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Staff “left with no choice”: 18-day strike announced for February

Alexandra Hedström-Blake reports.

Oxford University staff are set to go on strike for 18 days between the months of February and March. In a decision announced earlier this week by the University and College Union (UCU), they will be among 70,000 others at 150 universities nation-wide to take industrial action in response to concerns over pay, working conditions, and pensions. Aiming to have a greater impact than the three days of UCU strikes last November, the Union’s upcoming walkout marks “an unprecedented programme of escalating strike action” causing widespread disruption. While precise dates are yet to be confirmed, UCU members taking part will include lecturers, tutors, researchers, and other staff – some 11% of the professional body of the university. Their demands

come in the light of what the UCU general secretary Jo Grady termed “over a decade of falling pay, rampant insecure employment practices and devastating pension cuts”, as well as the increasing pressures of the current cost of living crisis. As a result of this, the union has called for widespread reform. In a statement issued by the organisation, disruption may be mitigated if the “vast wealth of the sector” was redistributed by university vice-chancellors – something Oxford’s newly appointed Vice Chancellor Irene Tracey touched upon in her admission ceremony earlier last week. Describing staff as “the lifeblood of any university”, Tracey announced plans to commission a new, independent review of pay, pensions and working conditions in order to “support staff during these difficult financial times and to be an attractive place to work in the future”. Despite this, a UCU representative told

Cherwell: “we expect the University to attempt to downplay our industrial action and are extremely grateful for the support and solidarity we have received from students during this dispute, particularly during November’s action.” In a statement to *Cherwell* on staff pensions and pay, David Chivall (Vice President of the Oxford branch of the UCU) asked the University to “stick to the commitment that it made in 2018 to ‘seek to provide pension provision for USS members employed by the University that is of the same standard as currently available.’” He told Cherwell: “Last year, the University failed to support a UCU proposal which would have prevented the employer body Universities UK forcing through an unnecessary and unjustified ~35% cut to our guaranteed future retirement income. USS has always been a healthy scheme and even its own flawed valuation methods show that the scheme is very much in surplus: there is no reason not to restore our pensions *Continued on page 2.*”



Motion to disaffiliate from National Union of Students over antisemitism report withdrawn from SU

Suzanne Antelme reports.

Following an independent investigation that found evidence of extensive antisemitism within the National Union of Students (NUS), a motion to call a referendum on disaffiliation was put to the Oxford University SU Student Council. However, the motion was withdrawn over concerns that it lacked clarity. The motion, proposed by Magdalen JCR President Ciaron Tobin and seconded by Mundher Ba-Shammakh, claimed the SU “serves the interest of Oxford students more”, citing “the horrendous issues the NUS has continually been

associated with” alongside “numerous robust reasons including financial cost”. The motion resolved to “call a binding referendum on the SU’s continued affiliation with the NUS, with a view to disaffiliating from the NUS”. An amendment was proposed by Joshua Loo to change the wording of the motion to clearly state that “in light of antisemitic conduct in the NUS and the findings of the report, the question of continued affiliation should be put to the membership”. Introducing his amendment in the council meeting, Loo spoke of the antisemitism report as “pretty grim” and showing “utterly contemptible behaviour”. A report was published on 12th January on Rebecca Tuck KC’s independent investigation into antisemitism within

the NUS which the union commissioned itself in May 2022. According to NUS, the report that has emerged subsequently is “a detailed and shocking account of antisemitism within the student movement”. The report itself states that the investigation found “numerous instances of antisemitism” including antisemitic tropes and holding Jewish students responsible for the actions of the Israeli government. One testimony in the report noted “I never initially entered student politics to talk solely about Jewish issues, but my time in the movement became defined with defending Jewish students’ rights to even be in the room”. In another incident, a Jewish student was targeted with a tweet that “invoked the notoriously antisemitic blood libel ... that Jews use the blood of babies or young

children to make Matzah”. Following the report, the NUS states that “[t]here is no place for antisemitism within NUS and we are committed to ensuring that Jewish students feel safe and welcome in every corner of our movement”. *Continued on page 5.*

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“On pay, we’re disappointed that the University continues to hide behind the employer’s body, UCEA. The cost of living crisis is now so acute that individual departments are having to make their own adjustments, such as giving staff a lunch allowance. We welcome the comments of the new Vice-Chancellor during her Admission Ceremony to ‘shift the needle in your quality of life so that you can continue to deliver your best performance.’

We urge the University to publicly call for UCEA to make a pay offer that that will shift the needle in our quality of life in the right direction. A below inflation pay uplift can only make things worse.”

The 4-5% pay rise offered by the University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) on Wednesday 11th was just that, and has consequently been slammed by the UCU as “not enough”. Given its position at 9% below the current Retail Price Index (RPI), Chivall criticised the UCEA for “effectively asking HE professionals to work an entire month without pay this year compared to last. This comes on top of a decade of pay cuts which mean staff are effectively working unpaid for three months a year compared to 10 years ago.”

In the light of previous criticisms that “real change” had been moving at a “glacial pace”, the UCU’s Jo Grady has stated that the “clock is now ticking for the sector to produce a deal or be hit with widespread disruption throughout

spring”.

While the Oxford branch of the UCU has expressed regret at the extent of the industrial action members of the union felt compelled to take, it believes they were left with “no choice”. “We have been forced to announce further strike days because of the failure of employers to engage seriously with the damage caused in recent years”.

For some Oxford students this would mean losses yet greater than the predicted 41% cut in contact hours unlikely to be rescheduled this February and March.

Among the near 2.5 million other students across the country to be affected by staff strikes for the second time since November, students at the University of Oxford have expressed frustration at the ongoing situation and their position as “collateral damage” in the disputes.

For those with upcoming Moderations or Final Exams, the consequences of the lack of teaching are likely to be particularly severe. In conversation with Cherwell, one student expressed concern that the university was not doing enough to mitigate the impact of the strikes on students in the form of hourly compensation.

When approached for comment, the university told Cherwell: “We note the recent announcement from UCU on further strike action in February and March. We await formal notification from UCU of their intentions, and will update staff and students once we have the details.”

Crap start to term: Hazmats called in to remove faeces from Univ showers

Cecilia Catmur reports.

University College’s messy discovery earlier this week has sparked what has since been coined the ‘Oxshit’ scandal.

College residents awoke to discover that a student had defecated in a ground floor student accommodation bathroom. University College told Cherwell: “On 16 January it was reported that a shower in a student accommodation block had human faeces spread across the seating, walls and the flooring of the shower. On further investigation it became clear that the shower had been used as a lavatory.”

An email sent by college soon after the incident’s discovery threatened residents of the building with, “a £1000 fine to get an external cleaning company in” if the culprit themselves, or the residents collectively, did not clean up the mess before the end of the day. Univ further told Cherwell: “As a result of this incident the College has closed the shower block until a professional cleansing company equipped to deal with such biohazards is able to clean and disinfect the area concerned.”

