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Who's Speaking Please? / 您好

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<https://paper-republic.org/pubs/read/whos-speaking-please/>

Who's Speaking Please?

Zhongwei had been in a daze ever since he came back home. There was still a dent in the centre of the pillow. The covers had been twisted by the snake-like grip of their legs. One flip-flop was in the bathroom, and one was just outside the door—she liked to walk around barefoot. The glass of water stood on a table, half-drunk. His underwear and shirt were folded beside the bed. She'd worn them while sitting on the windowsill early that morning, after the rain, the sea breeze playing with her long hair. She came, she saw, and she consummated—this was clear from the signs scattered about the flat. But now, Zhongwei was alone, like a stupid block of wood.

An old saying floated into his head: 'A thousand ships sailed past, but none was yours.' He stood by the window and looked down. The view of the street was obstructed; he saw the cars appear without warning and then gradually drive out of sight. He was sure that he loved her utterly, completely, hopelessly; whenever she was away it felt like a knife was scraping against his bones.

Theirs was the kind of eternal love that transcended history, wars, science and technology.

It was only a few hours since they parted, but he still couldn't stand the emptiness of being alone. He decided to call her. She would probably be eating, but he couldn't help it. He wanted to shout at the top of his lungs, 'I love you! I miss you so much it hurts!'

She picked up almost immediately.

'Hello, who's speaking please?' she said awkwardly.

'Who is it?' A man was sitting beside her.

'Yes, I will take care of the matter you've asked me to take care of, but right now I'm eating with a friend. Goodbye,' she said.

It took him a while to come back to his senses. The words filled up every space in his head: fuck, oh fuck, motherfucker. Then he thought that it might just be a misunderstanding. Maybe she was like Marguerite Gautier in *The Lady of the Camellias*. A courtesan, Marguerite tried to earn enough money to support herself and Armand by neglecting her poor lover and entertaining a wealthy duke. The overly sensitive Armand misunderstood her and never forgave her. She lived in agony for the rest of her life.

Was that it?

Impossible.

It was clearly a stupid mistake. She didn't want to ignore the call and hurt his feelings, but she didn't want to take the call and say anything intimate that would surprise the man she was eating with. Because what else would Zhongwei want to say at that moment except I love you? It was easy to tell from the question 'Who is it?' that the man was sitting quite close to her.

His heart tightened.

She was twitchy on the phone, like a rabbit trying to hide in the bushes. Nothing could be more hurtful. Zhongwei felt a deep chill. The distance between them had never been so vast.

A little later, she called back and, apologetic, explained what had happened. Zhongwei was like a gambler who had lost all his money but was still staring at the prize pool enviously, trying to think of a way to get a few chips back. He would take what he could get.

您好

阿乙

回家后，忠伟一直发呆。枕头上留有头痕。蜷曲的被窝让人想起腿像蛇一样夹过它们。一只拖鞋在卫生间，另一只在门外，她喜欢赤脚。喝过的半杯水还在。他的内裤和衬衫叠在床边，她曾穿着它们坐在雨后清晨的窗台上，海风吹过长发——这间房子全部是她来到、她看见、她献身的痕迹，现在只剩忠伟一个人。像根傻逼木头。

忠伟想到一句古话：过尽千帆皆不是。他站在窗前俯瞰楼下有限的街道，那些车辆忽然出现又慢慢消失。他确定自己正倾尽所有、不可救药地爱她，因为近乎刮骨的思念。

这就是穿越历史、战争与科技的永恒之爱。

仅仅分别几小时，他便忍受不下孤身一人的空荡，拨打手机。这时她应该吃饭，但他管不得了。他想喊着告诉对方，我爱你，想你想得好苦。

几乎在拨通的同时，她接听了。

“喂，您好。”

她这样尴尬地说。

“谁呀？”

在旁边有一位男子。

“您好，您托我办的事我会办好的，我现在和朋友吃饭，先挂了。”

