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THE BIG PONDER

I Love You, I Hate You

By Sylvia Cunningham and Monika Müller-Kroll

Monika Müller-Kroll: Paul Walsh is a freelance writer in Berlin. He's always looking for things to write about.

> **Paul Walsh**: And a really easy way of getting published is to find an anniversary …

Sylvia Cunningham: Anniversaries or birthdays, Paul says. So one day he was walking in his Berlin neighborhood. He was on his way back from mailing a letter.

[MUSIC STARTS]

> **Paul Walsh**: I thought I'll take this way home, went down a side street, and that was Lübecker Straße, and on the wall there, there was a plaque, and it was the birthplace, the place where Kurt Tucholsky was born.

Monika Müller-Kroll: And that name stuck with him. Kurt Tucholsky. A few years later, he noticed – Tucholsky's 130th birthday was coming up.

> **Paul Walsh**: And then I kind of fell down this rabbit hole, and some of the rabbit holes when you're writing and researching can be really boring, but this one was really interesting. And I found it really fascinating to read about his life and what went on in the '20s in Germany.

[MUSIC FADES]

Sylvia Cunningham: Kurt Tucholsky, who died in 1935, was one of the most influential writers during the Weimar Republic. He came from a Jewish family and was known for his clever poems and searing satire. A recent New York Times article equated his level of fame to "the kings of American late-night comedy" today.

> **Paul Walsh**: In the west, we tend to associate German writers with kind of angst and depression and kind of romanticism, but Kurt Tucholsky, he's kind of like … he's not heavy, he can be really light. He can talk about serious issues, but you know he can really make you laugh as well, and you can see why he was really popular.

Monika Müller-Kroll: That's what Paul Walsh really liked about this famous Berliner. That he was funny. Like this essay from 1929:

Man's Voice [IN GERMAN]: Die Kunst, falsch zu reisen. Wenn du reisen willst, verlange alles von der Gegend, in die du reist, alles: schöne Natur, den Komfort der Großstadt, kunstgeschichtliche Altertümer, billige Preise, Meer, Gebirge – also: vorn die Ostsee und hinten die Leipziger Straße. Ist das nicht vorhanden, dann schimpfe.

Man's Voice [ENGLISH VOICEOVER]: How to travel wrong. When you want to travel, demand everything of the place you go to: natural beauty, the comforts of a metropolis, old artistic treasures, low prices, the sea, the mountains – in other words, the Baltic Sea in front and Fifth Avenue in back. If all that isn't available, start complaining.

Monika Müller-Kroll: Or this. I love this one: "Das Englische ist eine einfache, aber schwere Sprache. Es besteht aus lauter Fremdwörtern, die falsch ausgesprochen werden."

Sylvia Cunningham: Which means, "English is a simple but difficult language. It's made up of all these foreign words that are pronounced incorrectly."

Monika Müller-Kroll: Tucholsky was incredibly observant, of people, of politics. Another writer at that tumultuous time said Tucholsky was a man who wanted to stop a catastrophe with his typewriter.

Paul Walsh: He was really, really against nationalism. He wrote loads of poems and stories about how stupid it was, about the kind of arbitrariness of borders and flags, and about how people waving flags should be distrusted. He was a soldier in the First World War, he spoke from experience, and he said this is crazy, you know, this kind of slaughterhouse. He spoke of the German nation as being producers of human jam at one point.

Sylvia Cunningham: In his essay, *Heimat*, or *Homeland*, he wrestles with just that – his homeland, and how to love it. He rejects the flag-waving patriotism of people who say "Germany above all." He counters that with:

Paul Walsh: We have the right to hate Deutschland because we love it.

Monika Müller-Kroll: We have the right to hate Germany because we love it.

[MUSIC STARTS]

Sylvia Cunningham: That sentiment is our starting point to explore the love-hate relationship we have with the countries we come from. Is there a right way to love the place you're from? We'll hear from an American writer and a Vietnamese refugee:

Viet Thanh Nguyen: I have a whole essay in my head about yes, I love America. BUT. And there are so many other things to say.

Monika Müller-Kroll: A German writer with Turkish roots:

Cigdem Toprak: When I am criticizing the German society, I criticize it because I want the German society to improve.

Sylvia Cunningham: A Holocaust survivor and the former president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the first woman elected to the position:

Charlotte Knobloch [IN GERMAN]: Ich spreche ja in der Hauptsache vom aufgeklärten Patriotismus, damit er nicht verwechselt wird mit Nationalismus.