Since the original email, the figure of £1000 may alter, depending on the actual costs. A statement the College made to Cherwell made it clear that: “The costs associated with this sort of cleaning, in the absence of any student owning up to the incident, will be shared among residents in the normal way.”

University College’s original request was that the building’s occupants cleaned up the mess themselves. The College left gloves and cleaning products in the bathroom for this, and withdrew scouting from the building.

However, this request was not fulfilled. Instead, Univ students have reported to Cherwell that they saw two people in

Hazmat suits entering the affected block on January 17th.

When asked to comment on the JCR reaction and plans, the JCR President, Shermar Pryce, told Cherwell: “It is our hope that the college administration will consider the potential impact on students who were not involved in the incident before rendering any decision. From my interactions with the relevant staff at Univ, it is clear they are also cognizant of the potential injustice of such a fine and are sympathetic to the students’ predicament.

“While I am unable to comment on the specifics of a hypothetical response from the JCR in the event of the imposition of monetary fines, I can assure you that we stand in solidarity with the affected students, particularly in light of the ongoing cost of living crisis.”

The reaction to this incident has sparked a feeling of disgust among both students and staff.

The email the students received the following day described such behaviour as “repulsive” going “beyond any bounds of what could be considered reasonable.”

Pryce told Cherwell: “the reaction of the student population at Univ to the recent incident in the accommodation bathroom has been one of disgust, dismay, and disbelief.”

When asked how they aim to address the incident from the wellbeing perspective of the student involved Univ told Cherwell:

“The College prides itself on being a community and a family. The behaviour of the student involved in this incident has fallen well below the standard we should be able to expect of a member of our community and we hope for better in the future.”

News Shorts



Small Cornmarket pret to turn into “veggie pret”

From 27th January, the Pret-a-Manger will not serve any products containing meat.



New cohort of offers released

Offer letters were sent last Friday to prospective students.



Spy drama filming in Oxford School

The spy drama “Slow Horses” has been seen filming at the Blavatnik School of Government.



Free Oxford Cycle Safety lessons

The two-hour rides will be run by Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and are designed to build confidence and improve safety awareness.



Philosophy don apologises for racist email: “Blacks are more stupid than whites”

Suzanne Antelme reports.

Professor Nick Bostrom has published an apology on his website for an email he wrote in 1996 where he said: “Blacks are more stupid than whites. I like that sentence and think it is true.”

Bostrom continued: “But recently I have begun to believe that I won’t have much success with most people if I speak like that. [...] For most people [...] the sentence seems to be synonymous with: I hate those bloody [n*****s]!!!!”

In his apology, Bostrom says, “I completely repudiate this disgusting email ... It does not accurately represent my views, then or now. The invocation of a racial slur was repulsive”. He claims he also apologized at the time almost immediately after the email was written, and says he is apologizing again, “unreservedly”.

The context of the email was apparently a thread on “offensive content and offensive communication styles”. It was sent on the mailing list of an internet forum called the Extropians, an unmoderated platform for “conversations about science fiction, future technologies, society, and all sorts of random things”. In the email, Bostrom said he has “always liked the uncompromisingly objective way of thinking and speaking”, the “more counterintuitive and repugnant a formulation” the better, so long as it is “logically correct”.

The email continued: “Take for example the following sentence: Blacks are more stupid than whites. I like that sentence and think it is true. But recently I have begun to

believe that I won’t have much success with most people if I speak like that. They would think that I were a ‘racist’: that I _disliked_ [sic] black people and thought it is fair if blacks are treated badly.

“I don’t. It’s just that based on what I have read, I think it is probable that black people have a lower average IQ than mankind in general, and I think that IQ is highly correlated with what we normally mean by ‘smart’ and ‘stupid’. I may be wrong about the facts, but that is what the sentence means for me. For most people, however, the sentence seems to be synonymous with: I hate those bloody [n*****s]!!!!”

He then said his point was that while he and other people on the Extropians mailing list might appreciate “speaking with the provocativeness of unabashed objectivity” and he thought it was “laudable” to “accustom people to the offensiveness of truth”, this might be a “less effective” way of communication with “the people ‘out there’” and could lead to “some personal damage”.

Bostrom is a philosophy professor for applied ethics and director of both the Future for Humanity Institute (FHI) and the Oxford Martin Programme on the Impacts of Future Technology. According to his FHI profile, he is the “most-cited professional philosopher under the age of 50” and has authored 200 publications.

A University spokesperson told Cherwell: “The University and Faculty of Philosophy is currently investigating the matter but condemns in the strongest terms possible the views this particular academic expressed in his communications. Neither the content nor language are in line with our strong commitment to diversity and equality.”

University submits planning application to convert chemistry lab into a bar

Rahul Jakati reports.

The University of Oxford has submitted an application to the Oxford City Council to convert a former chemistry laboratory into a bar and music lounge for Reuben College. The application, if approved, would refurbish the west wing of the Inorganic Chemistry Laboratory, which is currently unused.

This will be a welcome addition to the college’s social spaces considering they are currently using the bar at Linacre College.

As a part of the application, Oxford officials explained how the restructuring of the site would not affect the “heritage assets” of the building, referring to any potential historicity that might be lost in construction. Indeed, the west wing of the laboratory was formerly home to Dorothy Hodgkin, winner of the 1964 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

The Planning Statement argued that although the reconstruction would result in the loss of “historic laboratory use,” its present facilities are outdated. In fact, the 150-year old building has been unused for experimental work since 2018. They argued that “The ICL [Inorganic Chemistry Laboratory] was constructed to be a science laboratory. The use has evolved over time and the ICL is no longer fit for modern day science.”

Instead, they hope that by converting

the space to be a college bar, it “retains its association with the university” and therefore “represents an optimum viable use” that is “an evolution of their original purpose”. They seek to do this in a way that “ensures accessibility is provided for all.”

Mark Brouard, head of Chemistry at the University of Oxford, told Chemistry World that “The former ICL space which has been handed over to Reuben College will support their needs, and the department has taken over much newer refurbished space elsewhere in the science area to enhance its overall laboratory footprint.”

He commented that “Space allocations within the university’s estate are constantly changing to meet evolving needs.” He explains that this section included in the plans only constitutes around a quarter of the facility’s total footprint.

Changes to the building will include, according to the Planning Statement, “new door openings, new service penetrations [...] replacement of flat roof [...]” as well as various “internal alterations.”

Reuben College, constructed in 2019 and the first Oxford college to be established in the 21st century, is a modern addition to a university that has embraced the various technologies of the 21st century. According to the Planning Statement, Reuben College is focused on “artificial intelligence, machine learning, environmental change and cellular life.”

The council is expected to make a decision by January 30.

Bostrom brought the email to light himself on 9th January via an apology published on his website, claiming he had heard someone was digging through the Extropians archives to find “embarrassing materials to disseminate about people”. He feared that “selected pieces of the most offensive stuff will [sic] be extracted, maliciously framed and interpreted, and used in smear campaigns”, and aimed to “get ahead of this” by airing “the very worst of the worst in my contribution file”.

