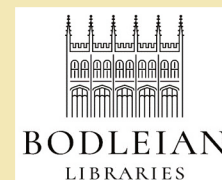


# Bamberg: An Anthology



Tara Williams



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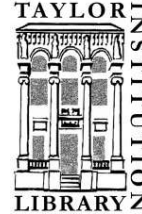
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Tara Williams

Bamberg – An Anthology

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## Preface

It is a pleasure to be able to write the preface to a volume of poems and images by one of our very own students, Tara Williams, finalist in German. Tara spent her year abroad studying at the University of Bamberg and also used the time to write this collection with the help of a prize from Lidl GB. Oxford is very lucky in having a number of university exchanges which have been going strong for decades and have weathered the storm of Brexit. Bamberg holds a particular fascination with its medieval heritage, beautiful architecture and literary associations. Previous students have done internships at the Bamberger Staatsbibliothek, working on manuscripts and early printed books. Topics with a Bamberg connection such as the first printer to publish vernacular illustrated books, Albrecht Pfister, are regularly featured in Oxford lectures, and E.T.A. Hoffmann above all holds a prominent place on the German syllabus.

There is a strong tradition in Oxford of combining History of the Book, study of literature, and creative writing. The series in which this booklet is published was first set up to document the collaboration with two writers in residence: Ulrike Draesner and Yoko Tawada. They both came to Oxford to work with students on projects involving translation, creative writing, and interacting with books, architecture, and local performance. This ‘in dialogue’ approach has been taken by Tara to include the reverse journey from Oxford to Bamberg – and back into the materiality of the Taylor Editions series.

Henrike Lähnemann  
Professor of Medieval German Literature & Linguistics  
Year Abroad Coordinator for German at Oxford



Bamberg, Rathausbrücke

## Introduction

This anthology, comprising of ten poems with accompanying illustrations, was made possible thanks to the support of the LIDL Year Abroad Project Prize, for which I am very grateful.

Upon receiving notification of my successful application for funding in the summer of 2024, I began work on the project as my year abroad entered its final weeks. From my base in the beautiful medieval town of Bamberg, Germany, I found inspiration from two sources: all that I had experienced over the past year spent abroad, and the literary works of E.T.A. Hoffmann. Having lived in Bamberg in the early stages of his career between the years of 1808 and 1813, Hoffmann's connection to Bamberg can be seen in the numerous buildings and institutions there which bear his name, and as a result I felt it fitting to draw upon his works as inspiration for my anthology.

I began my work on the project by choosing the works by Hoffmann that would form the basis for my inspiration. Both *Der Sandmann* (*The Sandman*) and *Der goldne Topf* (*The Golden Pot*) are darkly fantastical in tone, dealing with the inner psychologies of their protagonists and exploring the ambivalent intrigue that can lurk under the surface of the ordinary and extraordinary alike. As one of the sentiments that I wished to capture was the unique form of unease that comes from being left to live alone in another country for the first time, this tone present within Hoffmann's works particularly appealed to me. On the other hand, Hoffmann's ability to capture natural beauty also inspired me when creating other poems in the anthology, allowing me to celebrate the many wonderful things I was able to experience during the year. I enjoyed being able to consider the multifaceted nature of my year abroad experience in this way, exploring both the good and the bad that came with it.

With these sources of inspiration in mind, I decided that my anthology was to be divided into two sections, with each section being inspired by one of the aforementioned works by Hoffmann. I also made the decision during these early stages to link each poem of mine to an idea or moment from one of my chosen Hoffmann works, which I later indicated in the title of each of my poems. Once I had made these decisions, I drew up a rough structural plan of the anthology, with the accompanying illustration plans included, as I wanted to achieve a semblance of flow and overarching sentiment throughout the work as a whole. I specifically intended to achieve the sense of the reader embarking on the journey of my year abroad, beginning with initial uncertainty, developing to recognise and celebrate the beauty of Bamberg, and ultimately concluding by reflecting on the experience and the process of having to leave it behind me to return home to England.