Woman's Voice [ENGLISH VOICEOVER]: What I'm talking about is an "enlightened patriotism," so that patriotism is not mistaken for nationalism.

Monika Müller-Kroll: And we'll hear from two German-American couples, who have grappled with questions about where they belong throughout their relationships. I'm Monika Müller-Kroll.

Sylvia Cunningham: And I'm Sylvia Cunningham.

[MUSIC FADES]

Sylvia Cunningham: And R. Jay and Tanja, can you hear us all right …

R. Jay Magill: Yes, can you hear us?

Sylvia Cunningham: Yes …

Monika Müller-Kroll: We start this episode of THE BIG PONDER in Berlin, on a Zoom call with two couples. They're no strangers to questions about identity and where to call home.

Sylvia Cunningham: But before they started pondering complicated questions about their love for America, or their love for Germany, they first had another type of love to address. Here's Katja Ridderbusch and Jim Bauser:

Katja Ridderbusch: We fell in love and we did do the transatlantic commute for a while, basically for four years and then we got married.

Jim Bauser: You were a combat reporter, I was in combat.

R. Jay Magill: [LAUGHING]

Katja Ridderbusch: See? That's a man of few words, that's the executive summary basically.

Sylvia Cunningham: Who you just heard laughing – that is R. Jay Magill. He's married to Tanja Maka-Magill and they have an 11-year-old son.

Tanja Maka-Magill: R. Jay is punctual, he likes to clean and tidy the house.

R. Jay Magill: Yeah, we definitely have grown into the other culture.

Sylvia Cunningham: Both couples met while in the United States and fell in love there. Both couples weighed up the pros and cons, but in the end, they made opposite decisions. Katja and Jim chose the U.S. and settled down in Atlanta, Georgia.

Monika Müller-Kroll: For Tanja and R. Jay, it was a little more complicated. The two were at a crossroads in 2001. Tanja was working at a museum in Massachusetts, and her internship was about to end. And so they had to decide:

> **Tanja Maka-Magill**: Do we want to stay in America, or do we want to go back to Germany? And my decision had a lot to do with September 11th, yeah, with patriotism again, and I felt very uncomfortable and decided that I wanted to go back to Germany. And then R. Jay …
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> **R. Jay Magill**: Followed …
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> **Tanja Maka-Magill**: Followed. Yeah.
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> **R. Jay Magill**: Yeah, I think it was a different experience if you were not from the United States. I didn't feel like I had to run away from the United States, that's for sure, but I completely understood Tanja's discomfort with being there, and sort of, there was you know palpable hostility to foreigners. Which you …
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> **Tanja Maka-Magill**: Yeah and also maybe, I mean, not just that. Also maybe that was also the point where I felt that I wanted to be home, I mean, because I was afraid. A reaction that one has. Like, oh my God, I have to go home to mommy or something … [LAUGHING]
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> **Monika Müller-Kroll**: And how was it for you, Katja?
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> **Katja Ridderbusch**: I mean it was a difficult time. I remember 9/11 too. Now I didn't live there at that time, but you know, we had some experiences. Remember one time when we were told "we hate Europeans" by people we considered friends in America? And quite frankly, the same thing when I moved to the U.S. you know friends that I had in Germany who said – and that was more during the Iraq War, you know 2005 was when I actually moved there. "How can you move there? All those baby killers in America." I mean, we had some nasty experiences with people we considered friends on both sides.
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> **Jim Bauser**: You know I spent 20 years in the military, and there's very few places on this planet where I haven't been. And as an American, you're either loved or hated, you're either loved or hated. There's very little room in between, it seems. I've been in technically hostile countries and met wonderful people. I've been in technically friendly countries and met real, you know, knuckleheads. "Dummkopfs." You know, it doesn't matter. If you can't differentiate between the people and the governments, then I think you're not going to experience, you know, really getting to know people in different places and different cultures. Like, I said, I've been there, seen that, done it. It's not going to hurt our relationship or anything like that. You know, you can't change some people's minds.
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> **Monika Müller-Kroll**: So Katja and R. Jay, you're both in your partners' countries. Do you identify now with one country more over the other, or both, or neither?
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> **Katja Ridderbusch**: I think just being away from the country where you are born and where you were raised and where you spend a good chunk of your life, I think makes you generally speaking become more conscious about your identity, and you kind of ask yourself these questions. I would say today, when we talk about things like patriotism and pride, you know, am I proud of being German, American, European, whatever, you know, I'm struggling a little bit with