In his apology, Bostrom says his “actual views” are that it is “deeply unfair that unequal access to education, nutrients and basic healthcare leads to inequality in social outcomes, including sometimes disparities in skills and cognitive capacity”. However, regarding whether he thinks there are any “genetic contributors to differences between groups in cognitive abilities”, Bostrom says it is not his “area of expertise” and he “would leave to others, who have more relevant knowledge, to debate whether or not in addition to environmental factors, epigenetic or genetic factors play any role”. Although eugenics does not appear to be mentioned in the original 1996 email, Bostrom’s apology continues, explaining that he does not support eugenics “as the term is commonly understood”.

Cherwell spoke to Deborah Ogunnoiki, a 3rd year classics student, who said that “as a black philosophy student it really terrifies me that someone who could’ve taught me or taught the people who taught me, would casually suggest that my race makes me less intelligent”. She thinks this incident “really shows that Oxford really hasn’t changed”, and “[e]ven if there’s more diversity, it doesn’t mean this place has become any safer for us”. Ogunnoiki noted that it “feels

like [the] philosophy department is protecting [Bostrom] more than they’re protecting their black students”.

The Faculty of Philosophy published a paragraph on their website on 13th January which states: “The Faculty is committed to academic freedom of speech and, as part of this commitment, does not moderate opinions expressed by its members. However, we expect all members to meet certain standards of behaviour, and there is no room for hate speech in our faculty. In relation to views that have come to light in a faculty member’s historic email and their recent apology, the Faculty Board would like to make clear that it rejects both the views themselves and the abhorrent language in which they were originally expressed. The Faculty utterly condemns racism in all its forms.”

Nick Bostrom has been contacted for comment.

Image credit: Future of Humanities Institute/CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia commons.



Census data proves it... Oxford is getting smarter

Anika Gupta reports.

The most recent census data, published January 10th, shows that Oxford’s residential population is one of the best educated nationwide. Oxford, a city which has education at the heart of its local economy, is getting smarter.

The number of Oxford residents with no or lower level qualifications is falling, while the proportion of the population with higher-level qualifications is considerably increasing. Census data shows that 48.1% of Oxford’s usual resident population holds degrees and high-level vocational qualifications (Level 4), a significant increase from the previous 42.6%.

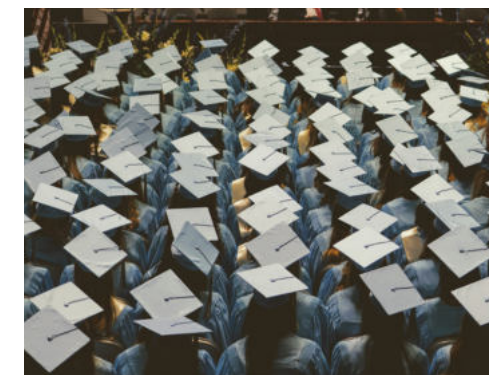
Leader of Oxford City Council, Susan Brown, told the council’s news feed that the City council aims to “encourage employers and developers to ensure more local people are developing skills, gaining qualifications and accessing high value, well paid jobs”. Oxford’s Level 3 (A-Levels, BTEC national levels, NVQ level 3 and equivalents) attainment average has seen a substantial rise; it has risen from 17.8% to 20.6%. This is far higher than the county of Oxfordshire’s level 3 and 4 averages at 17.1% and 42.0%.

The City Council has said it is investing in the “growth of the knowledge economy”. Roles in teaching, research and healthcare are being actively promoted. Those sectors are increasingly attracting a highly qualified

workforce. Additionally, the census data suggests that far more graduates are choosing to settle down in Oxford after finishing their courses to contribute to the growth of the education sector. Moreover, the Oxford City Council has enabled the increase of the number of organisations paying the Oxford Living Wage, which is currently set at 90% of the London Living Wage, to stimulate local growth.

Other than London, Oxford ranks in the UK’s top 5 for percentage of population with a level 4 qualification or more. Those that beat Oxford include St Albans (53.0%), Elmbridge (52.1%) and Cambridge (55.8%).

In recent years, increased opportunity to join the workforce, as well as to do apprenticeships and non-formal qualifications, seeks to benefit the local economy. The strategy of Oxford City Council may well continue to make Oxford’s resident population smarter.



Former Vice-Chancellor receives £542,000 parting pay package amid ongoing staff strikes

Becky Powell reports.

Former Oxford Vice-Chancellor Professor Louise Richardson received a total pay package in 2021-2022 of £542,000, an 18 percent increase from the previous year, based on research by the Sunday Times. This pay package is the sum of a starting salary of £411,000pa as well as the value of housing and additional benefits.

The findings come amid ongoing industrial action by university staff regarding pay, working conditions and attacks on pensions. They are expected to take place over 18 days between February and March as well as a marking and assessment boycott.

Among the Russell Group universities, the chancellor's pay comes second only to the stepping-down Imperial College London president, whose pay and benefits package amounted to £714,000. The average for Russell Group universities of Vice Chancellor pay packages was £413,000 in 2021-22, an increase of 6 percent from the previous year.

When asked in an interview with the Financial Times over the sustainability of administrator's pay increase while staff are struggling to stay afloat during the cost-of-living crisis, her response was that "I would really love to avoid talking about that."

An independent committee recommended an increase to the Vice-Chancellor's pay in 2019, concluding that the Previous Vice Chancellor's pay was not reflective of the extent of responsibilities that accompanied

the role and was out of line with UK peers. Due to the pandemic, however, Professor Richardson delayed taking until August 2021. Prior to this it had not been reviewed since 2009.

The independent chair of this committee, Charles Harman, remarked that "The Vice-Chancellor's pay is required to reflect the complex responsibilities of leading the world's highest-ranked university in the face of ever-increasing global competition. The Vice-Chancellor's salary was last set in 2009, and since then University income has more than doubled, staff and student numbers have increased substantially and Oxford now generates an estimated £15.7billion for the UK economy every year."

In comparison with universities across the Atlantic, a recent article in The Chronicle of Higher Education believes that over 200 US university president salaries exceed that of Louise Richardson's.

The Office for Students does acknowledge that "Leading a university is a complex and difficult role that requires great flexibility, knowledge and experience, and it is right that those who excel in these roles should be properly rewarded."

However, it also draws attention to the gaping disparities in pay within some higher education institutes between vice chancellors and academic staff, warning that "universities should not be surprised to be asked difficult questions about this" and should expect "scrutiny from staff and students as well as the general public."

The University and College Union (UCU), which represents academic staff, claims that 90,000 academic staff are on low



paid, insecure contracts. Many Oxford employees, especially those early on in their academic careers, report struggling to make ends meet in one of the UK's most expensive cities.

The UCU general secretary Jo Grady claims that "There is a big gap between 3 percent and the inflation offer we have asked for".

One of the first tasks facing Richardson's successor, Professor Irene Tracey, will be to resolve these tensions within university staff if she hopes to unite this ancient institution and lead it forward.

She addressed this source of conflict in her Admission Ceremony speech, remarking that "it is a priority for me to make sure the University is doing everything it can to

support staff during these difficult financial times and to be an attractive place to work in the future."