I decided to make the writing process a gradual one, writing poems piece by piece as inspiration struck me; I felt that this made the creative process more free-flowing, which helped the project to remain fresh-feeling and organic. The same can be said for my illustrations, especially as these took longer to create than the poems themselves in most instances and consequently needed to be completed over multiple sessions.

I decided to write the majority of the poems in a fairly freely structured style in order to not feel too constrained by literary convention, but did decide to challenge myself by writing in more structured styles (such as haiku and sonnet form) for some of the poems in the second half of the anthology.

Referencing my own photos taken throughout my time in Bamberg, the anthology's accompanying illustrations are all based around the sights and experiences that I encountered during my year abroad. The intertitle image of a woman's face in bronze, for example, is of the famous door knocker that can be found in Bamberg's medieval

old town (and which also was said to have inspired Hoffmann's character of the evil *Apfelweibla*, or 'apple-seller', in *Der goldne Topf*).

The overall creative process also stretched onwards into the time following my final departure from Bamberg, allowing me to complete the writing stage of the anthology once I had returned to England. This meant that I could reflect further with the power of both hindsight and physical distance; I found this very helpful, especially in regard to some of the poems in the second section of the anthology that deal with the transitory nature of leaving Bamberg for the last time to return to my hometown, and the consequent ending of this significant period of my life.

Finally, upon my return to Oxford in the autumn of 2024, I began to collaborate with Henrike Lähnemann to turn my anthology from a digital document into a physical book ready for publication, completing the finishing touches in early 2025.

I would like to conclude this introduction to my anthology by once again thanking the judging panel who granted me the LIDL Year Abroad Project Prize funding which enabled me to bring this anthology to life. I would like to also extend my thanks to Henrike Lähnemann for all of her help throughout this process.

Tara Williams  
Oxford, in January 2025

Part One – *Der Sandmann*





## The Sandman

Although, of course, *Der Sandmann* isn't real,

I've sometimes

almost

felt that he is.

As I lie in bed in my Bamberg flat, in darkness only broken  
by the flickering of the television of an occupant opposite,  
a creeping feeling comes over me.

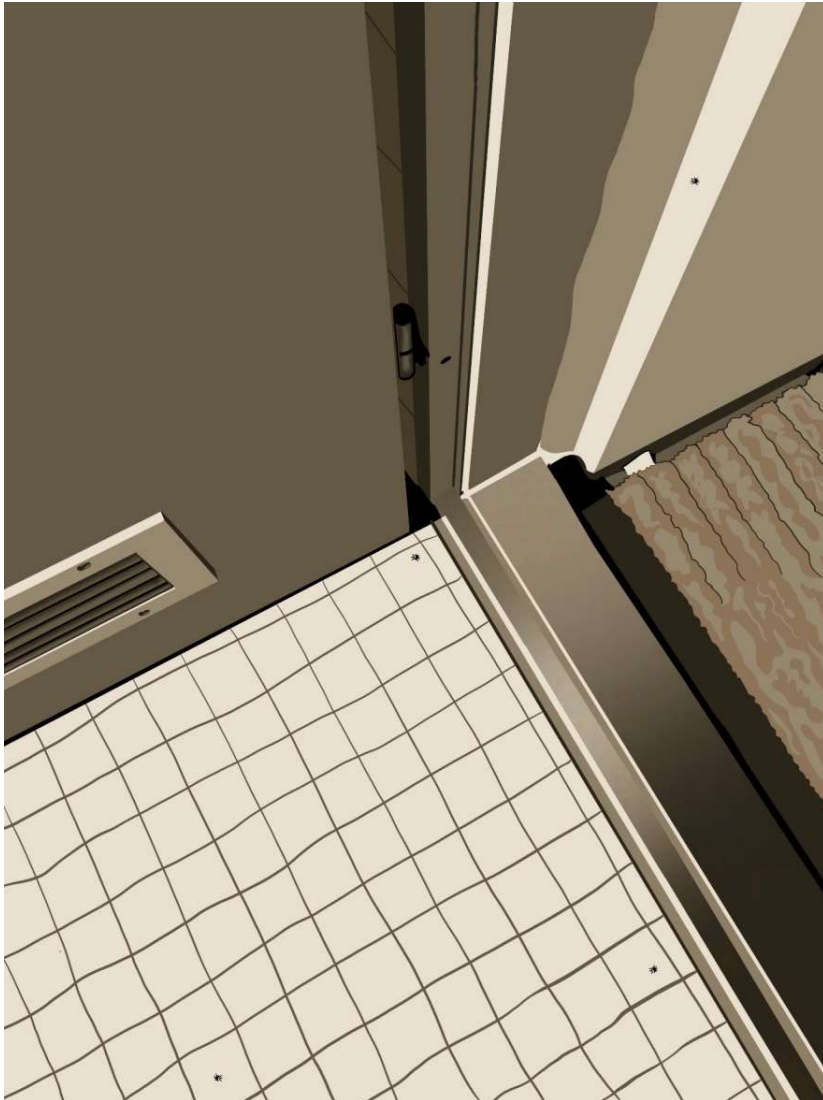
Had I turned the key in the crumbling lock of my flat?

