

Dear Clare Wigfall,<sup>1</sup>

I hope this letter finds you in time, specifically 1999. It'd be churlish of me to hope these words also find you well, because I know exactly how they will find you. Namely, on the edge of a great gaping maw of shit.

Did you ever see *Terminator*? Time travel isn't like that at all. For one thing, only organic or formerly organic matter can travel. No robots. No, no. Time travel is more like *Remains of the Day*. Everything is pregnant with everything else. Every pause, glance, stoically twitched British eyebrow; on every wobbly tray of weak tea lies a pooling eternity of possibilities. It's actually kind of dull. But it's about hopping back onto those moments, island to island. I couldn't explain the science if I wanted to, but the trick is: only half of it is technically scientific, anyway. The other half is what you might call psychedelic. But in a Merchant Ivory sort of way.

First off, spoiler alert: the strange looking child you described in that letter to me, as you've probably guessed, is your own. However, it will be/was/is a she. Her name is Elsa. The reason she looked so nearly skinless, toothy and odd (not to mention male) is because time travel is bad news for the little ones.

Here's what I'm allowed to tell you: tomorrow morning you must get on that same tram you saw your Holy Fool child on, same seat, same everything, but chill a little on the baroque Walkman<sup>2</sup> rhapsodizing; you've got to stay alert, Wigfall. Then, when you see the man and child, follow them. But shhhh; speak not. They may not have been in 1999 long enough to hear, they may be flickering still, their inner agents flitting from time island to time island. Certainly they're still partially tripping on those time-dislocating DMT mushrooms that living hoppers need to pass backwards. Don't ask. In any event, it usually takes a few days for biological matter to firm up. Paper, if it's pure dead tree, like the one you're holding in your hands right now, is a far easier proposition. Paper was actually the first man-messaged thing we were able to send back in any kind of controlled fashion. Thus the 2013 resurgence of old-fashioned letter writing, even if it was only letters written to The Past, and most often written to oneself at significant financial expense.)

Do not touch them. Him and the baby - your family. Their skin, at this point in the hopping, may be too weak, especially your daughter's. Follow them off the tram. Into Prague. Out of Prague. Into the Bohemian forest. Hope that they see you but don't be too upset if they cannot yet hear you; imagine them sleepwalking through a jabbering mist of 14 years of accumulated time.

Elsa will see you because she's made of you. The man will not see you. Or, he will see you, but only along with everything else that has existed in that space and moment in the fourteen years of time that, technically, separate him and you. Thus, the forest. Once there it will only be you and they and fourteen years of accumulated Czech mushroom pickers and the gorgeous, painterly mesh of birdflight and hanging, falling, twirling autumn leaves; and snow and rain and, of course, the ash from the war I'm not allowed to

---

mention. But this should be easy for the man to see through. He's been trained well. The child will only have eyes for you. Elsa has another letter for you. It's written on her back, in henna. Read it before the blood starts pooling in her eyes. It is my hope - and your future self's hope, I might add - that, once you've gotten this message, you will be able to begin the process of tweaking the future, of stepping away from something just in time. Ideally, you may never know how close you came to the ruin I find you in now, here, in 2013. You really look ghastly.

What else can I say? In *Remains of the Day*, wasn't the guy Anthony Hopkins devoted his sad life to a secret fascist? Well, the future is all kind of like that.

Sincerely,  
Tod Wodicka<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This letter was written in response to the letter from Clare Wigfall which we published in our first issue; you may wish, if you haven't done so already, to download our first issue from the archive section of our website, [www.theletterspage.ac.uk](http://www.theletterspage.ac.uk), and read that letter before going any further.

Otherwise, perhaps a recap will suffice: that letter was originally written by Clare in 1999, addressed to Tod Wodicka, and described Clare's feelings of anxiety and disturbance on seeing a young boy with a 'serene and beautiful profundity evident in his being,' with 'limbs like sticks' and 'eyes with the quality of having either shrunk or perhaps only opened for the first time.' She also talked about listening to Vivaldi on headphones when she saw him. Her letter closed with Clare acknowledging that she couldn't 'explain why this incident had such an effect on me,' and that it would 'sound silly to you I know.'

In the notes she gave us to accompany this letter, Clare explained that the original had never reached Tod, and that she'd later given it to him in person. It occurred to us that Tod might be interested in seeing this letter from the past and, moreover, might consider writing a reply. We got in touch, and he sent us this. As it turned out, he wasn't the only contributor to respond to Clare's letter.

<sup>2</sup>Younger readers may not know that 'Walkman' refers to a personal stereo cassette player; actually a trademark of the Sony Corporation, the word was used generically, in much the same way as 'ipod' is now used to stand for any MP3 music player. Although, come to think of it, does anyone still remember ipods? People used them before they started keeping all their music on their phones.

<sup>3</sup>Tod Wodicka grew up in Queensbury, New York, and lives in Berlin. His debut novel, *All Shall Be Well; And All Shall Be Well; And All Manner of Things Shall Be Well*, was published in 2007, and shortlisted for the *Believer Award*. He is working on his second novel.