忠伟半晌回不过神来，心里连续冒出三个词，操，干你娘，丢你老母。过了一会他试图想这只是误会，就像《茶花女》里的妓女玛格丽特·戈蒂埃，为了与情郎足够生活的费用，冷落情郎阿尔芒，短暂应酬有钱的公爵。敏感的阿尔芒误会了她，在心灵上对她报复，终使郁郁而终。

难道她也是这样？

这怎么可能？

这分明是愚蠢的失误。她既不想不接电话，以怠慢我，也不想因为接听时话语亲密（在这时我的嘴里除开我爱你还会有什么）而让那个陪她吃饭的人诧异。从他清晰的询问声（“谁呀”）可以判断，当时他坐在她身边很近的位置。

忠伟内心一阵绞痛。

她说得手忙脚乱，就像仓皇将头埋在草里的兔子。却是没有比这更伤人的了。忠伟冰彻至骨，感觉彼此相隔万里。不久以后她打电话来，歉疚地解释刚发生的一切，而忠伟像输光的赌徒眼睛通红地看着奖池，想着怎样往兜里回收一点筹码。能回收多少就回收多少。

A Message Held to the Flame / 我们所处的人的环境

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A Message Held to the Flame

I lack the knowledge and scientific expertise to offer any opinion on the new coronavirus epidemic. I have been watching the numbers, trying to grasp what experts are saying, and observing the responses of various governments, but none of that has allowed me to form a clear, coherent conclusion. In my birthplace of Jiangxi, only one death has so far been attributed to a case of pneumonia related to the coronavirus. In Fujian, too, the death toll stands at one. I don't know whether those low numbers are due to particularly effective local efforts to fight the virus, the epidemic striking those two provinces with diminished ferocity, or a combination of both factors. Someday, I am sure, objective conclusions will be reached on the epidemic.

I've felt the stress that everyone is under. It reminds me of Werewolf, the classic social deduction game that divides players into "innocent villagers" and "werewolves." The "werewolves" are provided with the identities of their fellow players, but the "innocent villagers" are given only the number of werewolves. When I played in the past, I would often ask myself: what would it be like to live according to the logic of the game? How would things turn out? Unfortunately, in this epidemic, we're playing the role of "innocent villagers," waiting for the "werewolf" to appear from nowhere and murder us. In a situation like this, some people turn into something that barely resembles their previous selves—perhaps it is more accurate to say that their true natures emerge. Fukasaku Kinji's film *Battle Royale* (2000) dramatizes exactly this process, showing what happens when a game turns into a life and death struggle.

The hazards and dangers of our games have been made very real by the epidemic. By simply riding together on public transportation, we might transmit the virus or be infected by it. What makes that even more frightening is the possibility that the person transmitting the virus might not show any signs of infection, and that the person infected might themselves remain asymptomatic. In a situation like that, where everyone is at risk, we have the chance to see how people truly treat themselves and others. There is no playing it close to the vest; we must all lay our cards on the table. For some, that has meant exposing to the world their private fears. I am thinking of the folks from a residential compound in Nanyang City, Henan, who prevented neighbors—nurses at a nearby hospital—from returning home after work, fearful that they would spread the disease. There were also a number of cases where paranoia about the potential arrival of Hubei residents drove people to destroy the roads into their villages. That fear and paranoia led to a Hubei truck driver being trapped on the side of the highway for close to a month after he was turned away at a roadblock and denied entry to rest stops. The truck driver was made overnight a refugee in his own nation. This anxiety has even reached my own residential compound, where anyone entering the gates must submit to having their temperature taken and show a pass card authorizing their visit. When iron

spikes were installed on the tops of the walls, I thought that the efforts to keep people out had gone too far, but then I came to find out that many of my fellow residents had asked for exactly those steps to be taken. I had come to a similar realization about the security checkpoints set up at the entrances to the subway: the increased security was a government initiative, but it had the full support of many citizens. Health and safety have begun to justify many things.