these type of terms, "pride" and "patriotism," in part because I'm German and the term is so tainted because of German history, but also because it was just never really was something that worked for me. You know, for me, pride has to do with a sense of accomplishment. You know, it's not my accomplishment that I'm German. I feel tremendously lucky and grateful to be born in a country and at a time that has been prosperous and peaceful, you know, and free. Being from West Germany, that's an aspect too. But if there is something like sort of an emotional attachment today to a country or some sort of emotional identity that I feel a sense of belonging, then I would say it's more America today. That's really my home. And simply because I really worked towards getting there. When I was finally sworn in to become an American citizen, that was in 2010, I have to say there was a sense of pride involved with that just because that was a little bit of an accomplishment, and it was a conscious decision to be there. That doesn't mean I don't enjoy going back to Germany. I mean I love to see people. I love to see friends, family. You know, it's all the memories kind of involved with, you know, being German, you know, the taste, the smells, the sounds, you know, everything that has to do with life and childhood there. I love to visit Germany, but after two weeks, I'm kind of ready to go home.

R. Jay Magill: That's so interesting. I feel similarly, Katja, that when I'm back in the States also. Two weeks to three weeks after that, I'm definitely ready to head back to Germany. I feel 100 percent at home here and that, you know, and that's been true for about a decade. But prior to that, there were definitely years of like, "Ooh it's still a little strange," and I thought that the benchmark was when you get all the jokes, and you get all the subtle humor, you're in.

Katja Ridderbusch: Are you a German citizen now?

R. Jay Magill: I'm not. We have friends that have you know, I have American friends that have actually done the citizenship test, that have kept both. I have to look into it further. I will do a German citizenship test if I can keep my American citizenship, but I will never give it up. That's the thing. The only thing is I can't vote. That's pretty annoying.

Tanja Maka-Magill: That's true. So do you have your German … ?

Katja Ridderbusch: Yes, I have both citizenships. Yeah, I have both. And I want the same thing, same thing as R. Jay. I wouldn't have given up my German citizenship. Two identities. Two hats. Two everything.

Sylvia Cunningham: But I'm curious about that because R. Jay, it's possible that you and Tanja might live in Germany for the rest of your lives, and if it would make your life easier to get the German citizenship, why wouldn't you consider giving up your American citizenship to do that?

R. Jay Magill: It really is the core identity question. I will never be German and I never want to be German. I am an American. I feel American. I feel more American having been in Germany than I ever did in the United States. I'm proud of, you know, lots of things that are American. Embarrassed by a whole bunch of other stuff. But holding on to that key identity, that is that's not give-upable for me. That is at the base. And it's probably emotional ultimately. You know, it's emotional and psychological and … yeah.

Sylvia Cunningham: Would everyone here be comfortable saying the sentence just flat out "I love Germany" or "I love the United States of America," or do you think it comes with a little bit of a caveat, or is it more complicated than just saying it straight out?

R. Jay Magill: That's an interesting question. Who's going to go first? All right … I can say I love the United States of America, and it's mostly based on a set of values and actions that happened after the Second World War to create an incredibly peaceful and prosperous world. And I like a lot of American traits – spontaneity, creative thinking, not taking the road fully traveled. I think there's a lot of uniqueness to American thought and a lot of confidence in American thought.

Tanja Maka-Magill: I think that I would say it in English. I think I would say "I love Germany," but I think I wouldn't say it in German. I wouldn't say: "Ich liebe Deutschland." Because yeah, that sounds strange to me. So in Germany "ich liebe" is more like "ich liebe mein Mann," oder, so. "Ich liebe Deutschland," that is too much for me.

R. Jay Magill: OK, so what – if you said it in English, what would you say about it?

Tanja Maka-Magill: I would say in English, I would say I love Germany because there's a lot of culture that I like, and I like the slowness, and the coming together of people. They are also a lot of things that annoy me to death. But that is too much to say now.

