticism at a time when both literature and criticism are being systematically devalued. A lot of this thinking was done in conversation with my Co-Fellow Alex Bevilacqua, whose companionship is the other aspect of my time at the Wiko for which I am most grateful. I miss our long lunches at the kitchen in Villa Jaffé, where we puzzled over what was to be done. We reached no satisfactory answers but found that the very exercise of thinking and talking so closely with another person was enough to stave off despair. (For me, at least.)

What else? The sun and moss on Herthasee in summer; the ice that dazzled it in winter; and the mist that stretched between and across the banks when the ice started to melt. Riding our bikes everywhere: into the forest, weaving our way around the very tall and very slender white birches; across the city to Treptower Park, where our older son knelt solemnly alongside the two statues at the base of the war memorial; from the Robin Hood Playground to the Wagner Playground to the 1001 Nights Playground to the Playground

for Witches. Speaking my first language, Turkish, to Anita and Ur, the couple who lived next door to the Wiko, and to nearly every taxi driver, kebab store owner, and volunteer medic at the COVID-testing centres. Driving past field after field of yellow rapeseed on our way to Rügen, where an unrummuring blue-grey sea stretched before us. One bright, fragrant spring afternoon after another spent with Alex and our children in the wooden lawn chairs on the Wiko garden, wondering if the swans were going to hop the fence and beat us with their wings. The mussels in white sauce and garlic bread Dunia served in the dead of November. The leftover toys and books and puzzles in the Villa Jaffé library. The astonishing red-gold sunrises we could see from our balcony. The fact that Maike has been extremely patient with my tardiness, understanding, as I'm sure she does, that the task of remembering is hard, because it makes one want to return. All this is what I miss, and it is substantial. (For me, at least.)