THE Offspring

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MEET THE TEAM

Hi, my name is Maria Bogdan and I'm the co-editor in chief of The Offspring Magazine and a sophomore at Spiru Haret Bucuresti National College. I love to talk about pressing issues and to weave stories through my writing. In my spare time, I'm always trying new tasty recipes for my friends or putting on a play at the Arts Theatre.

Hello everybody! I'm Aurelia Popescu from X G and I am one of the two chief editors of The Offspring. Leading the team has been one of the best experiences as a highschool student and I'm happy to be working with such a wonderful team! I hope I'll help make The Offspring a better known foreign language publication .

Hi! I'm Sara from X G and I'm the administrative coordinator of the Offspring. I am proud to say that I am part of our team of young, talented writers! I am a dreamer, I carry a book with me no matter the destination and I hope I'll take you into another world with every published InkLing!

Hello there! I'm Voicu Maria from X B. As the graphic designer of the team, my job is to make everything pretty and appealing to look at! I also illustrate articles from time to time.

Hello, I am Delia, I am the pr and hr of our magazine. I consider myself an artistic and motivated person and I want to make our magazine seen by many young teenagers who are passionate and dedicated to culture.

Sire, lady or demoiselle, ye be welcome! I am Alexandra, merely a traveller through time and space, but whatever wisdom I have gathered from all the centuries behind me, I will gladly share with you! I shall enchant you with history, geography or literature, yet there's so much more to discover! In these pages we lay not words, but art!

WHAT WE SHOULD THANK SPIRU HARET FOR

Andreea-Maria Sicoe, X G

Around the year 1900, the education system was still at the beginning and many things were uncertain and confusing after Alexandru Ioan Cuza had declared in 1864 that the primary school is compulsory and free.
Spiru Haret was one of the most remarkable people of his times for the contribution to this system, a reform often remembered today as an exemplary action in a field in which another similar one is needed today, but so long delayed.

We may be students of "Spiru Haret" National College, but still we do not know why we should be so thankful to the man whose name we say almost every day. We should certainly begin with his early years in the system, as a student. He was able to study at 'Saint Sava' High school (now a national college) thanks to a scholarship he won in a contest because otherwise he had no money for further education. He then attended the Sorbonne University and once again had to rely on a scholarship. This sad truth motivated him and, being impressed by the western model, he came back to his homeland and changed schools after the model of the French ones.

Once returned to Romania, even though he could have pursued a successful career in Paris, he started the approach of educational transformation. He had a strong vision on what "teaching a country" meant: "forming good citizens", "providing all young people with the knowledge that is indispensable to any living person" and "training specialists for all the careers that are necessary for the complete and harmonious life of the state".

As a general inspector, he took some tough measures after concluding an investigation and multiple school inspections. In only 13 years this reform almost doubled the number of literate people in Romania.

There are a lot of aspects in a Romanian student's life which are owed to him. We are used to taking part in extracurricular activities, have practical activities in school for a better understanding of concepts, benefit from a lot of options when we are to choose a university and also have some facilities such as free transport, but this is all because of Spiru Haret's support for pupils.

It seems to me that Haret's reform should be reminded to all the ministers of education as an example of how the current situation should be improved. He was a great supporter of school in rural areas, facing a lot of problems today, especially during the pandemic. We currently need different methods of evaluation and pedagogical training of teachers and moral support for both students and teachers, which is exactly what Spiru did in the older days.

It can be concluded that being a student would be totally different if it hadn't been for SpiruHaret. As students at a college that bears his name, we should follow his vision, have the same high regard for learning as he did and carry on his love for knowledge, because, to quote his words, "as the school looks today, the country will look tomorrow".

JUVENES TRANSLATORES ART, CRAFT AND A TWIST OF FATE

Georgiana Mușat, teacher

This school year has been doomed from its very beginning to bear the label of blank year, or the time for idleness as regards school competitions. The pandemic has deprived our students of the constructive to-and-fro of contests and-alas! - of the refreshing, exhilarating winner's joy that- no matter what the contest opponents might argue- used to give them a purpose.

Within this dreary landscape, Juvenes Translatores came as a ray of sunshine that sliced the darkness....by a twist of fate.

Juvenes Translatores is an international translation competition for seventeen- year-old high-school students initiated by the European Commission in 2007. Inspired by the European Union motto – United in diversity- which implies the necessity of being able to understand languages other than our own- J.T." raises awareness of the importance of translation skills and the need to reassess translation as a means of "mediating between languages" As a result, the purpose of the contest is to "promote language learning and translation" (1)

In order to enter the competition, participant schools from each EU country are selected at random (after previous school registration). The number of participant schools in each country cannot be higher than the number of members in the European Parliament allotted to that particular country (33 in the case of Romania).

We had already reconciled ourselves to not being counted among the randomly selected schools, when the Impossible popped up its head by an unexpected email from JT team in Brussels, meant to snatch us from our complacent, hibernating state (although, hopefully not from the comfort of our dens), about ten days before the competition date. A selected school had withdrawn and we were given the unexpected chance to participate in an online translation competition -held and supervised using Google meet.

Throughout a two-hour time span, the students indulged themselves into translating well-chosen, meaningful, challenging and inspiring texts that matched the art-craft definition of translation (a narrative-descriptive text on nostalgic childhood and cherry-trees imbued with symbolic charge, as well as echoes of mythical encounters with Brancusi -was the treat for the students who had chosen English as target language, and a sci-fi – an account from the future of our present life in Europe -impregnated with witty humour, for the ones who were supposed to translate into Romanian.

We could venture to label the novel competition event as a 3X Premiere:

- the first competition to be held online;

- our students' first participation in a translation contest;

- our students' first international competition (at least in the foreign languages section)

To our humble minds, promoting this type of competition might also be seen as a turning point as regards changing mentalities in teaching and learning foreign languages, within which translation should occupy a well-deserved, distinct place, owing to its art-craft ambivalence, its cultural significance and last, but not least, its linguistic benefits.

As a highly-respected scholar, beloved English literature professor and prestigious translator wisely stated:

It is only through extensive reading that one can „steal" the trade of translation. (2)

We have no other choice than take his word for it.

(1) ec.europa.eu>info>language-skills

(2) Virgil Stanciu- Traducerea este o meserie care se fură citind-Interviu in Revista de Traduceri Literare, 28 decembrie 2018

STUDENTS' FEEDBACK

The text selected in order to be translated presents a purely PRO-European vision to which our students should become acquainted, so that they become fully aware of the genuine benefits of being part of the EU. As a result, it is self-evident that this is the very message of the competition itself, and that it should be further disseminated.

Although we received the news of our acceptance and registration shortly before the competition, I am extremely happy to have been part of it.

Nicolae Andrei, student, 12 D

JT is a unique opportunity to practise and use a skill that is crucial in life, which helps us understand and communicate with people from all around the world. This has been an incredible experience, and I'm glad I've been a part of it.

Mara Dragomir, student, 12 B

I am so glad that I got to be part of this wonderful experience. This contest was a great chance, not only to improve our knowledge, but also to feel connected to the other countries that took part. It was very exciting to feel the emotion, the hours put into preparing for it and the contest itself. THANK YOU.

Maria Solomon, student, 11 A

The whole experience was very pleasant. I would participate again next year if I were not in another country studying. It was the first contest I had been enrolled in since the pandemic started. The variety of sensations and feelings I had was a nice stew of emotions. My head was in all the places: How will you supervise us? What if I am going to lose the connection? And who would have thought one year ago that I would be able to take a test like this one from my own bedroom? It's amazing. The pandemic did us good from a point of view. Even if we miss the human interaction, I liked being at home. In conclusion, I loved being a part of JT, even for a short period of time.

Sabina Dorobantu, student, 12 D

Juvenes Translatores has been a way for me to understand how difficult translating a material can actually be, although that didn't make it any less exciting. And because of this opportunity, I discovered what drove me the most: the desire to make a story known to as many people as possible, regardless of the language barrier.

Elena Savu, student, 11 G

INTERVIEW - MARIA ORBAN

"OAMENI MARI" CONDUCTED BY MARIA BOGDAN, X G

We are excited to host our first interview with Maria Orban, the writer of the new novel "Oameni Mari". Maria is a writer – this is her debut –, and a teacher, currently located in Brașov. The book was published in late November 2020 at Nemira publishing house, in the "n'autor" book collection. Through this discussion we hope to spark an interest in our young readers to discover new Romanian literature and unravel the many stories expertly woven by the authors of "n'autor".

Maria Bogdan (MB)
Maria Orban (MO)

MB: Well, first off, I want to say that I found the book resonated with me, as a teen, even though I know it was written for the 30-something generation. It presented the feelings that a teenager goes through candidly and I could relate to the protagonist easily. What has inspired you to write the book? Is a part of Rucsandra inspired by you and your high school experience?

MO: Initially I wanted to write a book about divorce. And then I realised I actually wanted to tell the story of so called "grownups" that are still young and naive at heart. And as far as how much of me is in Rucsandra's character, two things in my life inspired her development: the death of my father and my divorce. I wanted to create a character that would have to face up to a lot of uncomfortable situations that would challenge her to understand how to cope with reality and forge his own path forward.

MB: It is interesting how, as generations change, our habits change too. I think that for many of us, technology is the newest addiction.