Paranoia and anxiety are not the only things that have been revealed, though. Many have revealed a decency and honor that would usually stay private. I am talking about the doctors, journalists, volunteers, philanthropists, delivery drivers, and shop owners that have continued marching forward with nobility and integrity. They deserve our respect.

In *The Ballad of the Sad Café* by Carson McCullers, there is a line that goes: "It is known that if a message is written with lemon juice on a clean sheet of paper there will be no sign of it. But if the paper is held for a moment to the fire then the letters turn brown and the meaning becomes clear." I realize now that over the past twenty years, I have never really understood the people that surround me. This epidemic is like a strip of litmus paper, revealing to me what has been hidden in the hearts of those people. I have come to understand exactly what sort of citizens this nation has fostered, what sort of children our parents have created... I believe that this epidemic will be a chance for us to learn more about the people that we share our space with; I believe that through this epidemic, both the government and individuals will gain a better understanding of how we might deal with each other.

我们所处的人的环境

阿乙

我缺乏足够的知识储备和科学思考能力，来判断这一场新冠疫情。疫情期间，我很关注数据的变化、专家怎么说以及不同的政府怎么做，它们没有给我一个清晰、一致的结论。在我的出生地，江西省，因新冠病毒肺炎去世的，至 3 月 30 日，为 1 人；福建省也是 1 人。我不知道两省死亡率这么低，是因为当地组织了出色的抗疫行动，还是因为疫情本身没有想象中的那么可怕。抑或两者兼而有之？我相信，未来会给这次疫情下一个客观的结论。

我能感受到的，是人们的应激反应。我在玩“狼人杀”游戏时，常会出神，想，如果这不是游戏，而是真实的处境，一切将会怎样。那么，我们作为“平民”，就会突然处在被“狼”杀死的危险中。我们就会变为另外一个人，我们人性中真实的东西就会被逼出来。深作欣二导演的《大逃杀》反映的就是真实的“杀戮游戏”发生时人的应对情况。

新冠疫情爆发，实际是将过去只存在于游戏里的危险与考验真实化了：病毒在人与人的接触过程中传播。共同乘坐交通工具导致感染，以及出现无症状感染者，加深了人们的恐惧。因此，我们有机会看到，在风险状态下，别人怎样真实地对待自己，以及自己怎样真实地对待别人。这等于是翻开了别人和自己的底牌。有一些人直接表露了自己的焦虑，比如河南南阳市的一个小区，一些人阻止护士回去，因为害怕她携带病毒；一些地方不允许

湖北地区人员进入，甚至挖断路；一名姓肖的湖北司机因为高速路口不让下、服务区不让进，而在高速公路被困近 20 天，成为大地上真正的异乡人。我所生活的小区，进入需要出示出入证，测量体温，小区的围墙新铺设了铁刺，起初我认为这种管理的强化，是空降的，后来我想到，它究竟也反应了很多小区居民的意愿。正如有一天我想到，在地铁设立安检不仅仅是政府有意，它也得到很多市民的支持。健康和正在成为最大的正义。有一些人则在疫情期间，表现出非常高贵的一面，很多医生、记者、志愿者、捐献者、快递员、商人做出了高贵的选择，他们值得我们脱帽致敬。

在《伤心咖啡馆之歌》里，卡森·麦卡勒斯写道：“用柠檬汁在白纸上写字是看不出来的。可是如果把纸拿到火上去烤一烤，棕色的字就会显出来，意思也就一清二楚了。”过去二十年来，我对自己所处的人的环境，一直缺乏直观的认识，这次疫情就像一张杰出的试纸，检测出它的形态。我因此知道，过去几十年来，国家不断地作用于个人、父母不断地作用于子女，结出了怎样的一个结果。我相信大家都通过这次疫情，对自己所处的人群有了切肤的认识。我想通过这次疫情，政府和个人，都学会了如何与人群继续打交道。