Was it the outline of a person I could see in the shadows  
under my door?

Or something more? Was there a cloaked spectre  
lurking in the shadows, invisible,  
watching and waiting  
to tear out my eyes?

Of course, of course not, and of course not again.

There was nothing there.



## Black Beetles (Eyes)

I look down at my bathroom floor and see a black beetle.

He is small, spherical, shining in the fluorescent glow of the overhead light.

How long has he been there?

I glance across to the wall; there's another.

I look up to the ceiling; there's another.

Another emerges from under the sink.

Like eyes they glisten up at me, orbs of darkness staring me down.

The summer heat burns, but the bathroom tiles are cool,  
for there are no windows to let the rays inside.

The beetles have escaped the scorch of the sun,  
no longer languishing as eyes in piles of flames.

Almost as soon as he emerges, the beetle disappears again  
into a crevice in the wall.

But he's still there, I know,

waiting to lounge once again on the cool tiles of the cubicle.

He's very welcome as far as I'm concerned.

(As long as he doesn't bring too many companions, that is.)





## On Jenja (Olympia)

Oh, her beauty is indomitable!

Positively inimitable! Practically indescribable!

Fair Jenja, whose pure-white fur glistens  
but for the specks of dust that cling to her  
from the cobbles upon which she rolls.

Two cat's eyes, one blue and one yellow, peer at me from afar  
as she perches on the steps of the Villa Concordia.

I look back at her with delight,  
smiling as I meet her gaze.

A lady of eighteen years; young for a human, but for a cat rather old.

An air of sophistication clings to her  
as she stares down at me from the step  
upon which her makeshift bed resides.

There she will remain until nightfall,  
whereupon her owner will come to her  
to escort her home,  
until the morn, where she will take up her place again.

Nothing is robotic or false about Jenja's beauty.

Pure and simple, she sits day by day  
and watches the world go by.



Altstadt in a glass

## (Eye)Glass

As I raise my near-empty *Spezi* glass to my mouth,  
 I glimpse into its base as I finish the last drop.  
 The shapes of the scenery bend to the curve of the rim,  
 distorted through the lens of the base.  
 The towers and steeples of countless churches swirl into one another,  
 a cacophony of browns, and greys, and creams.  
 A millennium of history,  
 compressed into the bottom of a chipped café glass.  
 I lower the glass once more  
 and look out across the bridge  
 which crosses the *Regnitz*, and the riverside houses  
 that sit on either side, resting there in perpetuity.

## Part Two – *Der goldne Topf*

(‘The Golden Pot’)





Bamberg, Eisgrube

## Finding the *Apfelweibla*

Winding through the age-old alleys of Bamberg's *Altstadt*

I finally find the door.

The face of the *Apfelweibla* stares me down, smiling.

I've looked all year for this, her face on a doorhandle, waiting for me.

I've tried in the past to find her, but to no avail.

The winding roads, surrounded by picture-perfect Germanic houses,

did not reveal her to me back then.

It took me months of residing, living, surviving in this town that is not my own

before she finally led me to her.

As green leaves turned to brown in the autumn in which I arrived, she was nowhere to be found.

As powder-white snow covered her face and the ground beneath her,

she was tucked away out of sight.