Moving forward, she promises as one of her top priorities to "immediately commission an independent analysis of all aspects of pay and conditions for all our staff – academic and non-academic – that will report directly to me and Council and on which we can act." No timeline for this has been set yet.

Professor Irene Tracey, due to the current economic situation, has decided to take a lower starting salary of £390,000, the pay level prior to the 2019 recommended increase.

Image credit: Alan Richardson/CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Peter Thiel bashes "Greta and the autistic children's crusade" at Oxford Union

Andy Wei reports.

The Oxford Union opened its bicentenary year on Monday with an address by Peter Thiel, the entrepreneur and investor who co-founded Paypal and Palantir. He spoke primarily on the culture war in the West, arguing for what he called "anti-anti-anti-anti-classical liberalism".

Thiel began by asking the audience, "What is the antonym of diversity?" Someone shouted in reply, "University!" For the rest of the event, he delved into politically charged topics, declaring that "stagnation" is the greatest crisis of our time and to blame are universities, environmentalism, and the establishment.

Thiel characterised the study of humanities as "flaky" and pointless, while he described climate change as "one of the controversial subjects of the sciences." He also described the modern environmentalist movement as "Greta and the autistic children's crusade". Later, he encountered pushback on his comments during the Q&A period, with one student saying, "I've met Greta and she's actually quite lovely," resulting in cheers.

Thiel is currently the Chairman of Palantir and presumed to be its largest shareholder. The company has been contracted by NHS England to provide data services; it is also the current front-runner to win an additional £360 million contract, despite pressure from a coalition of civil

liberties groups concerned about privacy, data security, and Palantir's track record as a "key enabler" of mass surveillance and Donald Trump's anti-immigration policies. When questioned on how he would fix the NHS given his lack of faith in government, Thiel quipped, "The NHS makes people sick," and said, "The first step is to get out of the Stockholm syndrome."

In brief, Thiel described the current world as "stalled" and "deranged" due to the overwhelming influence of the "centre-left zombie straightjacket" has replaced bygone values of "classical liberalism." "It is all stalled out beyond belief," he emphasised. Part of the solution, he said, is shifting public opinion, which is why these talks are important to him.

A Union spokesperson acknowledged in a statement to Cherwell that some of its guest speakers may "hold views which are regarded as unacceptable". However, the Union believes that it is central to their function as a debating society "to facilitate open and respectful discourse on controversial views and topics." Thiel echoed this sentiment. He believes it is important to discuss contemporary issues in a public forum, arguing that many modern woes, including stagnation, can be partially solved by shifting public opinion.

Thiel also expanded on his contrarian views in a 2009 essay, saying, "I stand against confiscatory taxes, totalitarian collectives, and the ideology of the inevitability of the death of every individual.

... Most importantly, I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible."

A prominent donor to Donald Trump's electoral campaign in 2016, one member asked him once the floor was opened to questions, why he backed Trump. Thiel responded that it was based on a "very deep conviction that things were too far off track, too locked down, too stagnant." As a member of the executive committee of Trump's transition team, Thiel proposed that a top climate change skeptic be appointed to White House science advisor and that a bitcoin entrepreneur lead the Food and Drug Administration. The former

US president has praised Thiel, saying once at a meeting after his 2016 victory, that the entrepreneur was "a very special guy." Thiel continues to donate to conservative politicians in the US.

Union President Charlie Mackintosh told Cherwell: "I am incredibly proud that, two-hundred years on, the Oxford Union remains true to its founding principles of free speech and debate. By hosting people with differing views, the Union presents its members with unique opportunities to challenge viewpoints they disagree with and engage in open discussions."

Image credit: Gage Skidmore /CC BY-AW 4.0 via Wikimedia commons.





Continued: Motion to disaffiliate from NUS over anti-semitism report withdrawn from Oxford SU

Continued from front page

The NUS has developed an “action plan”, based on the investigation’s recommendations, that includes establishing “[p]ermanent formal representation for Jewish students”.

In debating whether Loo’s amendment should be accepted, discussion at the SU Student Council meeting shifted to reasons for and against disaffiliation. Members of the council meeting spoke with frustration of limited SU budgets, especially for the Disabilities Campaign and the LGBTQ+ Campaign, and noted that the SU pays about £20,000 in NUS membership fees. Others expressed concern that disaffiliation would dilute the SU’s influence on student issues that extend beyond Oxford.

A representative from the Oxford Jewish Society (JSoc) said they had been disturbed by the contents of the antisemitism report and wanted to make sure the NUS had the best chance of actualising the report’s recommendations. The JSoc representative asked for clarification on the motive of the motion, noting that if the motion was primarily motivated by

the potential financial and bureaucratic benefits of NUS disaffiliation then the timing was unfortunate as the ensuing debate would revolve around antisemitism and possibly impact Jewish students. Ciaron Tobin, the motion’s proposer, was unavailable for discussion as he was attending the meeting online and had lost connection.

Mundher, the motion’s seconder, told Cherwell: “My reasons for [supporting disaffiliation] are [three] fold; antisemitism, dissatisfaction in the NUS and a view that money can be better spent on a local level. First and foremost antisemitism at the SU is something that cannot be ignored - to represent students you must represent students of all faiths and when there is a pattern of behaviour among the higher levels of this organisation that has spanned the last decade [...] I cannot stay silent. [...]”

“Secondly I [believe] the NUS spends a great deal of time embroiled in policy debates, activism and political dealings unrelated to student issues and while I welcome any student who feels empowered enough to take on a national issue and

attempt to affect change on a matter they deeply care about, I do not believe that extends into the duties of the NUS. The NUS has one and only one remit and that is to fight for the interests of students, be it for increased bursaries, rent cuts [or] student support from the government [...].

“And finally the Oxford SU pays £20,478 in membership fees to the NUS a year, that money can and should be spent on our students which we have a moral duty to look after, with SU money going to local issues we have a better ability to [...] deal with pressing issues such as the sexual harassment on our campus.”

Jojo Sugarman, JSoc President, told Cherwell: “My comment before, which I stand by was that, ‘The report confirms, as Jewish students have long been aware, that the NUS has a problem with antisemitism. We very much hope that NUS use this report as an opportunity to alter the hostile environment that it has created for Jewish students, by following the recommendations made by Rebeca Tuck’. That comment was not made in relation to any talk of disaffiliation. As the representative of [J]ewish students, [JSoc]

has not been spoken to by those proposing disaffiliation. Our main concern is to represent Jewish students and we try to stay away from political matters. We would need to speak to Jewish students and to learn more about the consequences of disaffiliation to determine whether it is the right thing to support.”

Members of the meeting debated different procedural means to change and clarify the motion, with suggestions ranging from delaying the motion to the next meeting or moving it to a special or ‘extraordinary meeting’. A general consensus emerged that withdrawing the motion altogether was the best option. This would allow for consultation with students likely to be affected with a view to submitting a new and improved motion in due course, although no concrete plans were made. By this point it had become apparent that the meeting was inquorate because it had been running for nearly three hours and too many members had already left. Ciaron Tobin reconnected briefly via video to withdraw his motion and the meeting was brought to a close.