MO: Yes, it's truly scary. Before, I would see children outside playing, during breaks at school. Now, they are all glued to their phones, everyone in their own little world disconnected from reality. However, the pandemic, I feel, has made us miss the human connection we once had. The day to day real interaction is certainly something we yearn for.

MB: The book also spotlights the transition from childhood to adulthood. At every big step in life we try to hold on to our past habits. Why is it so hard to let go of our past selves?

MO: Maybe it all stems from our need of control, from how easy it is to stay in our comfort zone. Take university, you have a group of friends, some responsibilities, you know what you have to do. Then, you are suddenly thrust into the real world and a bag full of worries, needs and rules comes crashing down on your shoulders. It all depends on you, the way you had been raised, how you position yourself in front of this new- found maturity. Most of the time we think grownups know what to do, they have their life together when, in reality, there is a hopeful child in all of us. Really, the pressure on adults is even bigger and you can't even show your insecurities to anyone, especially if you have children.

MB: The protagonist's relationship with her ex-husband Seba sort of defines her. Sometimes, when in a couple we find ourselves only valid

inside the comfortable shell of the relationship. How did you create and portray this uncomfortable dynamic?

MO: We go into a bubble where we aren't really sure of who we are and any outside intrusion can destabilise us. I felt that an unsuccessful relationship is prone to triggering the failure of other connections that we have around ourselves. That's why I brought back the boyfriend from university and the father's passing, to also represent a different type of separation. I focused more on the way she relates to her marriage. And, in the quest to find the identity card she discovers different ways in which her relationship had been seen by her inner circle of friends and family. I think that's why Seba is more absent from the book. He is portrayed more through what others say about him. In the way he gets a new girlfriend, I wanted to underline how easily swappable we are in the others' lives.

MB: Rucsandra's relationship with her parents affects her greatly, blaming both her mother and father for her sometimes traumatic upbringing. How does she try to deal with her father's passing?

MO: She does a lot of therapy during the book and her psychologist advises her to take a closer look at her relationship with her parents, as that is what forms the way we perceive future connections and moulds us. I think she tries to understand the complicated relationship that she had with her father and through its filter she re-evaluates her maternal bond as well. She tries to take it in objectively, more than judge, to try and find a sort of peace with what happened, heal the wound.

MB: What I particularly liked about the book is the fact that Rucsandra associates most of her feelings to different songs. What songs have in spired you and to which should the readers listen to while enjoying the book? MO: To get into the atmosphere of the book I recommend listening to the playlist of the book, all the songs that are included from Moby's Porcelain, which starts the novel, to the many creations by Nirvana that are mentioned. But as far as my taste goes I try to not listen to music very often, because I find I empathise very strongly and whichever emotion the song is trying to depict I take as my own. Some of my favourites are Nirvana, Portishead and Radiohead.

MB: What have you been reading during this period? Do you have any suggestions for young readers?

MO: The last book I really enjoyed and would strongly recommend is "Viata mincinoasa a adultilor" (The lying life of adults) by Elena Ferrante. I found it very interesting how she built the protagonist, around the most challenging ages of anyone's life. I would also recommend any book by Hemon, Richard Ford ("Rock springs"). I've also read a lot of Romanian poetry lately; some stand-outs are Anastasia Gavrilovici and Ruxandra Novac; at the prose section, I would recommend Maria Manolescu.

MB: Lastly, how would you present the book to a teenager?

MO: You might find yourself in some way in the main character, it might amuse you and you should take away the understanding that even grownups are vulnerable, not always organised, put together. Age does not define us, or our mental stability, that is a choice we have to work towards every day.

Link to Youtube video:

https://youtu.be/u6tyj4GNZUs

THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR MEDICINE 2020

Marian-Alexandru Iordan, XII D

More than 100 years ago, the first Nobel Prize was awarded in 1901 to those considered to have conferred the most significant benefit to humankind. Such contributions stepped into light every year since the beginning of the 20th century, and every year new brilliant discoveries have enlightened the world, making it better and brighter. Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature, and Peace were, in a Lord of The Rings Tolkienesque fashion, the sciences whose award would make fellowships of nations. ...One prize to bring them all together.

Alfred Nobel invented the dynamite, a discovery that changed our world's shape, and with it, he rose higher in society as a wealthy man. He had no children, no relatives whom he could leave his fortune to, so instead, he "invented" the Nobel Prize. It is a part of this invaluable legacy he left us that we are going to discuss today.

On the list of brilliant discoveries that were awarded the famous prize, my eyes rested on the winners for medicine. Among them, three scientists' joint efforts: Harvey J. Alter, Michael Houghton, and Charles M. Rice, whose joint efforts led to a life-changing breakthrough. Because of them, we now know how to identify the hepatitis C virus. Does such knowledge confer a great benefit to humankind? It indeed does, as we now know how to help sick people prevent the spread of the deadly hepatitis C virus to healthy individuals (400.000 died in 2016 from this virus). As the virus makes room for cancer to settle in the liver, by this discovery, we can even find a cure to some forms of cancer!

However, the essential part of 2020's discovery is that blood transfusions are safer, and with that knowledge, effective medications that can cure hepatitis C are developing. An unlucky person that gets injured in an accident, for example, would not be receiving a life-threatening transfusion any more.

Medicine is about saving lives or prolonging them as much as possible. Saving a life means giving that person time and a purpose – that of becoming an even better version of themselves. I will pursue this field, and by the power I will be given, I will gladly dream of saving people and watching them smile for another day.

WHAT DID HARVEY DO?

Harvey focused on learning whether blood transfusions caused liver inflammation or not. Scientists knew that hepatitis A and hepatitis B were causing inflammation of the liver. He studied how the family of the hepatitis viruses affects chimpanzees, and he found that there was yet another virus, indeed unknown until then. He named that virus hepatitis non-A non-B. The new virus was spreading via blood.

WHAT DID MICHAEL HOUGHTON DO?

Soon after Harvey Alter discovered the new virus, he started investigating the genetic material of the pathogen affecting chimpanzee's livers. The tests' results proved that it was an RNA virus and that it belonged to the Flavivirus family (that means it is another type of hepatitis). Houghton and his team of researchers named it Hepatitis C (HCV)

WHAT DID CHARLES M. RICE DO?

He knew the pathogen's genetic material, so he used genetic engineering techniques to find out how it reproduces. He also managed to find explanations as to how HCV causes inflammation in the liver. Knowing these mechanisms, we can develop effective antiviral drugs to cure or slow down the disease (Sofosbuvir).

Their actions impressed me, and although I know it is not advisable to make promises when happy, I do impose myself, and to you, a challenge. I want to make a discovery of my own, and if possible, I would like to find a cure for arterial hypertension. Sounds valorous? Valour is the conqueror's shield so let us dive in together, chart the unknown territories in science, make our own discoveries and help our world shine even brighter than it does now.

ARE YOU COMING WITH ME?

THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR CHEMISTRY 2020

Humans today, who knows what tomorrow

Corina Ionescu, XI A

Chemistry was the most important science for Alfred Nobel's own work. The development of his inventions as well as the industrial processes he employed were based upon chemical knowledge, making Chemistry the second prize area mentioned in his will. This year's laureates, Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer A. Doudna, are praised for their 2012 discovery: the CRISPR/Cas9 genetic scissors.

In simpler terms, using this groundbreaking discovery, researchers can change the DNA of animals, plants and microorganisms with extremely high precision. This technology which has had a revolutionary impact on life sciences is contributing to new cancer therapies and may make the dream of curing inherited diseases come true. The genetic scissors have taken the life sciences into a new epoch and, in many ways, are bringing the greatest benefit to humankind.

Everything seems to be fine and dandy when put into a utopian perspective: diseases-cured, famine- eradicated, as the production can grow at a faster pace for lower prices, and so on and so forth. But what about being realistic (with a dash of pessimism). Genetic modification, especially in human beings, implies a political, and more importantly, moral debate.

Given the rapid scientific developments in the field of genetics, it is important to explore the implications of the human rights framework for the research into and the clinical application of genome editing. The broader normative question is whether the existing human rights standards are sufficient to address the challenges posed by this new technology. It will be argued that while international human rights law does not prohibit genome editing, it imposes important restrictions upon it. However, existing human rights are arguably insufficient to regulate germline genome editing as there are significant loopholes in the protection of embryos. Nor do they fully address the wide-ranging implications of the new technology for society and humankind.

When it comes to the moral implications of DNA altering, things tend to heat up. Some could consider my ideas to be a bit off place, some sort of pre-apocalyptic nightmare scenario, but this type of thing should be discussed at some point.
Firstly, there is a big question which is yet to be responded: who will be able to afford these genetic treatments. Improvements in biotechnology might make it possible to translate economic inequality into biological inequality. While hitherto the rich could buy little more than status symbols, soon they might be able to buy life itself. If new treatments for extending life and for upgrading physical and cognitive abilities prove to be expensive, a huge biological gap might open between the rich and the poor. Therefore, this case might result in the separation of humankind into a small class of “superhumans” and a massive underclass of “useless, normal” humans.