R. Jay Magill: Yeah.

Jim Bauser: I can say I love America, warts and all. I echo both of your thoughts that you just shared: Opportunity, optimism, the potential for unlimitedness. The way we bond together and you know, can go forth on a project and, you know, accomplish things. But I also think there's a lot of great places out there, great ideas they have, and certainly things that we could adopt here and make better. And I hope that we do and we're open minded enough to see that and maybe take some of these great things, because what made this country so great was a lot of different people coming together with a lot of different thoughts, working together for a common goal or solution.

Katja Ridderbusch: Well, I would say I can very much echo your thoughts, Tanja. It's a little difficult to say in German, "Ich liebe Deutschland." It just doesn't sound right. But I can say there is a lot of aspects of Germany that I love and that I miss. And about America, which is really my other country and for me very personally, as a writer, as a journalist, is a country that is so full of, you know, stories. Stories of American people, of American life and the diversity of American life, and its sad stories and happy stories and weird stories and, you know, complicated stories that, you know, I want to tell a lot of them and that is sort of the opportunity for me very, very personally that America provides. And I'm very grateful for that.

[MUSIC STARTS]

Monika Müller-Kroll: Now another perspective, from another generation.

Charlotte Knobloch [IN GERMAN]: Da gibt's viele Sachen, was man lieben kann…

Monika Müller-Kroll: This is Charlotte Knobloch, the former president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. She says there are many things to love about this country.

Charlotte Knobloch [IN GERMAN]: Da gibt's … zum Beispiel die klassischen Tugenden wie Pünktlichkeit, wie Disziplin, wie Gründlichkeit und auch in den letzten Jahrzehnten die

entspannte Weitläufigkeit. Das ist ein Deutschland, das die Welt auch anerkennt, diese Art und Weise, dass Deutschland sich darstellt.

Woman's Voice [ENGLISH VOICEOVER]: There are the classic virtues such as punctuality, discipline, rigor and in recent decades, a kind of openness. This is the way the world perceives Germany. It's how Germany presents itself.

Sylvia Cunningham: But of course, it wasn't always this way. Charlotte Knobloch lived through the Holocaust. She survived those years of persecution hidden on a farm in Bavaria. Today she still lives in Germany. She says she's proud of how far the country has come.

Charlotte Knobloch [IN GERMAN]: Da bin ich auch sehr stolz darauf. Weil man ja lange gebraucht hat, weil die Vernichtungsjahre, die Deutschland eingeleitet hat, und auch in der Hinsicht die Folgen tragen musste, die haben schon einige Jahrzehnte gedauert bis sich das so wieder dargestellt hat wie man es zumindest in den Anfängen, wie man es heute kennt.

Woman's Voice [ENGLISH VOICEOVER]: It took a long time. Germany had to reap the consequences of what it sewed after those years of destruction, of extermination. It took many decades to get here, to the Germany we know today.

Monika Müller-Kroll: She wants people to recognize that growth – and engage with it. She says there should be a new type of patriotism, what she calls an "enlightened patriotism."

Charlotte Knobloch [IN GERMAN]: Ich meine, ich bin dafür, dass man schon im Kindergarten sagt man, mal mit den Fähnchen seines Heimatlandes verbunden wird. Dass die da schon, dass die Kinder schon im Kindergarten mit den Fähnchen rumlaufen. Dass sie wissen sie haben eine Heimat, dass sie wissen müssen, dass sie auch in dieser Heimat auch sicher eine Zukunft haben.

Woman's Voice [ENGLISH VOICEOVER]: I'm all for seeing children, as early as kindergarten, walking around with the flags of their homeland. I want them to know they have a place to call home. I don't want them to doubt that they have a future here.

Charlotte Knobloch [IN GERMAN]: Die haben jahrelang in den Schulklassen in der früheren Zeit, durch den Unterricht über den Holocaust eine gewisse Schuld aufgeladen bekommen und das ist der größte Fehler, weil diese Nachkommen haben mit diesen Themen überhaupt nichts zu tun. Sie haben nur die Verpflichtung dafür zu sorgen, dass so etwas nicht mehr passiert.

Woman's Voice [ENGLISH VOICEOVER]: In the past, when children learned of the Holocaust in school, they were also burdened with the guilt of it. But that was a mistake, because they weren't responsible for what happened. But they are responsible for making sure it never happens again.

Monika Müller-Kroll: And the way she shows her pride in Germany?

Charlotte Knobloch [IN GERMAN]: Dass ich hier bin und hier bleibe …

Sylvia Cunningham: With everything that happened to her and her family, she's still here.

