

**Protuberance**  
by Ellena Savage

The week my first book was launched, so too was the pandemic.

I had been excited (about the book).

I had been excited, after years alone in my bedroom, writing it, for the book to be out in the world, with me, my body—alive!

Then everything was cancelled.

The readings, the festivals, the sparkling white wine.

I was sent back to my room without supper.

I was not so sure it—the book—existed.

I was not sure I existed, either.

I became neither dead nor alive, but presumed past-tense, presumed dead.

I did not mind this.

I had novels to read, a bed to lie down in.

I had moors to walk.

I did not mind being presumed dead.

I wished that my students had gotten the notice.

They kept emailing, kept calling, kept wishing for me to affirm that they existed, which was their right.

I did it, held them in the present as best I could, because that was my job, and I needed the money.

What I wanted, though, was to tell them they had me mistaken.

I was not, in fact, alive.

Not in the way they seemed to think.

I wanted to engulf myself in the voices of ghosts.

W. H. Auden (dead) writes that through art, 'we are able to break bread with the dead, and without communion with the dead a fully human life is impossible.'

I wanted a fully human life.

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As an undergraduate, I learned that when you quote a text, you quote it in the present tense, even if the text is a hundred years old.

You do this, any teacher will tell you, because if you're quoting it, it's still happening.

The text is alive on your breath when you speak it.

And every living text is connected to every other.

When you trace the lines back, a web of connections—ghost threads, invisible in some light—comes into view.

This is why certain critics extinguish the individual body as the text's origin.

To them, the *web* is the thing that lives, not us—not us animal mediums.

To them, we might as well be dead.

Cancel the sparkling white wine.

But texts move through bodies that live and fail and die.

And when you listen closely, another web appears.

One with broken lines.

One with whole panels missing.

When I think of the word community, I think of deep time.

I think of the web, and the shadow web.

The dead with books out (alive).

The dead not accounted for (dead—pending recovery).

The unborn, who have visions, too.

\*

‘Where are your dead buried?’ asks Vinciane Despret (living).

My blood-dead are buried in Yorkshire.

Near the Brontë sisters—also mine.

My dead.

Those moors.

Where are your dead buried?

Despret means: *Where are you from?*

I mean: *Who is your community?*

I mean: Who are your ghosts?

When Emily Brontë walked the moors, her face was ‘lit up by a divine light’  
(Anne Carson, living).

My blood-dead walked the moors, I am sure of it.

Their faces, like mine, were lit by a divine light.

My blood-dead didn’t have the money for paper.

Their stories are somewhere.

Not on pages.

Somewhere else.

Tristan Bera (living) asks, for *Where are you from?*, 'What trees did you draw as a child?'

The dead are from places, too.

From the earth.

Heredity is one mode of speaking with the dead.

So is art.

I want a child but I won't give up my mornings.

I have quires of paper.

I have pens coming out my ears.

As a child, I drew gumtrees.