Secondly, the fact that human genome can now be edited for various purposes, does not define the nature of those motives. I do not mean to sound like a conspiracy theory fanatic, but if I am to let my mind wander, I unwillingly remember that abuse of power is and will forever be a thing. Given this point of view, I cannot help but ask: what if these alterations in the nature of DNA will result in violations of the human rights, or even in wars? Give this following scenario a bit of thought: Russia sends its perfectly trained, equipped, and genetically modified spies to the United States. Not even FBI would be prepared to keep up with, not to say catch, such advanced beings, and only God knows what information put into the wrong hands could do.

However, it would be ignorant of me not to acknowledge the scientific improvements this discovery has brought upon humanity. Evolutionary speaking, this step would have been made sooner or later, as humans will always persist in pushing the boundaries of science in their quest for finding the universal truth. Overall, these two women dedicated their lives to the advancement of our species, and truly deserve this prize for their work. We should be paying more attention to our valuable scientists and give them the recognition they deserve.

FROM MARCH TILL DECEMBER: ONLINE SCHOOL AND THE DAILY LIFE OF STUDENTS

Andrada Vari, X G

This year has been hard on everyone. And maybe a bit harder on us, students.

I am now in the 10th grade. That means that I have spent most of my high school experience at home. I got to enjoy about four months of school, before the pandemic struck. I was 15, just discovering teenage life and all its perks. For the first time, school was where I went because I wanted to, not because I had to. (I loved the fact that I had chosen my area of study.) I discovered freedom! Freedom to enjoy my classes and, after the school program was over, freedom to try on life, by myself and with others of my age.

March came with the pandemic. That was the saddest, most dead spring I have ever seen. With it came also a lot of "lonely".

I don't know if anyone remembers anymore. Or even if they've got time to try. But, in the beginning, for about a few weeks, there was a lot of waiting around. We didn't know what was happening. One day we were at school and the next we were sent home. After that, it took just a few more days for us to lose the knowledge of when or whether the school was going to reopen; and with it, our normal lives.

Back at home, the closest some of us got to friends were the brothers and sisters that we didn't quite hate. (I didn't have that! For me, it was just me and my mother.) But after spending every day together for a few months, we surely got to hate even them.

The summer came and, although things didn't get better in the general sense, we did get a few chances to slip out and have just a bit of fun, to enjoy our young lives. But just a bit; not too much! We had to be careful not to touch things, stay close to others, go to certain places...

We managed over the summer and autumn came along with a failed attempt at normal school.

Now there have been months we have spent staying more and more inside. We had school, which consisted in a strict routine that forced us to wake up very early in the morning and, then left us with the second half of the day to fill just by staying at home.

I, for one, had a sad schedule. I woke up every day to go to school; which was about three steps away from where I slept; after that I would eat, do a little work and just hang around the house, mostly with myself, doing nothing, waiting for the day to end. Just to start over and do the same thing the next day.

Staying inside kept me alive and miserable all year long. Now I have spent a few months doing the same thing, the same routine, again and again, I almost don't remember how it was before. Going to online classes and being, in general, a student in these times, doesn't get interesting or even just a bit exciting. But it does get very lonely at times. It consists of a plain boring existence and it seems like it's never going to change.

I never understood the fun in the simple act of socializing, till it was taken away from me. I know that, in these times, opening the school isn't a possibility. But it can be a hope! I will know we are living better days when I am able to complain again about the actual school. Till then, I'm waiting...!

BEING A VOLUNTEER

Bianca Alexandrescu, X G

Volunteering means giving with great responsibility things of remarkable value: time, knowledge, a bit of yourself and of the things you believe in. It's important to be open, not to give up easily and understand that it takes perseverance and dedication.

When I began my first summer volunteering, little did I know that it would lead to a future permanent summer activity. My uncle was the person in charge of an adventure summer camp somewhere in Bucovina, and he took me with him to be a part of the organizing team. The summer camp involved playing educational games, taking children on hiking trips and all sorts of entertaining activities.

I loved every minute of it, and that summer I got to meet groups of children and teenagers between 5 and 18 years old. It was really rewarding to care for them, to see them making friends, becoming more confident and just having a brilliant time. Because it was over a week, we felt like having a small family to take care of, trying to make them more competitive, fair and just enjoy life. There were all kinds of children, wealthy and needy, shy or very talkative ones, and it was a real challenge for us, the volunteers, to communicate with them and to be an example, like an older brother or sister.

From that summer on, I went to Bucovina to discover not only its beauties, but also to find out a bit more about myself. Children have a special way of teaching you how to be a better person, to have more patience, to believe in yourself, to overcome every fear and to express yourself in a genuine way. Every day was tiring, sometimes exhausting, but also very rewarding. It's been 3 years now, but as I grow older I'm relishing more the presence of the little ones and also the time I have to spend with the teenagers of my age. Nothing can compare the wonderful feeling you get when almost one hundred people gather around the campfire and sing folk music with pleasure and enthusiasm.

Giving to others can keep you mentally stimulated, reduce stress and provide a sense of purpose. I feel like volunteering allows me to connect with the world and, perhaps make it a better place. I was able to bond with people, to improve my social skills, to unravel my deep thoughts and I developed friendships that maybe will last a lifetime.

Life has to be lived with passion, positivity, compassion and an open mind. It takes the same skills to be a volunteer. Like Martin Luther King Jr said "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?".

THE CURE FOR LONELINESS

Conț Cristina-Alexandra, XII H

With today's technology, the distance between you and whoever you want to interact with doesn't seem that far away. There's watches that tell you how the other person is feeling: happy, sad, angry, you name it and therefore the small restraining walls that keep you away from your close ones are getting ripped to pieces.

By now, you've all probably heard that COVID-19 will continue to be among us for quite some unknown time. This means social distancing and staying at home as much as possible is part of our new "normal". In these unprecedented times, it has never been more important to stay in touch with family and friends mostly because you never know when you'll get the chance to see them in person again and you don't want to lose those tight connections that you've built up for years; and also because losing these connections means getting a ticket straight to the deep doom of insanity. I'm joking, but we all know how unpleasant it can get when living in your own little bubble with no human interactions whatsoever. And we should not forget that reconnecting with family and friends will start looking a tad bit different and might be somewhat challenging.

First of all, this might sound quite shocking but we should take advantage of the times when the pandemic started. Just think about it, what if all of this had happened a hundred years ago? With no internet connection, no headphones, no 'Siri' to save us during our hardest moments, such as not remembering our grocery list or with how many r's to spell 'quarel' - I mean 'quarrel'! What I'm trying to say is, we should be grateful for the little device we use every single day, and put it to some actual good use for once! There are so many apps that we could use to keep in touch with our friends and family, you can text, send pictures of your cat rummaging through your drawer, send voice recordings, and even watch a movie together!

Second of all, I don't even dare to forget mentioning our dear saviour - The internet, coming to aid once again! As long as you have access to the internet, you have access to the whole world! Quite literally. Besides messaging and sending pictures or videos, if you get bored easily you can visit a museum or even an escape room, or if you feel brave enough, go on an adventure in the jungle with your friends! Virtually of course... But we should look at the bright side: no more waiting in the queue for hours in order to purchase a ticket, since most of the virtual museums and other attractions are completely free; no crying babies; no visitors that speak way too loud for anyone's liking, and it's also quite a beautiful way to both socialize and experience something new.

Believe me or not, you can also make new friends during the pandemic! And this comes from my own personal experience, which means it's 101% doable. I got the chance to meet lots of amazing people from all around the world: The United States Of America, Canada, Switzerland, Thailand, Singapore, France, China and even more! How? Simple, through social media. It's fascinating how many people you can meet and talk to based on your hobbies or likes, and even common hatred towards a certain subject. The only downside to this is the difference in the time zones, but with enough patience and if you REALLY want to keep in touch with them, you can make it through, possibly even sacrifice a couple of hours of your sleep just to talk with them. Shockingly enough, this is how I met my best friend! She lives miles and miles away, across the Atlantic Ocean and on a wholly different continent, yet she feels closer than any of my friends. She goes to sleep when I wake up, and wakes up when I am heading to bed, yet somehow we make it work. And you can do it too, can't you?

In conclusion, instead of sapping around in these quite unpleasant times, we should find methods to get any form of human interaction and socialize! And remember, no one wanted to deal with the pandemic in the first place, but if we adapt to the situation and take all measures of safety, protecting ourselves and everyone around us, we can make it through! Don't you think so?

THE SOCIAL DILEMMA

MARIA BOGDAN, X G

Over the last year, my generation has been hit with an abundance of time, a never-ending stream of boredom that seems to completely drown and leave us with only one solution: mindlessly scrolling our social media sites, trying to forget what is going on around us, leaving our present issues and concentrating on an easily consumable, dopamine giving activity.

On top of that, Gen Z has also been the only generation to grow up already connected to the internet. It is intertwined in our vary DNA as a part of us, whether that's a good or bad thing. So, when I watched the new Netflix documentary "The social Dilemma", I found it hit close to home.

The hour and a half long movie presents us with tech giants that publicly recognised what they had made is wrong and unhealthy for users, while sharing the real life impact social media has had on teens by telling the story of a suburban family dealing with their kids' constant use of technology.

The many tech creators and programmers told chilling stories. The entire interview section had a bitter sweet aftertaste, as the viewer could sense how truly awful these people felt about the unwanted consequences of their work. The one that struck me was the creator of the "Like button" who initially made this option available because he wanted to bring more joy and a sense of unity into the world. But, as he confessed, the number of likes a new post gets has become one of the biggest reasons of depression, anxiety and envy between young internet users.