[MUSIC STARTS]

Cigdem Toprak: When we were young, or when we were born we were foreigners – so 'Ausländer.'

Monika Müller-Kroll: Cigdem Toprak is a journalist and author. She was born in Germany in 1987. Cigdem has Turkish roots, and most of her work deals with questions about identity.

Cigdem Toprak: This was the term of us, we called ourselves as 'Ausländer,' and it was very official that we do not belong to that society.

Monika Müller-Kroll: In her 2020 book, *Das ist auch unser Land!* or *This is our country too*, she interviewed people from her 'community,' as she calls it. Germans with a 'Migrationshintergrund'. More than a quarter of the German population has a so-called 'migration background,' meaning their forefathers were born somewhere else.

Monika Müller-Kroll: Cigdem for your book, you talked to rappers, entrepreneurs, athletes. What did they tell you. Is Germany their country?

Cigdem Toprak: My interview partners talked a lot about exclusion about discrimination, prejudices and racism. But when I asked them: do you believe that you have opportunities in Germany, really almost all of them – just one exception – said "yes." And this "yes" was very self-confident, and also very in a positive way and they said "yes," you have opportunities in Germany.

Monika Müller-Kroll: But as you write it wasn't always like that. When you were a kid, did you long for somewhere else?

Cigdem Toprak: As teenagers we really identified ourselves with the Black community, especially in New York. We loved, of course, the music. So we got to know the U.S. culture, by the pop culture. So the hip hop music or the TV soap operas, I felt very close to certain social dynamics. For example, it was very normal in American teenage soaps that young girls have troubles with their fathers because they want to have a date or they want to go to a party. So we know that problem. The problems are very similar to our problems when we were teenagers. And this was something that maybe also German teenagers had faced, but we didn't know anything about that.

Monika Müller-Kroll: And how do you feel about Germany nowadays? Do you call Germany your home?

Cigdem Toprak: Of course like Germany is definitely my home. I figured out that patriotism is not a bad thing. We should embrace patriotism but always in a very critical way, so the question is for me, not only what does my country do for me or what I can do for my country, but how does my country treat people who do not belong to that country? So how do my country treat their neighbors, neighbor countries? How do they treat immigrants who want to be part of the country? So this is something that I ask myself.

Monika Müller-Kroll: I want to come back to a quote we heard earlier – from Weimar Republic writer Kurt Tucholsky where he says: "We have the right to hate Germany because we love it." Does this still hold some truth today, can you identify with this?

Cigdem Toprak: I can say I can identify myself with this quote. So the more we hate and I believe in that because when I was young, I also hated Germany or not Germany, but German society. I can say that. And I know that in my heart, in the bottom of my heart, it was the love and maybe the sadness of not being accepted as part of this country. But I think a lot of young people with migration background, they are not aware of their love.

[MUSIC STARTS]

Sylvia Cunningham: *I Love America. That's Why I Have to Tell the Truth About It*. That's the title of a 2018 Time Magazine essay by Viet Thanh Nguyen. Viet is a Pulitzer Prize winning author and a professor at the University of Southern California. His family fled from Vietnam when he was 4 years old.

Viet Thanh Nguyen: Too often I think when we are asked to say "I love America" or it's demanded of us, of people like me, people don't want the complications, they don't want the history. They just want a straight up "Do you or don't you love this country and if you don't love this country or if you cannot say it un-ambivalently, you should leave." You know so there's all these connotations with this phrase that needs to be unpacked. That's why I always have to say it with hesitation, because I have a whole essay in my head about yes, I love America BUT. And there's so many other things to say.

Sylvia Cunningham: So what comes before the "but." When you're thinking "I love America" what are the reasons that come to mind that you do?

Viet Thanh Nguyen: Well, I think the first reason is that 'America' is a mythological term. I mean, it's a term that symbolizes so many things to different people. But one of the things that it symbolizes is, on the one hand, liberty and freedom for those who unabashedly will say this. And on the other hand, it symbolizes conquest and erasure for those who would be ambivalent or hesitant or refuse to say it. And I think like with many other things, America is contradictory. It's not one thing or the other. And a lot of people would just want to say, well, either America is all good or America is all bad. And as someone who has benefited from many of the wonderful things from the United States of America, I can say I do love America because it's given me certain opportunities and pleasures and all of this. But I also recognize for me that the United States of America is a country built on slavery, genocide, conquest, colonization. These are facts. You know, I don't see how these are not facts. People who refuse to even acknowledge these facts completely misunderstand what this country is.