‘Not my King’: charges dropped against Oxford activist who spoke against monarchy

Olivia Boyle reports.

After shouting “who elected him?” during King Charles’s proclamation ceremony through Oxford, activist Symon Hill was arrested for a public order offence. Cherwell can reveal that the charges made against the alleged anti-monarchist have now been dropped.

The ceremony that took place at Carfax Tower in September was part of the standard procedure for the assumption of a new monarch. Though, with the death of the country’s longest reigning monarch and for most of the population, the only monarch they’ve known, this was no ordinary proclamation ceremony. Hill told the BBC that he “remained quiet” in the moments that warranted respect for the late Queen. The activist spoke up when King Charles III was declared the new monarch, who is, as Hill commented, “a head of state being imposed on us without our consent”. His protestation, “who elected him?”, resulted in being arrested, a journey in a police van, and four months

of legal proceedings.

The Crown Prosecution Service has now decided to “discontinue the matter” of the charges against Hill just three weeks before the court hearing was expected to take place. This is a success for the wider civil liberty campaign though it is shadowed by the surprising suppression of many individual protests against the monarchy across the UK. The activist stated in an article for Bright Green that the police had become “defensive and refused to talk” when he “expressed a mild criticism of the royal procession”. The police reaction to Hill’s small-scale protest raises further questions of the relationship between state and monarchy, not to mention the notion of a society that welcomes multiple points of view.

The Oxford protest was not singular. There has been a host of republican protests across the country since September, including the billboard campaign ‘#NotMyKing’. The campaign

was inspired by a lone protester in London holding a piece of A3 paper of the same phrase; video footage shows she was promptly confronted by at least three police officers. Though, with the tension surrounding Prince Andrew, and more recently, the Royal Family infighting, it is not surprising that the King would feel threatened by growing public discontent. Nevertheless, anti-monarchist troops were rallied and protests against the non-democratic assumption of a new monarch are expected to reach their peak at the coronation on 6 May 2023.

The nation has an apparently expanding distaste for the monarchy. Though Oxford has its share of republican action, the monarchy remains a strong presence with the King as Visitor at three University colleges. For now, Britain remains hooked on its monarchic tradition.

Image credit: Annie Spratt via Unsplash.



Linacre College proposes new governance statutes following Thao renaming controversy

Rufus Hall reports.

Linacre College has updated its statutes relating to charitable governance and structure.

The proposed changes to the statutes would see the creation of a Board of Trustees, whilst leaving the structure of the Governing Body untouched. The board would be comprised of up to seven members of the Governing Body, a junior research fellow, the President of the common room and up to three independent trustees “currently unconnected to the College (but who may include emeriti, alumni or those with professional expertise relevant to the business of the College)”.

Linacre College website states that “the Trustee Board has responsibility for ensuring the College is properly run and fit for purpose.” Other new statutes should regulate the ‘Powers of the College’, ‘Application of Income and Assets’, ‘Conflicts of Interest and Loyalty’ and ‘Meetings and Decisions of the Governing Body’.

The current statutes were created in 1986 and are “out of date”, according to an announcement in the Oxford Gazette. The new statutes have been updated to “to en-

able the College to meet the high governance standards expected of a major modern educational charity”, a website announcement reads.

These changes come after the college signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the 31st of October 2021 with SOVICO Group represented by its chairwoman Madam Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao to receive a donation of £155 million. The donation has proved controversial with Oxford University Campaign for Climate Justice, who criticised SOVICO’s association with the Russian oil company Zarubezhneft. As part of the Memorandum with Linacre, Madam Thao has committed the SOVICO Group to carbon net zero by 2050. SOVICO’s other commercial involvements include offshore oil and gas exploration, as well as Vietjet Air, Vietnam’s first privately-owned airline.

The deal has courted further controversy relating to the college’s application to the Privy Council to change its name to ‘Thao College’. Head of Alumni Relations and Development at Linacre Lisa Smårs acknowledged that she had received emails expressing “sadness, or even anger” when the proposed name change was announced in 2021. Writing on the college website, Smårs said that “however important our name is

to us, I believe that the values we represent are of far greater importance”, citing other colleges that had been renamed following donations.

Concerns were raised by Julian Lewis MP that Thao was “extremely close to the Vietnamese Communist Government” during a debate on the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill in the Commons. On 13th June 2022, then Education minister Michelle Donelan announced she was ‘actively investigating’ the deal between Linacre College and SOVICO, but Donelan has

since resigned.

Of the total £155 million donation to the college from SOVICO, £40 million has been earmarked for the college endowment fund. Under the new governance statutes, investments, including parts of the endowment, could be managed externally by ‘a financial expert’, according to a draft of the new statute book, available on Linacre College Website.

Image Credit: Linacre College/ CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



Oxford to continue Ukraine Scholarship with funding from XTX Markets

Bintia Dennog reports.

Oxford’s Graduate Scholarship Programme for Ukrainians has been extended for another year and will be jointly funded with the trading firm XTX Markets, who are contributing £602,550 from their Academic Sanctuaries Fund. The scholarship will fund up to 18 graduates in the next academic year.

Successful applicants will have the entirety of their course fees covered and will receive a £10,000 grant for living expenses. Alongside that, colleges will also provide free meals and accommodation.

The scholarship is aimed at well-qualified Ukrainian graduates who were badly affected by the ongoing war – students displaced from neighbouring countries as a result of the war may be considered too.

Oxford initially announced the scholarship last May following the Russian invasion, continuing a long-established tradition of commitment to supporting refugees. For 2022/23, the programme was co-funded by the university and the participating colleges. Since then, 26 graduates have received the scholarship and been welcomed into Oxford.

Professor Lionel Tarassenko, President of Reuben College, devised this scholarship and said: “Like everyone else, I was horrified when the conflict started in late February, and immediately began to think about how best to help the people of Ukraine. Having been an academic in the University for the past 34 years, I had no doubt that Oxford could play its part

in supporting students fleeing from the conflict.

He continued: “The funding from XTX Markets is the first step towards making the scheme sustainable, at a time when all universities are facing serious financial challenges.”

Simon Coyle, the Head of Philanthropy at XTX Markets, said: “XTX Markets is delighted to be funding the University of Oxford to expand its Graduate Scholarships for Ukraine, supporting people displaced by the war in Ukraine.

“We are encouraged that this programme will focus on supporting students who can help Ukraine build back better, in this case by providing one-year master’s courses in areas that are crucial to reconstruction, including energy systems, medicine and science.

Myroslava Hammond, the programme coordinator, said: “Seeing the programme come to life has been emotional for me. I was born in Ukraine and first came to Oxford in 1995, when I was just five years old to join my academic father Andriy Halushka at Worcester College (one of the first Ukrainians to study and teach in the UK).

“When I arrived, I didn’t speak any English and missed my mother every single day, but the opportunities that waited for me in the UK made it all worthwhile. Today, my mother Natasha is here with me, and we are proud to be a part of a visible Ukrainian community. As our scholars adjust to the demands of an Oxford degree, it feels deeply rewarding to see them thrive, not just as individuals, but as a community.”