Acting as a catalyst, the story of the American family really puts into perspective the whole documentary. The family's son is dared by his mom to not use his phone for a week, in exchange for a new mobile screen. For the first day he realises he has a lot more time on his hands and actually tries to speak to his friends, but his anxiety creeps in. We have grown so used to looking into our phones when we feel uncomfortable that they have become a sort of adult pacifier, acting as a wall between us and the rest of the world. Unfortunately, the son loses the bet the next day, when the news that the girl he likes is in a new relationship comes up as a notification from Facebook. He feels the instant, all consuming need to check his socials and confirm the news and then goes on to spend the entire night looking on his phone at meaningless accounts, stores and whatnot.

Really, the scariest part of this documentary is the knowledge that each social media company uses us as a resource, competing each second for our attention, improving their AIs to show even more relevant information that might make us stay connected for longer. It doesn't even matter that the unachievable ideals of Instagram ruin teenagers' self image, increasing self harm in young girls by 270%, or that many of us feel more disconnected and lonely than ever.

The documentary underlines that the dystopian future many of us fear is closer than ever and that we don't even know in how many ways we are being manipulated each day.

So, after reading this article will you change your ways and be a bit more mindful about the way you interact online, or will you keep on taking your daily dose of a mindless high?

A PHOTOGRAPH IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS?

SARA-MARIA TUDOSIE, X G

It's said that a photograph is worth a thousand words.

But is it really? Does a photo truly capture the essence of the moment or just a vague part of it?

Nowadays, cameras seem to follow you everywhere: the latest triple camera set-up that can just barely fit into your pocket is now a normality, billboards are everywhere, stealing the sunlight from windows and trees so *you can get a glimpse of the "most advanced ever" photography experience. They follow us like a sunflower seeks the golden rays.*

It all started not too long ago—barely a century and half ago—this phenomenon of having to fake a smile for the sake of a picture or to disrupt the privacy of family life and its unique moments with the argument: "But I want to always have a memory of this!" You will. If the moment matters so much, you wouldn't seek ways to tattoo it, to mark it in a file that will be just as forgotten as a third grade diary.

The tendency of using pictures instead of words is way more dangerous than some might even realise—it is threatening the ability to express complex thoughts, to describe a moment that made you laugh until your belly hurts; photos cannot fully replace stories, or cameras the eyes of someone, even though they do seem to intrude that much more.

People talk about the uprising of technology, leaning mostly on the ridiculously fast development of the A.I, the ways to be more environmentally-friendly and how to have a much-needed „tech detox". But no one ever seems to talk about the way that, even in World War II, there were cameras. The soldiers were filmed while fighting, dying or wishing they were somewhere else.

Cameras are everywhere and no one seems to be questioning it. Why is that? Should we be concerned?

Frightening enough, yes.

How the digital era affected our generation and the mental health of today's teenagers

Delia Cojocariu, X G

Our generation was born with mentalities and needs that differ from those of our parents' generation. We grew up in the digital era and the constant presence of devices transformed us. Most of the teenagers in our days struggle with mental health issues and with a constant feeling of pressure from the outside and from inside themselves. They feel like they will never be good enough for this world because of the standards imposed by today's society. And this is the point where mental imbalance begins.

We live in the era of speed where the information is basically thrown at you without letting you decide whether it is necessary or not. The psychic changes appeared sooner than usual and this brought many insecurities to teenagers.

Because we live in a post-communist country, mental health and everything related to it were considered taboo and many parents didn't want to discuss them with their kids or simply did not know if these changes are normal, as they had never discussed them with their own parents. So we took all of our information from the internet, without knowing the internet isn't the safest place and believing that everything we read is true.

Many kids these days fight with depression and anxiety from a young age, without being prepared to deal with them. They feel tremendous stress and sadness while not even knowing what these words mean. Even though they have clear symptoms, their parents don't take them seriously and this only affects them more and drowns them more into their problems. Today's teenagers also feel an enormous pressure when it comes to building their future. Every day they see perfectly built lives on social media and they tend to compare themselves to those standards, without knowing that what is promoted online is mainly fakeness and marketing strategies. They become frustrated, start to feel anxious and forget that their living, breathing, beautifully imperfect real life is 100% better than someone else's controlled online content.

I struggled with mental health issues too and I sometimes still get caught in this dark scenario. I first felt anxiety and panic at the age of nine, but it wasn't something constant; there were only specific moments when I felt it. When I was in the fifth grade, I experienced a sort of mild depression. I was constantly having panic attacks and anxiety and I felt like I was caught in this dark hole and I couldn't get out of it. I was only a child and I didn't know at that time what anxiety feels like and how you can control it. Therefore, it was extremely overwhelming. I struggled with this issue for almost a year, but I fought with myself, healed my childhood traumas and fears, and finally I succeeded and got out of that extremely toxic environment. That way, I learned how strong we really are and that we can control fear and panic by using our incredibly powerful mind. I didn't experience any other mental health issues after that, but recently I started to feel anxious about my future and about the idea that maybe I won't be able to accomplish my dreams and my ideal lifestyle. But worrying about your future will never help you, so leave these thoughts behind, treat yourself with kindness and realize that you deserve a wonderful and happy life.

Yes, we are a generation who struggles with a lot of mental insecurities, but we have the power to change mentalities and to break patterns. And if we realize that we are way stronger than our fears, there is nothing that can stop us from evolving and making this world a better place.

PROTEGO! PARENTS, PROTECTION AND OVERPROTECTION

Ilinca Maria Dima, X G

Parents and protection go hand in hand as they both entitle positive aspects such as love and safety. The word "protect" comes from the Latin "protectio" which translates to "cover in front". So what is the harm in overprotecting, in over loving? When does the "cover" held by our parents become too opaque to see life clearly and why?

How to spot an overprotective behaviour

The line between rational and irrational can be slim, but in this case it's a single word: controlling. In 1990, the term "helicopter parent" appeared and was used to describe intrusive parents who were overlytrying to always be involved in every aspect of their child's life, not just in a supportive way, but in a controlling way. This type of behaviour is extremely noxious and, sadly, has increased in the last decade. What I believe to be even sadder is the fact that these parents only and truly desire is to protect their offsprings from the pain life comes with. By taking that desire to an extreme they become what's hurting their children without even realising it and, naturally, permanently altering their relationship with them.

The danger of helicopter parenting

During childhood our brains are mainly operating in Theta and Delta waves, after that they only occur during REM sleep and deep stages of meditation. What does that mean? It means our brains are little sponges, absorbing everything around them and creating deep synapses that usually last our entire lifetime becoming our beliefs, subconsciously guiding our actions. A significant part is generated by our parents and that's why we are so sensitive and deeply affected by their behaviour. When the parent is excessively cautious, the child becomes risk-averse later in life; when the parent is treating their teenager like a little child, they tend to lack maturity, having a sense of entitlement. They are prone to become outcasts and pariahs.

What happens after childhood ends?

If a parent has the tendency to overstep their child's boundaries, a loss in the sense of individuality occurs: where does the caregiver end and where does the teenager begin? Everything becomes a blurry mess. This imbalanced dynamic has shown to increase cortisol levels in teens and, as an outcome, one of two things happens: one- the child rebels and dozes of into the other extreme trying to compensate the freedom that was never received, or two- they become extremely dependable on their maternal/paternal figures, always doing as their told and forgetting to think as if they possess their own brain and values. These reactions have of course consequences: lack of social skills, missing out on life lessons, not handling stress and challenges, etc. So, the omnipresence of a parent remains as a ghost, haunting the child in question long after they remain on their own, like a shadow of trauma constantly telling them they can't do it on their own, that they need their parents, they need someone to think, decide and act for them, and when that person is gone all that is left is self-doubt and pain.

What you can do to mend things

Discuss the matter calmly with your parents, counsellors or an impartial relative. Remember that although you may feel frustrated your parents love you and the reason behind their madness is that they think they are doing what is best for you, having your best interest at heart. Try asking them about their childhood and see where they are coming from, usually they have suffered from trauma themselves and now, without realizing it, they are passing their unresolved issues down to you. It is all of you against the problem, not you against them. Your mental health is extremely important and should be taken care of; don't be afraid to speak up for yourself and always remember you are valid and loved.

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Chiara, lady of the manor

Alexandra Zaman, X G

The story I am about to tell you happened over 20 years ago. I was already in my thirties and I was a single mother, raising my 4-year-old twins on my own. We lived in Reading, in a small house, but I was constantly changing my job and even doing a bit of tidying or spending time with my kids when returning home was extremely tiring. I know they disliked me for this, but I was doing everything I could to make a living.

I worked for many families as babysitter and caretaker for the elderly. That March I was jobless and I was desperately searching for any request on the Internet. I found one that perplexed me: a man needed a maid and companion for his 90-year-old grandmother who was living in a manor in Oxfordshire! The village, Kyllis-on-Cherwell, had very few inhabitants and they did not seem very friendly, especially when I told some that I was going to work at the manor. 'Beware!' they said while looking me in the eyes. 'That woman is crazy!' Now that's an awesome way to start your first day at your new job! But I was on the point where only money mattered, and the payment the man promised from his grandmother was very generous.