Sylvia Cunningham: But when you're visualizing what you actually love, what are the aspects that come to mind – I mean, is it the people, is it a spirit, is it a landscape?

Viet Thanh Nguyen: I mean, theoretically, when I say America, I can think, yes, you know, blue sky Montana or the prairies or things like this. But in reality, the America that I love is the America of California and the America of pop culture. And what this means is that this for me is the America of diversity, multiculturalism, things that I take for granted because I grew up in California and this is a part of the fabric of life. This is to me, the greatest thing about America that I love is the reality and the potential for diverse peoples of various many, many kinds of backgrounds to live together and to forge a country and a future beyond a norm of whiteness or white supremacy or white privilege. And then associated with that, you know, there's that notion of freedom. I can take it for granted that I can say these things to you, and that I can write what

I want to write. And I'm not going to risk being sent to prison, at least not right now. If I was in Vietnam, that would not be the case. I could not say these things about Vietnam, the equivalent things about Vietnam, and not risk being punished. And that's a reality that I think anybody would need to acknowledge. So those are the things that I love the most about this country.

[MUSIC STARTS]

Viet Thanh Nguyen: I don't know what other people's relationship to love is, but love can be complicated. Love can be tough, right? And so unless we have some pie-in-the-sky ideals of both our country and love, we have to acknowledge and oftentimes love involves hard conversations, struggle, difficult emotions, conflicts. These are all part of love. And I think that part of the nature of being engaged politically and patriotically in this country includes struggling over what we mean by love of country. And so there are these unidimensional definitions of love as in "love it or leave it." And then there are these other more revolutionary notions of love. And I'm increasingly coming around to this idea that we need to put more adjectives in front of love. Revolutionary love that would involve trying to change this country in difficult ways to make it actually come closer to the ideals that so many people profess to believe in.

[MUSIC CONTINUES]

Paul Walsh: Your country changes, and your identity changes …

Monika Müller-Kroll: Let's return to where we started. Here again is Paul Walsh, the writer in Berlin who discovered Weimar Republic writer Kurt Tucholsky a few years back.

Paul Walsh: And, you know, I'm not sure whether I would place my identity within a national framework. I mean, you have to find new ways of thinking about your identity rather than just the place where you were born or something. And I think a lot of people are in the same position as me, like thinking about what is my identity, where do I come from, what is really important to me.

Monika Müller-Kroll: There's one essay in particular that's stayed with Paul ever since he wrote that piece marking Tucholsky's 130th birthday. It's called *There is no virgin snow*. Paul reads us an excerpt …

Paul Walsh: There is no virgin snow. If you climb upwards and look around, breathing deeply and thinking what a fine fellow you are to have scaled such heights. You alone. Then you always discover footprints in the snow. Someone has been there before you. Have faith in God, despair of Him. Reject all philosophy. Let the doctor tell you that you have stomach cancer and that it will be all over in four years. Believe in a woman. Despair of her, carry on with two women, plunge into the world, withdraw from it …

Monika Müller-Kroll: In this episode of THE BIG PONDER, you heard interviews with R. Jay Magill, Tanja Maka-Magill, Katja Ridderbusch, Jim Bauser, Charlotte Knobloch, Cigdem Toprak, Viet Thanh Nguyen and Paul Walsh.

Sylvia Cunningham: You also heard excerpts from Kurt Tucholsky's book of essays, *Germany? Germany!* translated into English by Harry Zohn and from *Sprache ist eine Waffe* [*Language is a Weapon*]. The music was composed and performed by Jonathan Kroll. In Berlin, I'm Sylvia Cunningham.

Monika Müller-Kroll: And I'm Monika Müller-Kroll.

> **Paul Walsh**: All these experiences someone has had before you, this is the way someone believed, doubted, laughed, cried and pensively picked his nose, just the same way. Someone has always been there. That makes no difference, I know, you're experiencing it for the first time. For you, it is virgin snow that lies there.

THE BIG PONDER is a transatlantic podcast by the Goethe-Institut that explores abstract concepts and phenomena through personal radio essays. Every other week, one of our producers transforms a broad topic into a captivating story told from a US-German perspective.

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