Oxford to lead inter-university biodiversity initiative in partnership with UN

Rahul Jakati reports.

The University of Oxford has partnered with the UN Biodiversity Conference to create the Nature Positive Universities Alliance (NPUA), a multinational pledge by universities to promote various conservation practices and general interest in nature. According to their website, the NPUA’s primary purpose is to “unite both the climate and biodiversity crises to build more resilient ecosystems, help nature recover, and limit climate change.”

Involving 522 universities around the globe, the initiative centers Oxford within a growing movement whose pledges go beyond simply reducing of emissions and carbon footprints. At the University of Calicut, students use classical dancing to express their appreciation for nature. At the University of British Columbia, researchers and staff are working to ‘bird-proof’ their windows to prevent lethal collisions. To further the initiative’s cause to “stand up for nature” at a grassroots level, NPUA encourages students to sign up as “student ambassadors” that volunteer and organize various events around their respective campuses that promote biodiversity and encourage their university to make the “Nature Positive Pledge.”

At Oxford, the alliance reinforces a commitment made by the university in March 2021. At that time, the University council adopted an Environmental Sustainability Strategy with two major goals: net zero carbon and net biodiversity gain

by 2035. This is buoyed by the 200 million pound Oxford Sustainability Fund, as well as a set of tenets that almost directly mirror the requirements of NPUA pledgers. These include creating baselines for current environmental impact, setting specific goals that target these impacts, “taking bold action to reduce biodiversity impacts,” and annual reporting. The University also awards individual colleges and departments for their commitment to sustainability. In 2022, Lady Margaret Hall was the only college to win the ‘Beyond Gold Award’ for green impact and sustainability, thanks in part to their annual “Green Week,” and electrical power sources.

NPUA is the most recent example of partnership between the UN and Oxford. In 2020, Oxford’s Environmental Change Institute worked with the UN Environment Programme and UN Office for Project Services to create frameworks for more sustainable infrastructure. NPUA was created as a result of the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15), whose stated goals included stopping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius and the “landmark” Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which aims to put at least 30% of the planet and damaged ecosystems under protection by 2030.

Wags in the Rag: Oxford’s most lovable college pets

Showcasing St Catz’s famously adorable Catherine and Pippi.

Ciara Rushton

Cats, dogs, tortoises and more, Oxford has its fair share of college animals. From the new kittens of St John’s college last week, this week’s column will instead focus on some of Oxford’s most prominent canine residents: St Catz’s college dogs. The aptly named Catherine and her eight month-old daughter, Pippi, live with the Master of the college, Kersti Borjars, and serve as the College Dog and new Deputy College Dog respectively.

Joining the college in 2020, Kersti had thought about getting a dog as her cats at home in Stockport would not have taken kindly to a dog joining the household. St Catz had a cat named Cadbury who visited frequently when Kersti arrived, but very little history of college pets otherwise. She settled on bringing a cocker spaniel

to the lodgings, given that they are human-oriented dogs that very rarely show aggression. The last of her litter, Catherine thus moved to St Catz just before lockdown began in 2020, making it a perfect time to have a puppy and to let her grow accustomed to the college.

In May 2022, Catherine gave birth to four puppies and took well to motherhood. The puppies’ lives were well documented on Catherine’s Instagram page, @catherinethecollegedog, until they left home at eight weeks, all moving in with people in and around cats. However, Pippi remained with her mother and is now her Deputy as the college pet. A Kennel Club registered dog, her full name is Canelita Fina of Alexandria, ‘fine cinnamon’ in Spanish to show her colour, and ‘of Alexandria’ after St Catherine of Alexandria. ‘Fine cinnamon’ being a term akin to ‘the bee’s knees’, she is by name truly excellent.

With Pippi described in three words as ‘still a nuisance’ and the duo with ‘here comes trouble’, the two have clearly gained a reputation for causing mischief in the college. Yet, as all college pets have shown throughout this column’s run, they maintain an important role in the college, especially for student welfare. Students can be much more keen to stop for a chat if the dogs are around, Kersti says, giving her a better connection to the college. The puppies were also around during the exam period in Trinity 2022, meaning that when visiting hours came around they were a great destressant for students. Getting to enjoy a break from the library by cuddling a puppy is ideal for anxious students.

But most importantly, the dogs contribute to the college community even simply by being around. Sometimes we all



need a bit of non-human interaction to help us take a break from endless essays, lab work, and the other general stresses of student life. Catherine and Pippi help with college welfare in a multitude of ways, much as the other pets I have looked at in

this series. It is no wonder why, therefore, many colleges continue to keep animals around in order to give students just the pick me up they might need on a day to day basis.

Image Credit: Kersti Borjars.

Sound and Music

Exploring the ‘Something Stupid’ montage in *Better Call Saul*.

Albert Genower

Despite its frequent snubs at awards shows such as the Emmys and Golden Globes, few critics would argue that *Better Call Saul* isn’t one of television’s crowning achievements of the past decade. Of all the things that the show does exceedingly well, the artfully crafted montages throughout each of the sixth seasons stand head and shoulders above other shows, both in their emotional resonance and technical craftsmanship. There is, however, one montage that viewers keep returning to, in Season 4,

Episode 7 of the show, featuring the song ‘Something Stupid’.

Better Call Saul is, at its heart, a love story, and this montage illustrates the lives of the two characters in this relationship, the titular Saul Goodman (here known by his legal name, Jimmy McGill), and Kim Wexler, showing how they differ and how they remain the same. At this point in the show, the story must progress through several months, showing Kim working as a lawyer and a temporarily disbarred Jimmy undertaking various odd jobs. All the while, a version of ‘Something Stupid’, recorded specially for the show by Israeli band Lola Marsh, plays.

By taking a closer look at the two vocals of the song, both individually and how they interact, we can paint a better picture of why this particular montage is so effective. Firstly, there are two voices, singing in two-part harmony, a male voice and a female one - Jimmy and Kim. As well as this, the voices are rhythmically identical, always moving together, even if they are moving in different directions and in different spaces. The two-part harmony of the vocals stays apart, never quite connecting in unison. For example, let’s look at the first line of the song. The voices start a major 6th apart, with the female voice singing a G# that she holds for 2 bars and the male voice singing a B. As the male voice ascends, the intervals shrink to a perfect 5th, then an augmented 4th, then a major

3rd. Just as the voices seem as if they’ll finally connect in unison, they are yanked further apart to a minor 6th, before settling in a perfect 5th. We can see this reflected in the montage itself with the display of both Jimmy and Kim’s names. Both names are revealed here but in such wildly different contexts; Kim’s is revealed on the door of her office, whilst Jimmy’s is shown on the document checking in during his legal suspension.