When I arrived, I realized the manor wasn't a joke at all! No wonder the owner needed someone to do the cleaning and to keep her company- the 200-year-old house had two floors besides a huge ground floor and a little garden that only had one rose bush. The owner looked extremely peculiar: she was dressed elegantly, looking like one of those ladies from the 'Downton Abbey' series and wouldn't let me in until I told her every little detail about me.

'I'm going to call you Fanny.' she announced after I finished talking. I rose my eyebrows.

'My name is Amanda. Why would you call me like that? I mean, most of the people call me Amy or Mandy...' I objected.

'I don't know... It sounds quite servantish.`

'Ma'am, I am not a...'

'Ah yes, I forgot to tell you. You shall refer to me as 'Duchess Chiara' and dress according to my times and pleasure. Here is your maid uniform.'

Yep, get ready for some more 'Downton Abbey' content! I received a black dress, apron and a bonnet and was forced to wear them since I got there at 8 a.m. until I left at 4 p.m. every single day! When I asked her jokingly if I should address her as 'Your Grace' since she pretended she was a duchess, she smiled and responded that it was an excellent idea.

A normal person would have walked out the moment she said she was a duchess. I knew the royal family tree too well: no mysterious Claire or Chiara in sight. Then, all those strange requirements... we were almost in the 21st century! But there was something spooky about her manor that I liked. Besides, her craziness was funny. I was feeling like I was escaping from the modern world and time-travelling. She had photos of her family in every room. Some were black and white, some were coloured. She showed me with great pride one with her grandson. I asked her why he wasn't there to take care of the manor.

'He used to live here. Yes, we had so many beautiful memories... Until...`

She sighed and looked away from the photo. I was ready to hear what was worse.

'Until he moved with his girlfriend in Leeds and forgot I even existed!'

That was Duchess Chiara's problem. She had no friends. I was the only one she talked to, she shared a cup of tea with, she heard the news from. She was nevertheless an interesting lady. I could not cook whatever I wanted: she had an antique recipe book that she insisted I use every time. I could not enter whatever room I wanted: she still had the keys and kept some of the chambers locked. I was also not allowed to step further than the first floor. She told me that the second floor had some memories she wanted to hide deep down in the past. This sounded really poetic; of course I was now even more curious to see what lay in there. I asked her if there was any kitchen or bathroom upstairs because 'it stinks'. Coincidentally, there were both.

'One hour for cleaning. If you don't come down in an hour, I'm locking you in there, Fanny!'

While dusting off and cleaning the floor and counters, I looked around carefully with a Sherlock Holmes attitude. There was absolutely nothing suspicious: only a bathroom, a kitchen and a child's room. The kitchen only had a jar of honey - an intelligent move because honey does not expire. The bathroom had not been used for centuries: there was no soap, no toilet paper, instead there was a lot of mold and the spiders very having a great time sewing their webs around the taps. The child's room was full of toys and black and white pictures. I drew the curtains from the windows. The corner view was astonishing. I could not help but observe a long wooden ladder that was connecting the room with the garden. It was pretty stable, being fixed both on the exterior wall of the room and in the soil in the garden. I opened the window and let the soft wind play a little bit through the room. But I heard the Duchess's voice.

'Come on, Fanny, three minutes left!'

So I left the upper floor quickly, in order not to seem suspicious. In the weeks that followed I discovered other parts of the manor. There were many bedrooms and guest rooms, a kitchen on every floor and five bathrooms only on the ground floor! The left wing was the creative zone: studies, a music room, a ballroom, a small gallery. The right wing was for the practical work: a library with all sorts of science books, a study for paperwork and accountancy, a former terrarium, a room for inventions and chemical experiments. This manor was a whole city! It was a pity that most of the rooms were locked and remained unused.

For many months, everything had been the same. Cleaning, cooking, chatting on the balcony over tea and biscuits; the Duchess had a special preference for some chocolate cookies whose recipe was the first one in her cookbook. They were indeed delicious! The tall, slender Duchess was elegantly drinking her cup of tea while telling me stories about her family. She insisted she was of royal blood and was kept hidden in the countryside because of some unclear illegitimate origins. It wasn't impossible, just highly unlikely. It was clear where her money came from: a large inheritance from an uncle who died childless during the First World War. Therefore, nothing suspicious was in sight and she had zero evidence of having ever corresponded with the Queen or her ancestors. I was taught, however, not to judge people from the first glance, so I continued playing her time travel game. The salary was higher than everything I had ever earned before (I was able to afford to get my kids in an after school club and they told me it was super cool and they loved it) and she was a funny, pleasant lady. What more could I have asked for?!

I was also doing the shopping for her. That's how, one May morning, I found out that a bunch of kids had played hide-and-seek the evening before and one of them, a boy who was only 7, was missing. Soon, the police were everywhere. The people's houses were searched and the woods surrounding the town were checked. Even Cherwell was under surveillance, in case the

child had been unfortunate and had drowned. Neighbouring villages were also under alert. And the policemen stopped at the manor, too.

The day before however, when I was preparing to go home, I could hear some strange sounds coming from the second floor. 'Of course it's only in my mind!' I told myself. 'No one lives there and I checked everything when I cleaned the bathroom and kitchen!' I continued. When I tried to gain access one more time to the second floor, Duchess Chiara point blank refused. Instead, she thought that it was the poor boy's ghost who was haunting the upper floor.

'So... You think a ghost inhabits your home and don't even bother to check? You do have the guts to simply accept it like it wouldn't be something equally terrifying and suspicious.'

'Eh, I've learnt to live with ghosts a long time ago!'

She allowed the police to search through the manor, but she didn't let them go to the second floor and hid the keys. Since they needed her consent to search a room, their only option was to beg her to open the strange massive door that was abruptly ending the staircase. Meanwhile, the villagers were talking more and more about her.'It was that witch! I'm 100% sure that she killed the boy and keeps his body somewhere in the upper floor! I wouldn't ever trust her, nor that woman who visits her every day!' I could here someone talking over the phone once. Since things were getting serious, I asked her as well to let the police investigate. Again, she hit me with an enormous 'no'. That day, I took a sick leave. I was sick of her airs and repeated refusals to collaborate with the police. However, my disappearance was suspicious and the next day, she had to call me, apologise and ask me to come back to Kyllis-on-Cherwell. I arrived in the village as soon as I could. I tried one more time.

'Fine! But you must accompany the policeman who will check upstairs!'
Everyone agreed. We went up with flashlights, ready to search all of the three rooms extremely carefully. We started with the bathroom. It was small and there weren't many places where a tiny human could have possibly been hidden. The kitchen was next: we turned everything upside down, but still couldn't find anything. A thump could be heard from the bedroom, so we entered. After checking the furniture, the man opened a wardrobe. There, crawled, we could see a little boy.

'Oh my God, are you OK?' I asked while helping him out of the wardrobe, stepping over a pile of clothes and looking very unsure at his surroundings. It had been four days and we had finally found the missing boy, who was very much alive! The policeman confirmed he was the one they were looking for.

'What happened?' I asked him. 'How did you get in there?!'

'I was playing with Thomas, Kate, Jack and Erika! I saw the ladder and climbed and thought they won't find me in here!'

'But it's been four days! How did you survive?! What did you eat or drink?'

'Honey from the jar and tap water!'

I looked with serious concern at the policeman and we took the boy downstairs to announce everyone that he was well, maybe just a bit hungry and dizzy from staying in the same place for four days straight. We all agreed that his approach on hide-and-seek was far too professional.

The Duchess explained to me what was with the ladder and all of her secrets. She once had a younger brother, Arthur whom she loved very much. One day, however, he climbed the window and fell and he did not make it. The family was grief-stricken. Her mother's last wish was for

Chiara to fix a ladder at Arthur's window so his ghost will always be safe. The honey was left for him, but it helped a living boy that was about Arthur's age when he died, and this made the old woman smile from the bottom of her heart. The cookies she loved were also Arthur's favourites. She said that she locked the upper floor to let her brother's ghost live there in peace. That's when she became so obsessed with spirits and afterlife.

I continued to 'serve' her for three more years, until she said her last goodbye to the world, too. In her very elaborate will, she left me the manor, even though she had legitimate heirs. She stated her son and grandchildren wouldn't be interested in this huge, useless house, while I knew all of its secrets, and wished for me to transform it into a hotel. I thanked her and promised to do so. The business didn't start off easily, but in time, it became an attraction in the region. It is now a 4-star hotel where many locals found a job and which keeps the history of the manor alive. Even Duchess Chiara's son came to see how the manor looks and was quite impressed. He told me the rest of the story of the eccentric 'Duchess'. She was indeed a commoner: Kathleen Brookman, from London, who moved into the manor at age 5, when her parents bought it at an incredibly cheap price. Her brother was born there and the tragedy was real. Still, she was no duchess. Just a woman with an incredible imagination and acting skills who spent a little too much time on holiday in Italy. I tried to think of her as two different people, but I couldn't. Kathleen and Chiara were one and the same person.

Of course, I have never forgotten the origins of the hotel: how I cleaned with my hands all of the rooms, rearranged them and invested much money in reviving the ground floor and middle floor. However, I knew the rule: the upper floor remained untouched and was only cleaned once a month. That was Arthur's home and now, it was Chiara's, too.