Even as the flowers began to bloom as spring arrived,

I couldn't quite find the time to find her.

But as warmth turned to heat,

drawing me out of my fourth-floor flat to seek respite in the faint breeze,

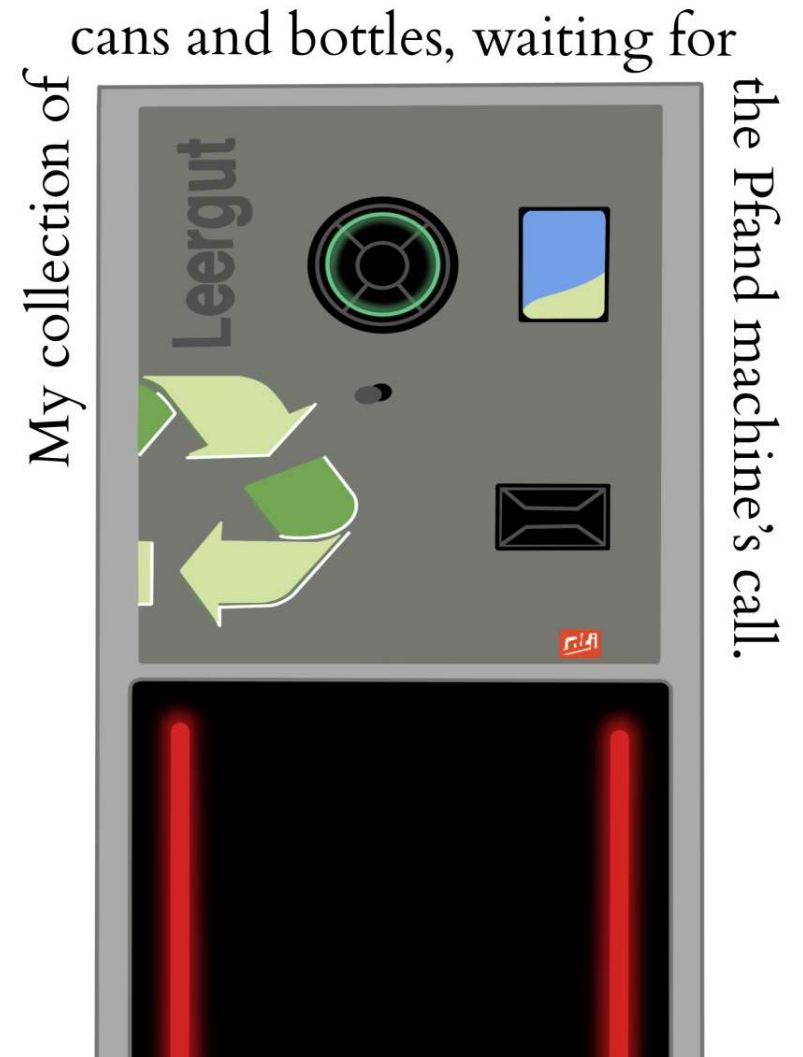
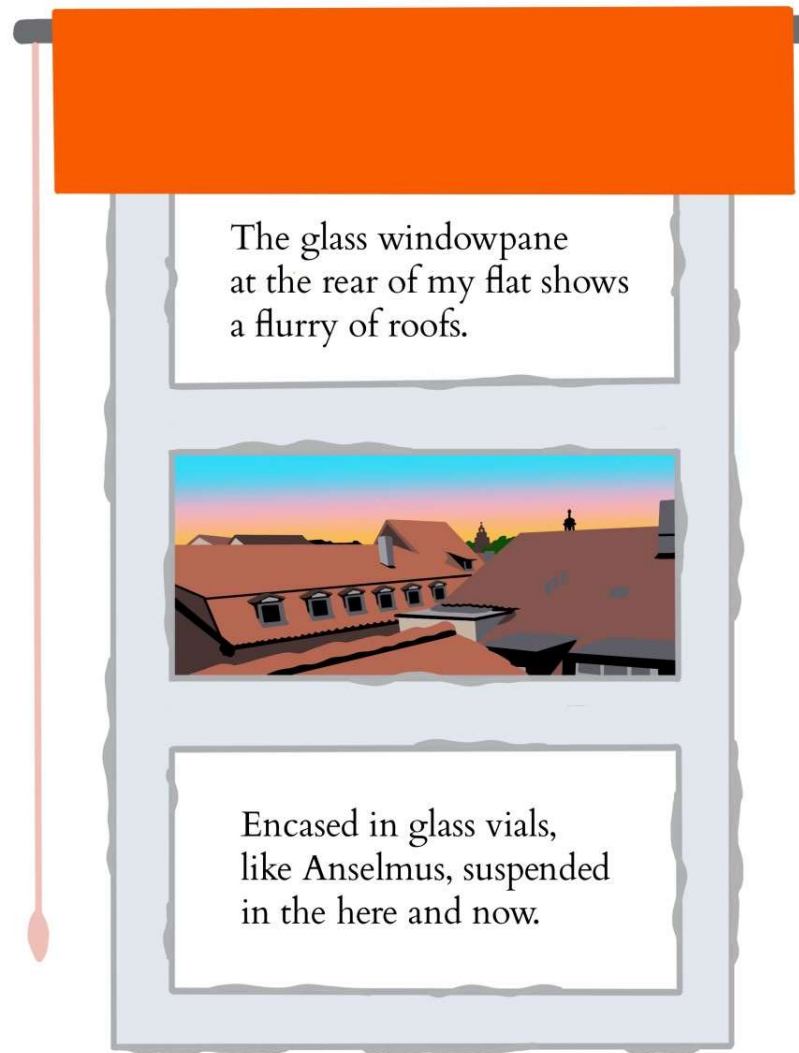
I began to walk down a path I hadn't travelled before.