This is not to say the showrunners looked specifically at the exact intervals in the music, that would be a pretty big stretch to make. But intentionally or not, this is the effect of the interaction of these two vocal lines, and the showrunners most certainly felt the impact of this interaction with their song choice. Something else that reflects the characters is the vocal melodies individually, with the female voice remaining more stable and consistent than the male one. Although it is the female voice that often sits on the harshest tensions, such as on the line “quiet little place and have a”, where the woman highlights the dominant 7th of the E7 chord, the melodic contour of the male vocal line is far more unstable. The montage emphasises these qualities in the characters; look at how radically different the company they keep is; Kim, the professional businesswoman with suit-and-tie office workers helping her, and Jimmy, for everything that he is, spending

his days with Huell, a professional pickpocket. Later on in the song, the vocal parts swap, with the female vocal part jumping up an octave. Firstly, this shows that the song uses relatively little melodic material, instead using smaller fragments in different ways to create something bigger. But this also lends a new energy to the fairly lengthy song, lifting up the whole vocal melody.

Not only the songwriting itself, but also the production of the song contributes to the montage. The vocal lines are hard-panned in the left and right ears, something that differs from the more famous versions of the song, like Nancy and Frank Sinatra’s. You’ll only be able to hear this if you have headphones or stereo speakers, but the female voice is in the left ear and the male voice is in the right ear. Mirroring this, Kim is on the left, and Jimmy is on the right hand side of the screen.

There is a huge amount to say about this song and this montage, but focusing on the vocal lines is the clearest way in which we can understand how the song serves this montage. The perfect song choice is instrumental in creating the perfect montage, and the use of ‘Something Stupid’ is a testament to the care and attention that the creators put into the show, and why it’s such a brilliant piece of television.

“*‘Something Stupid’ is a testament to the care and attention that the creators put into the show*”

“*‘Better Call Saul’ is one of television’s crowning achievements*”

“You write things and get lucky”: In conversation with screenwriter John Hodge

Discussing *Trainspotting*, scriptwriting, and the entertainment industry with the BAFTA and Olivier-award winner.

Meg Lintern

Although you may not know John's name, you'll certainly know his work. Having written the screenplays for *Trainspotting*, *The Beach*, *A Life Less Ordinary*, and *T2 Trainspotting*, as well as the script for Olivier-award-winning play *Collaborators*, he is the creative genius behind some seminal British entertainment. Far from a jaded Hollywood veteran, John is a man who speaks with admirable modesty, and whose tangents are peppered with pearls of wisdom. His success, he tells me, is the product of luck and perseverance: “You write things and get lucky, but luck is kind of difficult to come by.”

John's interest in writing began while he was at school. He wrote his first sketches while in 6th form. However, after choosing to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh, John's move into the creative industry was a leap of faith, requiring him to choose a pursuit of passion over a stable career. He tells me that what drew him to study medicine was the duration of the course, since “the more time at university, the better”, and whilst he “didn't really enjoy the course much”, he wrote for Edinburgh's student paper and performed sketches at his Medics' Ball.

He says, “I went through my degree and started working as a doctor and put all that [creative interest] behind me. I got through some postgraduate exams, but then in my mid 20s I thought to myself, ‘I enjoyed scriptwriting in high school, so I'll have a go at this. And if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out.’ But I knew I would really like to write a film script. And that was the extent of my ambition. I didn't know what this film script I was going to write was going to be about, or anything like that.”

John drew his inspiration from films like the Coen Brothers' *Blood Simple* and Steven Soderbergh's breakthrough film, *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*. He tells me, “I was really impressed by the way that both those filmmakers created intelligent commercial films, [especially] their use of tension, threat, and ultimately violence in small amounts.”

Exploring “that *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* route [and] moving pieces around to create tension” is what led John to produce his first script, *Shallow Grave*. This black comedy crime film, directed by Danny Boyle and starring Ewan McGregor, Christopher Eccleston, and Kerry Fox, was not only a commercial success, but it gave John a springboard from which to launch his career. Subsequently, John set about adapting the script for a film that would become a cultural phenomenon: *Trainspotting*. This script originated with the magazine shorts and books produced by Irvine Welsh. The novel *Trainspotting* was first published in 1993, and told the harrowing tale of a group of friends whose lives were wracked by addiction and self-destructive habits. Having lived in Edinburgh and worked as a medic, thus seeing first-hand the devastating effects of heroin addiction and the AIDs epidemic, John was inspired by the content of Welsh's writing. He tells me, “Edinburgh in the mid-80s was a minor epicentre for the HIV epidemic... the drug taking community all sort of knew each other, so needle sharing, in ignorance, managed to infect a disproportionately large number of people compared to some other cities, so that sort of world was familiar to me. Reading [Irvine's] book, I was electrified by the characters.”

In creating any script, screenwriters have to immerse themselves fully in their research and become a part of the world that they are writing into existence. When writing a script that deals with painful and traumatic topics, this has the potential to weigh heavily on a writer's mental state. *Trainspotting*, which deals with themes ranging from internalised homophobia to infant mortality, is an extreme example of such a script. John tells me that he did indeed find his psyche to be affected by the powerful and gruesome themes he was writing about, so much so that when more producers reached out to ask if he would help with adaptations of similar stories about drug addiction and death, he knew that “there's no way I wanted to do that”.

However, he concedes that writing *Trainspotting* was made easier since he was



adapting not just a book about hardship and heroin addiction, but “a book about people in all their glory, in all their wits and humour... I'd much rather do things that have a certain degree of escapism, amusement, stuff like that, because that's sort of what I like to see. I think there's a place for a wide spectrum of emotional journeys. And we each have to be responsible for our own.”

Having worked in an industry known for being cutthroat, brutal, and heartless, John's journey has come with its shares of lows. “I was fired from James Bond. I was working with Danny Boyle on it, and we were dumped, but I don't feel bad about that. You know, I was well paid for the work I did.”

Ultimately, the decision was pinned on ‘creative differences’, which saw both John and Danny Boyle removed from the film. “The way it happened was very Hollywood... I think something happened to do with the script and the rewrite, which was delivered and didn't satisfy [the producers'] demands. Danny was very supportive. We were going to go meet them, the producers and people from the studio, in New York, to sort of thrash it all out. And I had this feeling that it might not end harmoniously. But I thought, you know what, I was gonna go to New York for a few days at someone else's expense. So that's good. The hotel was booked, and I was going to raid the minibar, because again, I thought I might never be coming back. [I was in] the car on my way to Heathrow and the phone rang. It was Danny saying, ‘Now we're off. That's it.’ The car turned around. I never got as far as the minibar.”

“It was very disappointing, and you felt hurt at the time, but it's really not bad. My overall experience [in the industry] has been great. When I started out [in medicine], a doctor said to me, ‘What you really want, John, is a job where you don't need to go to work each day’. That's what I've had for nearly 30 years now.”

John admits that for young people starting

off in a creative career, these setbacks might be too much to take. His only advice is perseverance, and the magic ingredient - luck. “I feel like there should be some secret that everyone who's in the business knows. There isn't really. It's just tough. And it can be very depressing. Be prepared to be depressed. To feel sort of lost. And like you've made a big mistake.”