The Nature Of White

by Tudosie Sara-Maria - X G

Countless poets have explained time and time again how leaves turn golden brown and abandon their oh so earthly green. They condemn the leaving of birds, the arrival of the cold and the freezing of window sills.

But have they ever asked themselves: why does the snow fall, after all?

The reason, unkown and seemingly ignored, troubled a little boy long past his bedtime.

'When clouds are sad, they cry, don't they?'

The tired mother nodded.

'And flowers bloom when the sun comes back?'

Thin lips moved into a smile and a frail body's head nodded "yes".

'But, maman—he dragged the word, pouting as his eyes pleaded for an answer—why does it snow?'

The woman, hand resting on the doorknob and eyes heavy with sleep, smiled at her son. She shook her head in disbelief. 'Oh, Jacques...' She warmed him up with a hug. Her right hand stroked the ebony, curly hair, looking into little pools of wonder. 'It's how the clouds tell us goodnight,' she laughed as she tucked him in—a third time, that is. The door clicked, sheets were ruffled and small

feet wandered to the window. Tall and imposing, it stood before petit Jacques. A nose was pressed up against the now foggy glass. The cold had brought back early evenings, dim light and, Jacques' favourite of them all, the waltz of the snowflakes. Hazel eyes, open wide, stared at the white floating lights.

The sky was hollow, clear of misty clouds and chandeliers made of stars; la madame moon was alone tonight. She shone and beamed down on little Jacques. 'Why are you all alone tonight?' his voice squeaked out. A pout made its way on his freckled face.The silver white light danced on top of his scrunched-up nose.

Having touched his heart already, his index finger stretched, shyly. He reached for the sky. And reached. And reached 'till the light seemed to meet him halfway.

Thirty pearly whites shone in the dim moonlight.

As ashy rays danced on his cheeks, he grabbed it—or tried to—as fast as he could. "Not quick enough!", he thought with a frown.He was determined now. "I shall catch the moonlight!" and up on the window sill he climbed. In his loose-fitting pyjamas and only one fuzzy slipper, he opened the window.

It flew ajar to the sides, curtains twirling in the breezy night air.

With a curt nod, he took a step. Then another. And just as he was about to take a third one, a concrete-grey ray of light reached around his torso and pulled him back inside. Surprised, he looked up. The moon had saved him! Mouth agape, he thought "Maman will never believe this!".

Jacques thanked the mistress of the night, as all well-mannered gents would do, and asked once more: 'Why are you all alone tonight?'

The gentle, yet ground-shaking laughter came as a response. It seemed to reverberate off of the walls. 'I am never alone, my dearest. I have my stars with me.'

'All around us, she replied in the warmest of voices.'

Jacques still looked puzzled—this was a lot to process for a seven year old.

'Once darkness falls, we protect you all.'

'What from?' he inquired furthermore.

'Bad dreams. They surround us as soon as the sun goes to sleep. They climb trees high, go down chimneys and knock on windows in the middle of the dark.' A frown was heard as she then continued: 'Pesky creatures. So, the stars choose to fall down to earth in winter time so they can protect you all, my dearest.' Her ray stroked his chubby cheek. It slowly faded away, lingering by his eyelids still.

'Mooom!' he shouted at full volume. 'Maman, the moon spoke to me!'

At first alarmed, the woman let out a slow sigh and picked up her child. 'Did she now?' she asked, a grin tugging at the corners of her mouth.

'Yes! Yes, and she—' he yawned '—she—' he yawned again '—told me why... it snows...'

Tucking him in, the mother left his room for a fourth time. Both gazing at the window, one in amusement, one in awe, the snow began to fall once more. And just as he muttered a squeaky "Good night", the moon shed a part of her stardust on his half-way closed eyes.

Good night, my little one.

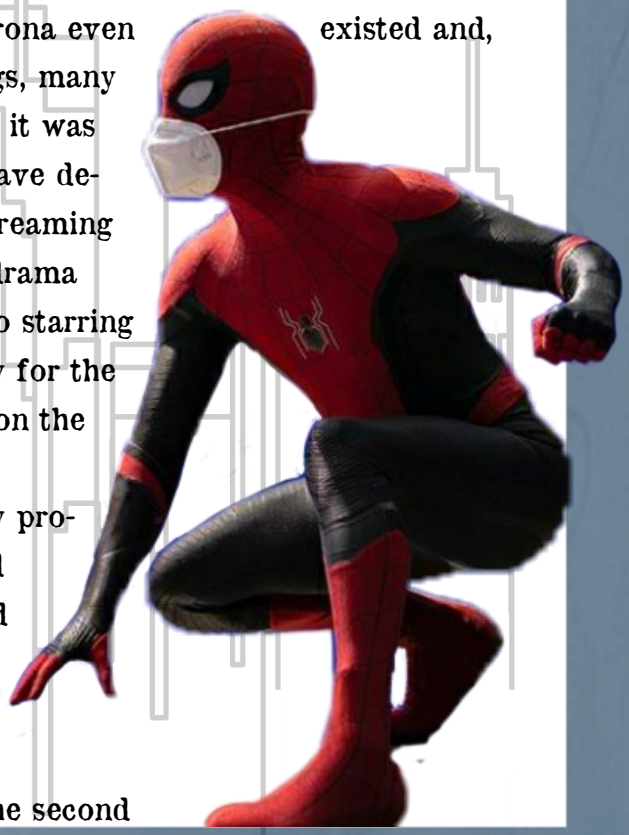
THE FILM INDUSTRY POST OUTBREAK

Aurelia Popescu, X G

The pandemic has been going on for a while now and we have all grown quite tired of rewatching the same shows and movies over and over. However, this summer the film industry has decided to come back to the land of the living, but not with as much force as it would've hoped to or in the ways it would've wanted to at first. But what exactly am I referring to?

A great example for a failed idea of coming back is the movie "Tenet". The action/sci-fi movie directed by Christopher Nolan starring John David Washington and Robert Pattinson was hit hard by Corona. Produced with a budget of 205 million USD and with the goal of being a midsummer hit, Warner Bros. was only losing money by keeping it in their servers. Seeing that most European countries had come out of the first quarantine, the team behind the movie decided to release "Tenet" in Germany and the rest of Europe on 12th August, only one month later than its original release date. However, the company still ended up with loses, the movie not being a big hit at the box-office, scoring only 353.7 million USD. Truth be told, when everyone was trying to get out of their houses to the beach, mountains or the park, not many were thinking about going to the cinema. People deemed "Tenet" a failure in earnings; however it was one of the best to perform during this time period as a cinema release.

Many movies were however released on streaming services, like the thriller "The Devil All the Time" starring Tom Holland, Sebastian Stan, Robert Pattinson and Bill Skarsgård. The film released in early autumn was trending for a couple of weeks after its release on the streaming platform in multiple countries, charting in Romania as the number 1 release for almost 2 weeks. This movie was going to be released online even before Corona even existed and, unlike "Tenet", quarantine boosted up its views and earnings, many people spending hours upon hours on the streaming service it was released on. Looking to the near future, many companies have decided to take the daring step and release movies both on streaming services and in cinemas, an example being the case of the drama "Cherry", under the direction of the Russo brothers and also starring Tom Holland. Pushing it to be considered as an Oscar entry for the 93rd Academy Awards, the success of this movie is laying on the legacies of the directors and the actor in a leading role.



Filming during the pandemic hasn't gone great either. Many projects had to be abandoned because of the high cost it would take the companies to film them, as Palme d'Or winner and director Cristian Mungiu admitted quite recently. The ones who did manage to assemble crews on the set of movies were however the giants of the industry, such as Disney, Sony and Warner Bros. A successful wrap of filming had the second

one with the movie "Uncharted", a prequel to the PlayStation games that shaped the gaming industry, another movie starring Tom Holland, but also Antonio Banderas and Mark Wahlberg. Disney has managed to keep the sets of Marvel shows and movies corona-free, but also the ones from the second season of the show "The Mandalorian". Most of the problems came after Warner Bros. and their new version of Batman played by Robert Pattinson on the set of which a CoVid outbreak happened, even the main actor contacting the disease.

