

Nina Segal

Nina Segal is a playwright and screenwriter. She was awarded the Playwright's Scheme Award in 2022 and was shortlisted for the George Devine Award in 2020. Her first play, 'In the Night Time (Before the Sun Rises)', premiered at the Gate Theatre and subsequently produced throughout Europe. Currently, she is working on behalf of the Dutch National Opera. In 2023, Nina Segal's new translation of Bertolt Brecht's 'The Good Person of Sezuan' was performed at The Lyric, and her play 'Shooting Hedda Gabler' premiered at the Rose Theatre. Her new play, 'The Odyssey (It's a Really Really Long Story)', will be performed this year at the Unicorn Theatre. As a screenwriter, she has written for the series 'The Crown' and 'Hanna' and is currently developing her own projects for ITV and Channel 4. 'Stadt, Land, Flut' (Original: 'O Island!') was premiered by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2022 and can be experienced for the first time in German language at the Stadttheater Gießen translated by Karen Witthuhn.

IMPRESSUM

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References and further reading:

Julia Ebner: Radikalisierungsmaschinen: Wie Extremisten die neuen Technologien nutzen und uns manipulieren, Aus dem Engl. von Kirsten Riesselmann, Suhrkamp, Berlin, [2019]. Byung-Chul Han: Infokratie. Digitalisierung und die Krise der Demokratie, Matthes & Seitz, Berlin, [2021]. Philipp Ruch: Schluss mit der Geduld, Ludwig Verlag, München, 2019. Nikolaj Schultz: Landkrank. Ein Essay, Aus dem Engl. von Michael Bischoff, Suhrkamp, Berlin, [2024]. Dylan Thomas: Unter dem Milchwald. Ein Spiel für Stimmen, Aus dem Engl. von Erich Fried, Fischer, Frankfurt a.M., 1984.

Stream

Stadt, Land, Flut (O, Island!)

Play by Nina Segal

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Translated from English by Karen Witthuhn

GERMAN LANGUAGE PREMIERE

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Viv Paula Schrötter

Laurie Zelal Kapçık

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Leonard David Gaviria

Inge Nils Eric Müller

Director Yeşim Nela Keim Schaub **Stage & Video** Theresa Reiwer

Costumes Marthe Labes **Music** Cédric Douhaire **Lighting** Pierre Schmidt

Dramaturgy Tim Kahn

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Deputy Technical Director Robert Straatmann **Technical Management Small Stage**

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Bezdek, Max Hartel, Nicola Hug, Pierre Schmidt **Trainee Event Technician** Kira Tinoco

Technical Production Management Small Stage Lucas Unverzagt **Set Management**

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The Crisis of Truth

by Tim Kahn

It is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the cobblestreets silent and the hunched, courters'-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloeback, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboat-bobbing sea. [...] And all the people of the lulled and dumbfound town are sleeping now.

This is how the Irish poet and writer Dylan Thomas begins his play „Under Milk Wood“ in 1953. In the small-town idyll of the fictional town of Llareggub, he tells of the thoughts, dreams, and deepest desires of the inhabitants, and within a day, the entire abyss of petit-bourgeois coexistence opens up. Thomas narrates in sensual metaphors about the cross-section of a community that seems to exist under a cloche, completely disconnected from the outside world. But it is precisely in this supposed distance that a societal portrait emerges, one that delves deep into the human soul and reveals much about living in politically fragile conditions marked by denunciation and even murderous impulses.

Similarly, fiction and reality intertwine in the play „Stadt, Land, Flut“ by the British author Nina Segal. Overnight, a fictional small town is transformed by an unforeseeable flood disaster into an island. Cut off from the outside world, the inhabitants must decide how to proceed. As they do not want to leave their home passively to the forces of nature, they refuse the planned evacuation and arbitrarily transfer political responsibility to Margaret. As the oldest inhabitant, she seems to fulfill the optimal requirement to lead the community out of the crisis as the new leader. Through a microcosm of small-town life, the author observes bourgeois people in their isolated habitat, like a species in a laboratory. There, she confronts them with global, sociopolitical questions about human coexistence in times of multiple crises: floods, droughts, and heatwaves, violent political confrontations and warlike human rights violations, persecution, flight, and displacement. The chain seems endless and is accompanied by a noticeable shift to the right, which warns of the fascization of bourgeois society. To understand what all this chaos around us is causing, the author delves into the cross-section of society and examines the stability of the democratic foundation. In the artificiality of isolation, from which no one escapes and to which no one joins, the dynamics become all the more apparent. How susceptible are individual members of the community to extremist movements? What visions of the future do they have, and how do they intend to realize them? What is the social dynamic that keeps members within the group, and how do they evolve together?

As a backdrop to her narrative, the author chooses a powerful image. The flood here is not only a potential consequence of man-made climate catastrophe, but goes far beyond a critique of our ecological actions. It becomes a metaphor for an impending dictatorial tyranny, into which Margaret increasingly maneuvers the small town to secure her newfound power. Just like floods, dictatorships also have a high destructive potential and drag everything human into the abyss. To prevent the unpredictability of natural disasters, there are technical security measures such as dams and barriers, but are there suitable early warning systems for the plunge into a political abyss?

In the age of media and information, even the latest technological advancements are not always a guarantee. On the contrary. The interaction between technology and society has long been a central factor in radical upheavals. Walter Benjamin already wrote in 1936 that the rise of fascism was promoted by inventions such as screen printing and the first photocopying technology. The reason for this is how they changed the public perception of politics, media, and art. The media also play a significant role in „Stadt, Land, Flut“. The information flood that sweeps over us through the digitization of life, the global news that are permanently available on a variety of platforms simultaneously, all presenting different versions of the same reality, now also encompasses the political sphere and sometimes leads to massive erosions in the democratic process. In the age of fake news, disinformation, and conspiracy theories, truth has practically no political value anymore. „In the crisis of truth, the common world, even the common language, is lost,“ writes the philosopher Byung-Chul Han. This loss becomes a breeding ground for ideologies that attack factuality itself. Fake news are not lies. Rather, they are completely indifferent to the truth, even when the real-world impacts have long been proven worldwide. In the play, Margaret denies the existence of water until the end, thus denying the apparent abuse of power. She prioritizes her perceived truth, her own ideal, over the safety of the people on the island, who are busy coping and surviving with what little they have left. With her experimental arrangement, Nina Segal completely breaks with the idyllic notion of an island as a paradise and refuge, offering both protection and a future. Her island is not a perfect refuge, far removed from the problems of reality, with a solidarity-strong community and self-sufficient provision. Instead, the islanders create their own, self-made truth and stage a reality that cannot withstand a world where living together in harmony is possible.