Was she really that easy to find?

Mere minutes from my door,

she was waiting for me all along.

### On Glass and Bottles (Encased in Glass Vials)





Bamberg, Residenz

## Sonnet (Snakes in Trees)

As the swallows and starlings o'er do fly  
 The walls of the *Residenz* and the *Dom*,  
 I think to myself that Bamberg is my  
 New home, outside of my first English own.  
 They sing to one another, flying high,  
 A symphony of calls from bird to bird.  
 Shades of pink, blue and orange paint the sky  
 As the faint flurry of wings can be heard.  
 The warmth of the German summer does flow  
 As the wind rustles the leaves of a tree.  
 Truth be told, it's impossible to know  
 If such a quaint landscape there'll again be.  
 Like how Anselmus the tree snakes does see,  
 A paradise view's presented to me.



## In Transit (Atlantis)

As I wait in a plasticky chair in the corner of an airport terminal  
to depart for the last time (for now),  
it feels as if I am stepping into another world.  
The simultaneous feeling of a longing for home,  
yet also to remain here  
has captured me for weeks.

As I sense the faint buzzing from the overhead lights,  
luminous and unnatural against the bright summer sunlight  
from the nearby windows that stand by my sides,  
I think of what lies in store.

To wander through the country lanes  
that wind around my Wiltshire home,  
cat-spotting and nettle-dodging  
as I make my way into town,  
sounds a lovely way to spend the summer.

The waves will flow to meet the shore of the Cornish coastline,  
I will pass the lovingly crafted thatched roofs  
of Cotswolds cottages on my wanderings,  
while bees will buzz as they make their way  
between hedgerows and flowers  
of every garden, and park, and meadow.  
A true idyll will materialise.

Yet, despite all of this,  
it is odd to leave Bamberg for the final time,  
without the knowledge that I will soon be  
making the day-long journey once more.  
It has become routine, coming and going  
from here to there, and there to here once more.

No longer will I amble the few paces to the *Bäckerei*  
to gaze upon rows and rows of pastries and breads.  
I fear the shelves of my local cafés  
will appear a little sad in comparison,  
their days-old offerings slumped limply upon the counter.  
The glorious views of medieval architecture  
I've been treated to this year  
will no longer accompany my daily strolls.  
Nor will I glimpse the sounds of Frankish German  
as I weave amongst locals and tourists alike.  
But which is reality, and which is Atlantis?  
Both, and both again.  
Although I will surely one day return,  
I cannot shake the feeling that  
I am leaving for good, a final farewell.