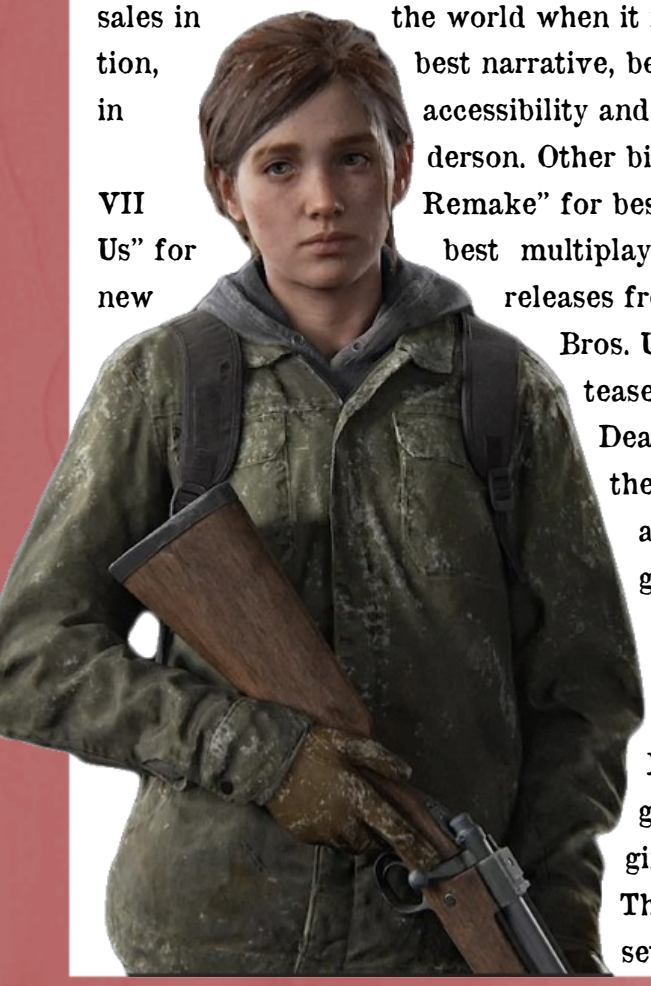
The film industry is not at its peak at the moment and depends heavily on the number of cases confirmed each day. The only hero from its story may be the vaccine, the hero of so many others. But it is important not to lose hope, just like the protagonist of a story doesn't lose theirs and keeps going till the end.

The Game Awards

Aurelia Popescu, X G

The year 2020 has definitely been a challenging time for the entertainment industry: films have lost a lot of money from the closing of theatres all around the world, streaming platforms have started burning through their content to keep everyone hooked on their sites and theatre was just left in a dark corner. However, what managed to get even more popular during quarantine were video games. And on the 11th of December, the Game Awards announced their winners of the year that is just about to end. Let's take a look at what went on at the online edition of this award show.

The big prize of the night was taken home by the Naughty Dog game "The Last of Us: Part II" as the game of the year. In addition to that, the hit sequel, which also managed to have the biggest sales in the world when it first came out, won a long list of awards, including best direction, best narrative, best action/adventure game, best audio design, best innovation in accessibility and best performance by Laura Bailey in the role of Abby Anderson. Other big wins were attributed to the following games: "Final Fantasy VII Remake" for best score and RPG, "Hades" for best indie game and "Among Us" for best multiplayer and mobile game. The night was also full of surprises and new releases from the industry: the very well-known game "Super Smash Bros. Ultimate" announced new playable characters, "Among Us" teased the new map that will soon be released in 2021, "Left 4 Dead" released a trailer and gameplay for the new instalment of their series, Vin Diesel will appear in a new game called "Ark" and "Mass Effect" announced the continuation of their games.



Many celebrities also took part in the show as presenters, people such as Brie Larson, Gal Gadot, Keanu Reeves, Jacksepticeye, Troy Baker, Nolan North and Tom Holland. The last two of them were part of a small skit regarding the upcoming film "Uncharted" which presents the beginnings of the main character of the games, Nathan Drake. The movie is set to release in summer 2021.

The 2020 Game Awards show that it isn't impossible to recognise the talent of creators even during quarantine. Considering how big the award show was this year and the media exposure it had, who knows, maybe video games will be the next main way of entertainment for the years to come.

THE BATTLE OF TRILOGIES

Maya Sânpetru XI A

There is no doubt that the famous The Lord of the Rings trilogy and its prequels, The Hobbit series, movies inspired by the late J. R. R. Tolkien's books, have captivated millions of viewers. After all, they are very close to perfection compared to other movies in the genre they belong to - high fantasy. However, which of the two trilogies is ultimately the best one? To determine that, I will analyze a series of factors which are detrimental to deciding whether a movie is adequate or not: plot, characters, soundtrack, costumes, special effects and atmosphere.

To start off, I believe that both series have succeeded in the plot department. Specifically, both narratives are adventure-based and they create numerous parallels between each other. However, it is important to point out that the producers have decided to stretch out the relatively small original plot of The Hobbit into three whole movies, which is more than I would have expected. Does this hinder the viewer's experience in any way? Absolutely not, and I would even go as far as to say it's the right decision. Next would be characters: for a predominantly male cast, I believe that both trilogies provide a variety of characters which play off each other wonderfully. Furthermore, I am happy to say that the casting was one of the best I've ever seen.

The next two factors depend a lot on each other- music and atmosphere. While both trilogies get progressively darker and more somber with each passing movie, so does the soundtrack. By the end of the last Lord of the Rings movie, The Return of the King, the optimistic moments are greatly overshadowed and outnumbered by the sinister ones. The same cannot be said about The Hobbit's last film, The Battle of the Five Armies. Even as a whole, the prequels have decidedly less amount of angst, fact that is supported by its music. Although I cannot objectively say which of the two soundtracks is better, I will have to mention that the original series' music is more memorable for me.

To top that off, I will have to say that even though The Lord of the Rings has done the books justice in the costume and special effects department, it doesn't beat the perfection of The Hobbit in that area, given that The Hobbit is more recent that the other series. The next factor is purely subjective; both trilogies give off different feelings- for The Lord of the Rings, it's nostalgia and rush that can only be described as epicness. On the other hand, The Hobbit inspires optimism and occasionally stirs up feelings of kinship.

Considering the aforementioned factors, I have to conclude that by far, the best trilogy has to be the original one, The Lord of the Rings. That isn't to say that The Hobbit didn't come close. On the contrary, I would even dare to say it's the perfect, more lighthearted companion of the original series.

Fashion eras named after British sovereigns

Alexandra Zaman, X G

For centuries, England (and later the United Kingdom) has been a great western power. Times of social changes were remembered using the names of the current monarch who was, more or less, the initiator of them. Some of them are short and easily identifiable especially when it comes to fashion, while others cover a variety of styles and preferences linked with the beliefs of the society: emancipation, fancy vs. practical, symbols and the revival of certain ages.

Elizabethan Era

Starting with the Tudor dynasty, England flourished and expanded, but its rulers were not exactly what the people hoped for. With a parsimonious Henry VII, hot-tempered Henry VIII, unstable Mary I and inexperienced Edward VI, citizens were praying for a monarch that would put an end to the internal religious wars and channel the public money towards culture rather than military campaigns. Little did they know, however, that they will live to experience the Golden Age of England.

Elizabeth was born to King Henry VIII and Queen Anne Boleyn (his second wife), an English noblewoman whose sister had already had an affair with Henry. The chamber in which Anne gave birth to the future queen had a tapestry of Saint Ursula and the 11.000 virgins, not the best choice considering she was in desperate need of a son. Henry was unhappy, since he already had another daughter, Mary, from his previous marriage. Besides, he was madly in love with one of the ladies-in-waiting, and Anne was not the kind of woman who would easily excuse infidelity. The miscarriage of a boy was the signature at the bottom of Anne's death sentence and Elizabeth was less than 3 years old when she was left without her mother. She was declared a bastard and her governess was frequently writing to the king that the princess was so poor she didn't have decent clothes to put on. This, and the constant fights between Catholics and Protestants instigated by her half-brother Edward VI and half-sister Mary I (who ascended the throne after her reconciliation with Henry and the sudden death of Edward), made Elizabeth seek peace rather than pride and victory.

The rule of a queen who vowed to be a virgin till her least breath put women in a better light than before. Having her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, as an example of why a regnant queen should never marry (she had several husbands who ruined her by pretending she was weak by being a woman), Elizabeth declared she was the bride of her country, becoming a maternal figure to her subjects and associating herself with Virgin Mary. Therefore, white clothes were preferred by the ladies, symbolizing purity. The ruff collars became a thing for both sexes, but the women could also wear a more revealing collar that resembled the tail of a peacock, an elegant, yet protective and sometimes aggressive bird. This type of collar was later on fashioned by Queen Anne of Denmark, the consort of Elizabeth's heir, King James I. Even though it showed much more skin than the previous types of collars, this didn't seem to upset the men, who had no power anyway against the queen's will. Elizabeth, like everyone else, still believed in the "womanly weakness" and told her ladies she wished she had been born a boy, but she always acted like a real gentleman who was simply trapped in a female body.

Elizabeth was also a big fan of pearls -a HUGE fan actually- and these gems became superstars during her reign: in the Armada portrait, painted to praise the victorious queen after defeating the Spanish fleet, she wears pearl necklaces, pearls sewn into the fabric of her dress and even pearls in her hair! [Her mother had a necklace with the letter "B" from "Boleyn" and 3 pearls attached to it, which was almost surely sold after her execution: Henry had to recover his money in order to properly welcome his third wife. However, it is said that one pearl was saved from the necklace and it now rests on the English crown.]

Makeup was used in excessive quantities by the Elizabethan women. The paler the skin, the better! So as to whiten the skin, lethal combinations of lead, mercury, urine and mouse fur were used. And let's not forget about the tons of eggs that were sacrificed just because they were...well...white.

Back in those days, the dresses of the court ladies were supported by farthingales, a structure with hoops that vaguely reminds us of the Victorian crinolines. However, farthingales were only accessible to the rich, since they required a greater amount of expensive fabric, which is not the case of the 19th century crinolines: those were worn by every woman regardless of class and financial possibilities. The farthingales also did something unseen during the Renaissance era: they exposed the shoes. This change had 3 benefits: less fabric since the dresses were slightly shorter, less difficulty in walking and more money for the shoes industry. Floral and animal patterns were preferred and the materials varied. The nobles wore mainly silks, furs, velvets, taffeta and brocade, while the lower classes had to be satisfied with linen and wool. Rarely, poorer people afforded to add pieces of silk or taffeta to their clothes. Nevertheless, some rules existed when it came to dressing according to your status and gender: the Sumptuary Laws. You may have gathered enough money to buy yourself noble clothes, but if you are from the lower classes, you don't want to add a huge fine from the Queen to your expenses, do you? Genderbending your clothes with your partner in public sounds fun? You really want to lose your property because of that?!

