

# Erasure poem from the Covid-19 lockdown in Paris, March 2020

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These poems are extracted from my verse novel, *Fallow* (WIP), which traces the journey of a student in Paris who turns climate activist during the COVID-19 pandemic. The erasure poems use newspaper clips or articles which I translated from French to English. I extracted words and phrases into standalone poems to subvert the plain meaning of these texts at first reading. The erasure poems chart a quest for meaning behind the pandemic and hidden conversations with Covid-19 as a non-human entity. In a time of lockdowns, when community care meant physical isolation, the act of erasure becomes a symbol for a new common space, and tentatively, social change. The form creatively echoes the critical trend to perceive the COVID-19 pandemic as a unique opportunity to reflect on humanity's responsibilities for the climate crisis and ecological loss. (Corvino, 2021; Geiger, 2021).

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I'm a civilian.

**Mathias Wargon, 53, head of emergency medicine at Delafontaine Hospital in Saint-Denis**

I don't  
want  
war

Our  
missions are  
emergency ,

real life

I live only in

Fear. Fear.  
Fear Fear

“This is only the beginning of the war, and we’re already starting to lose soldiers.”

Mathias Wargon, 53, head of emergency medicine at Delafontaine Hospital in Saint-Denis (Seine-Saint-Denis)

“I don’t like the term ‘war medicine.’ I prefer the term ‘disaster medicine.’ I’m a civilian. If I had wanted to practice war medicine, I would have joined the army. Here in Saint-Denis, it’s not yet war, but the hospital, the entire hospital, has been put into war mode this week.”

Our lab is preparing tests. We’ve emptied the wards to accommodate Covid patients. There are some intubated in intensive care today. Admissions are filtered, and visits are limited. In the emergency room, we’ve completely changed our way of working: we’re redirecting less serious cases to the private sector.

“At every level, the hospital has jumped into action to deal with the epidemic. This makes the disconnect with real life all the more shocking.”

Every lunchtime, a crisis unit meets for an hour, an hour and a half, to manage all the problems (beds, equipment), sometimes contradicting the decisions made the day before. I spend my days solving problems. My life revolves around the hospital; I live only in the coronavirus.

This is only the beginning of the war, and we are already starting to lose soldiers. In the emergency room, three doctors, a nurse, a nursing assistant, and a stretcher-bearer have contracted the coronavirus. They are confined to their homes while they recover. Fear. We’ve talked about it a lot this week. Fear of contamination. Fear of going home and infecting loved ones. Fear of seeing people die. Fear of having to choose between patients.

Stéphane Foucart, Elisabeth Pineau, Stéphane Mandard, Nathalie Guibert, and Sandrine Blanchard (Wargon, 2020)

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### Associated readings

Corvino, F. (2021) ‘The covid-19 pandemic and climate change: Some lessons learned on individual ethics and social justice’, *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 77(2–3), pp. 691–714. doi:10.17990/rpf/2021\_77\_2\_0691.

Geiger, N. et al. (2021) ‘Investigating similarities and differences in individual reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Climate Crisis’, *Climatic Change*, 167(1–2). doi:10.1007/s10584-021-03143-8.

Saadat, S., Rawtani, D. and Hussain, C.M. (2020) ‘Environmental perspective of covid-19’, *Science of The Total Environment*, 728, p. 138870. doi:10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.138870.

Wargon, M. (2020) ‘Journal de crise des blouses blanches: “La consigne est de se cacher quand le brancard passe.”’, *Le Monde*, 22 March.