

WORKING IN A VACUUM – LAUREN OYLER ON THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WRITING COMMUNITY IN BERLIN

by Noel Maurice



I'm a Berliner. I have always known about the nightmareish lower marshes full of desperate poets hanging loose in late-night bars getting nothing done, slowly killing off the dream. I never wanted to become that way, because I'm a writer, and I really want to get my stuff done. When I tell people in Berlin that I'm a writer they mostly think it's funny and give me that knowing look that says "oh, you're an alcoholic", and "like everybody else in Berlin".

I met Lauren Oyler in June, when I volunteered a reading from my book at her night of readings with all-under-30 writers in Berlin, at Shakespeare & Sons on Warschauer Strasse, appropriately called "Berlin Under 30". It was great to be there : everyone was my age. Just what recently I had been missing!

This bookshop event definitely had a piece of the classroom-like charm where everyone sits politely at their tables facing the front of the room, keeping quiet through the readings and sipping delicately on a glass of wine. It suddenly brought back to me this inimitable feeling of confidence and hope for the future that only

young people can carry over quite so nonchalantly.

Instantaneously I got why Lauren wanted to have these readings with only the super-new, beginning, budding writers on stage – and how great that at the moment, there's a clutch of us bouncing around Berlin and enjoying the easy going lifestyle the city has to give. Cool! Magical thrill, truly, all great expectations floating around the air, and not a single sarcastic face... it felt really great. Aston Sam had his first ever reading that night, and what a reading.

Lauren Oyler was keeping it all fresh and together, and so I wondered, who is this lovely lady? I got a few very interesting virtual words out of her...

You just are in the middle of organizing an event for young writers in Berlin to do some readings at the English Book shop. How did you get into that?

I've been organizing the Berlin Under 30 readings at Shakespeare & Sons since last November, and they've gotten a lot of positive responses, as well as a few humorless people viciously accusing

me of ageism, which I find so boring. (Just so we're clear, I also organize other readings at Shakespeare that have nothing to do with age.) I've always liked doing readings, mostly because I like attention but also because I think it's great to engage with writing in a different way. Writing in English but living in Germany, you generally do most of your networking/socializing/non-writing work online, and I at least really want to interact with actual humans occasionally; it's good to get a break from drone-esque scrolling, which can be really isolating, and I already felt really isolated as an expat, etc. A lot of people I'd met at events and parties had asked me if I knew about writing groups or readings they could go to. I also knew (from experience) that it's good to have something like a deadline to work towards, but that it can be hard to create those for yourself, particularly if you're a young writer without a book contract or editorial contacts. It's like working in a vacuum. I'm also friends with the owners of the bookstore, and I knew they were always looking to host events/readings, so I put it all together. Several writers have done their very first readings with us, which is really exciting, and I'm happy to be able to give people that opportunity.