If you were a man during the Elizabethan era, you would most likely wear a shirt, a doublet (basically a sleeved jacket), a jerkin over it (which looked like a doublet, but had no sleeves) and a ruff to cover the neck (or even the wrists). And yes, wearing your cape off one shoulder was all the rage back then! Under the waist, you would wear stocking or hose and a nice pair of short, fluffy trousers. Boots were only used for outdoor work by the lower classes and hunting or riding by the nobles; on other occasions, men wore shoes. Early Elizabethans also wore codpieces: they covered the genitals and became bigger and more ornamented in time, so much that a shocked philosopher labelled them as "empty and useless" since they grew to the size of a pocket. Hats were extremely important; adding a few feathers meant you belonged at least to the middle-class and guaranteed your success with the ladies! Now, going back to the collar, this could be the famous cartwheel ruff (shown in the illustration) or more like a typical suit collar, but just larger in shape. Sometime around 1605, during the

early reign of James I who was still dressing like in the Elizabethan era, the gentlemen abandoned the large cartwheel ruffs in favour of the new, simpler type of collar, which continued to be popular throughout the 17th century.

The hair was brushed back for both men and women. Most of the women of higher ranks would attach different colourful accessories in their hair, while hats also became more common for them. Men would later wear something called a "lovelock", a portion of hair, sometimes braided and tied with a ribbon, that officially symbolized faithfulness and love for a certain lady, even though its creation might have been accidental. It appears the Danish king actually had a health issue, but the Court thought it was a new trend and it immediately spread across Western Europe. If you have ever watched the cartoon 'Pocahontas', it is time for you to know that Disney (surprisingly!) got the evil Governor Ratcliffe pretty accurate, although the double lovelock he sports was not actually a thing.

This era of fashion supremacy ended sometime around the reign of James I's son, Charles I, when France took the reins. Even though the next fashion era, the Georgian, was also a time of great fashion changes in the whole Western area, we will still find France eclipsing the British lands, with queens (literally and figuratively) of fashion and scandal, while the English Court was far more peaceful... and chaste.

The magical key to meanings and origins of some words and phrases thorough the eyes of two curious teenagers

Bianca Ivașcu and Laura Alexia Lazăr, X G

SANDWICH

Let's start with a classic. We all know about the famous sandwich, but what are this snack's origins? It is named after an 18th-century English aristocrat: John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich. It is said that he ordered his valet to bring him meat tucked between two pieces of bread because he was too busy playing cards. Then, the Earl of Sandwich's friends started to order it as well: „The same as Sandwich!". The first written usage of the English word appeared in Edward Gibbon's journal where he refers to „bits of cold meat" packed as a „Sandwich". 250 years later, it's still a favourite!

CROCODILE TEARS

Everyone has heard the phrase "crocodile tears" at least once. It is used to describe a display of superficial or false sorrow, but the saying actually derives from a medieval belief that crocodiles shed tears of sadness while killing and consuming their prey. The myth dates back to the 14th century and comes from a book called "The Travels of Sir John Mandeville." It is noted that "These serpents slay men, and ate them weeping, and they have no tongue." While inaccurate, Mandeville's account of weeping reptiles later found its way into the works of Shakespeare, and "crocodile tears" became an idiom as early as the 16th century. Now that's an old expression!

PAINT THE TOWN RED

The phrase "paint the town red" most likely owes its origin to one legendary night of drunkenness. In 1837, the Marquis of Waterford led a group of friends on a night of drinking through the town of Melton Mowbray. It all ended in vandalism: Waterford and his friends knocked down flowerpots, pulled knockers off doors and broke some windows. Moreover, the mob literally painted a tollgate, the doors of several homes and a swan statue with red paint. The marquis and his pranksters did compensate Melton for the damages, but their drunken escapade may very well be the reason for calling a wild night out this way. However, it may originate from the red lights of the brothels and refers to men behaving as if their whole town were a red-light district.

https://www.history.com/news/10-common-sayings-with-historical-origins

TRAVELLING DURING A PANDEMIC

Ștefania Iacob, XII H

This grand show is eternal. It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never all dried at once; a shower is forever falling; vapor ever rising.

Naturalist John Muir when asked to describe the world

I think we can all agree on the fact that in the midst of a pandemic, one can easily forget how fascinating the world we're living in is. That's mainly the reason why I started my article by quoting John Muir's – in times like these, we tend to immerse ourselves in negative thoughts and simply overlook life's small pleasures we should be grateful for – like being able to watch the sunset. Or the rain falling down. Uncomplicated deeds that can brighten up your day.

That being said, let's get back to the main point of this article, which is travelling during a pandemic – YES or NO? Most of you are probably wondering – can we travel while COVID is still out there? And especially – should we do it? I believe that this question is one of utmost importance and luckily I got you covered!

First of all, I'm going to start with a background story of how my summer holidays used to be before this global epidemic (side note: I think the fact that we're using the term "before" when talking about an action that happened before the pandemic is the perfect representation of how COVID affected our lives. It strikes me that it has become such a great reference in our "timeline".).

Anyhow, everyone who knows me also noticed that I might (only "might?!") have a fondness for Germany - one of the main reasons why I sometimes enjoy calling this country "zweites Zuhause" - my second home. As always, I had planned my trip to Bavaria long before the pandemic happened and although I knew that I was going to be in a safe place (at least safer than Romania), I was definitely experiencing some feelings of uncertainty and doubt. Both Hungary and Austria had closed their borders for tourists and under no circumstances was one to spend more than 24 hours in one of these countries without getting COVID-tested before. However, as I was planning to do a lot this year, I took the risk and just went for it! And it was probably THE wisest choice I've made!

Of course, the disadvantages of travelling during times like these should be taken into account as well -- I can't stress enough how anxious I was as me and my family crossed the Hungarian border (Reminder to everyone who plans to travel during the pandemic – read the news, but don't overanalyze them, as a great number of media reports tend to be deceiving & exaggerate the current situation). We were 100% sure that we should undergo a couple of medical examinations before crossing the border into Hungary but guess what? We waited less than 10 minutes and nobody asked us anything! Strange, isn't it?! Same thing happened at the border with Austria. Needless to mention the fact that I had filled out plenty of forms and not a single person wanted to see them!

Nevertheless, I stopped being so stressed out the moment I set foot on German soil. My trip to

Germany this year was so much different from the other ones, yet so fantastic and remarkable. In the current chaos, it was a much needed getaway from the daily city life I'm trying to get back to now. Still not over the fact that 4 weeks went by so fast. How on earth are we already in November?!

The truth is that I've been spending my summer in Bavaria for so many years and only now do I realize how grateful I am for every moment I spent in this amazing place. I remember describing this place as being "boring" and "designed for older people" a couple of years ago as it was yesterday. I used to LOVE the noises of a big city, the lights, the cars, always being in a rush...Don't get me wrong, I still do but there are some (unprecedented) times when I feel the need to enjoy the silence (pun intended!). Therefore, the Bavarian Forest is always my go to place – even in the midst of a pandemic.

But most important of all — I'm still in awe of the stunning landscapes & mesmerizing sunsets I've seen here. The evening walks I used to take while gazing at the sky and taking plenty of photos. The hiking trails (designed for advanced hikers sometimes!). The quietness and stillness of the summer nights. The people I've met & the knowledge I've gained. The way I used to spend my nights on the balcony, even though it was so cold outside.

Of all the places I've ever visited, the Bavarian Forest will always have something special to it.

That being said, I hope I can sum up these thoughts by some pictures. Photos do speak louder than words — that's what they say, right?

Also, for everyone wondering – all of these photos were shot on my trustworthy iPhone by me.

4 months later, I'm still mesmerized by how stunning this sunset was. Looks like someone had painted the sky!

DO go chasing waterfalls!

A typical Bavarian city seen from above

In conclusion, I should probably answer the previous question – is travelling during a pandemic safe? Well, to be honest, the answer is: it depends. It depends on so many factors – the country you're planning your visit to, the means of transport, the current restrictions.

What I can say for sure though – and what I advise anyone to do – is:

- Watch more sunsets!
- Take a walk and focus on your thoughts while you're admiring nature!
- Light up a scented candle and drink some hot tea while you're watching your favourite movie!
- Think less about the negative effects of the pandemic & focus more on the positive impact it had on your life!

Hope I was able to shed some light upon a lesser known situation!

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Coordinating teachers: Dorina Enciu, Ana Maria Georgiana Muşat

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REDACTORI:

Aurelia-Maria Popescu
Alexandra-Maria Zaman
Maria Bogdan
Sara-Maria Tudosie
Delia Cojocariu
Ilinca Dima
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Andreea-Maria Sicoe
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Ștefania Iacob
Bianca Ivașcu

îGRAFICA:

Maria=Alexandra Voicu
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