Finding another aspiring creative at a similar stage in their career can be a liferaft, according to John. “Meet someone who you trust and who you like, and who has similar ambitions and complementary views, so you get to go through this journey together, because there's a lot of knockbacks.”

Having made it over the many barriers to success and achieved many incredible accolades, John maintains that he has managed to evade the scrutiny that has arisen in the age of social media. He says of the height of his fame: “it was fine. It never caused any problems for me. I was

never recognised in the street or anything like that. And it was an age before social media, so these were more innocent times. But once I went to the Musée d'Orsay - No one knows the name of the scriptwriters here in Britain, but you go to France and it's different - I went to the Musée d'Orsay, handed over my bank card as deposit for the audio guide, and [the receptionist] looked at it and said, “Oh, you wrote *Le Tombeau de la Terreur*, which was the French title of *Shallow Grave*. So that was nice. I think I still paid for the audio guide, though.”

“But I worked on *The Beach* [with] Leonardo DiCaprio in the immediate post-Titanic fervour that surrounded the guy. And he dealt [with the attention] very well, but by keeping a distance. I think that's what they have to do: they have to put up barriers between themselves and the outer world, which is a shame. And of course, putting up barriers for a long time can do things to someone.”

The celebrity culture that John has avoided is playing a bigger role than ever in the new Age of Netflix. With the appeal of

“**What you really want is a job where you don't have to go to work each day**”

“**I was fired from James Bond**”

new films often focusing around the glossy stars they can attract to their roster, and with corporations like Disney hiring whole teams of screenwriters for any one script, the authenticity of the art of screenwriting has arguably suffered.

“Cinema is sort of dying,” John tells me. Instead, in the eyes of scriptwriters who want to maintain their own style and voice, “everything’s for television”.

However, modern ‘binge’ culture has, in John’s opinion, taken its toll on this form of writing too. “It becomes more like manufacturing, you know; the sort of television equivalent of the Model T Ford. Your manufacturing process creates a more reliable product, or products that are more

predictable. The end product is good, and then that’s fine. It works. But it’s just... it’s just different.”

This isn’t to say that John doesn’t still find immense enjoyment in crafting new scripts. He notes that one of his proudest creations was the sequel to Trainspotting. He says, “It was not as successful as Trainspotting - it’s not as exciting a film. And I’m totally okay with that. It was never conceived of as something that would be as exciting as Trainspotting, for the very simple reason

that the characters are in their 40s. Life in your 40s is not as exciting as it is when you’re 21. It just isn’t. And there’s no point in pretending otherwise. And so it’s an inherently depressing film, because it’s a film about ageing, and nostalgia.

“Obviously, the phenomenon of Trainspotting and being involved in that was a big part of my life. So the the act of going back to that with the same people 20 odd years later was quite emotional. This was more or less due to the privilege of working with these great actors. I thought

“*Cinema is sort of dying... everything’s for television*”

‘The Ants & the Grasshopper’: meet environmentalist filmmaker Raj Patel

Discussing climate change, activism, and the creation of his recent film.

Ciara Rushton

Food security has long been one of the most pertinent issues arising from the climate crisis. With the global environment changing immensely and countries facing ever more extreme weather conditions, the situation continues to worsen and individuals are feeling the impact more pertinently day to day. The impact has not been even across the world, however, and the realities of the climate crisis and food insecurity are felt most direly in the developing world.

I sat down with Raj Patel, climate change and food security activist and co-director of a recent film, ‘The Ants & The Grasshopper’. Currently a Research Professor at the University of Texas, Austin, he attended Oxford in the early 2000s and has gone on to dedicate his academic career and activism to issues surrounding food systems and the climate crisis. ‘The Ants & The Grasshopper’ looks at the work of Malawian climate change activist, Anita Chitaya, as she seeks to incite change both in the farms of her home in Malawi, and all the way in California and DC. The fruit of GenerationFoods, a decade-long food security and justice project, the film sees Anita meet despairing farmers, climate change skeptics, and individuals from across America’s racial, class and gender divides in an attempt, as the film’s tagline suggests, to change their minds about “the most important thing in the world.”

We first discuss how Raj first became interested in the issue of food security. Aged five, he travelled to India with his parents for the first time, members of the Indian diaspora in the UK. On a stop they made

whilst travelling around Bombay, he recalls seeing a young girl around his age begging at a traffic light. He couldn’t understand why she was outside, hungry, and his family were able to simply drive away. Upon returning to London, he began to fundraise, lending out toys at his kindergarten, and earned a Blue Peter badge for his work. At a young age, he was confronted directly with the inequalities integral to food insecurity.

After this, Raj spent a long time wondering what reasons there were for hunger. “The conclusion I’ve reached”, he says, “is that there aren’t any good reasons for why there’s hunger, it’s always a political choice...governments are enabling and cementing the power of large export agricultural operations and an unsustainable farming system.” Such a system, he says, leads to individuals such as Marcus Rashford, responsible for the government’s U-turn on providing free school meals, having to intervene. Likewise, he says, it leads to an acceptance in countries like the United Kingdom of the existence of food banks, where once it was a “mark of national shame” that they had to exist.

At the university where Raj teaches, one in three students is food insecure. Normalised as a part of the “student grind”, skipping meals or not having the money for food is regularly brushed over. The situation is not overly different in Oxford; Hertford JCR, among other colleges, opened its own food bank in October 2022 because of the strain of the cost of living crisis on students. It is clear that, particularly in student culture,



food insecurity is directly felt. Across the global west as a whole, the circumstances are becoming ever more precarious. Whilst we continue to ignore the role of ‘middle class overconsumption’, the cost-of-living crisis deepens and individuals fall further into food insecurity.

And yet, he also notes that slashing the aid budget represents a refusal to recognise the UK’s own role in causing food insecurity. “We’ve got Americans and Brits who are consuming disproportionately, the consequences of whose actions are being wrought, not necessarily at home, but certainly abroad”, he tells me. In tackling the intersections of colonialism, racism, patriarchy and food insecurity in ‘The Ants and The Grasshopper’, Raj and Anita demonstrate that a refusal to accept this role in the developed world has direct global consequences especially on countries like Malawi, where Anita lives. The existing environmental movement, he argues, has failed to rid itself of patriarchy and white supremacy, which leads to white saviourism in the climate change movement and, Raj argues, harmful stereotypes about Africa being perpetuated by groups such as Band Aid. In focusing on and allowing Anita to tell her own story, therefore, the film seeks to give power back to the individuals experiencing firsthand the most severe implications of food insecurity and the inaction of western governments. Turning the mirror on America and the rest of the global west, it provides a raw perspective on what society is doing wrong on climate change.

Raj remains critical of the American and British governments in their approaches to climate change, as well as their capitulation to corporate cabals and the so-called ‘free market’.

they were just all fantastic. And it was so easy to write [the script] because I had their voices in my head. And it was just a pleasure. [The] same crew worked on the film who’d worked on the original 20 years before. Of course, the film carried its own stresses and hassles and everything with that. That’s just taken as read. But I just really felt really privileged to be involved in that again, it was great.”

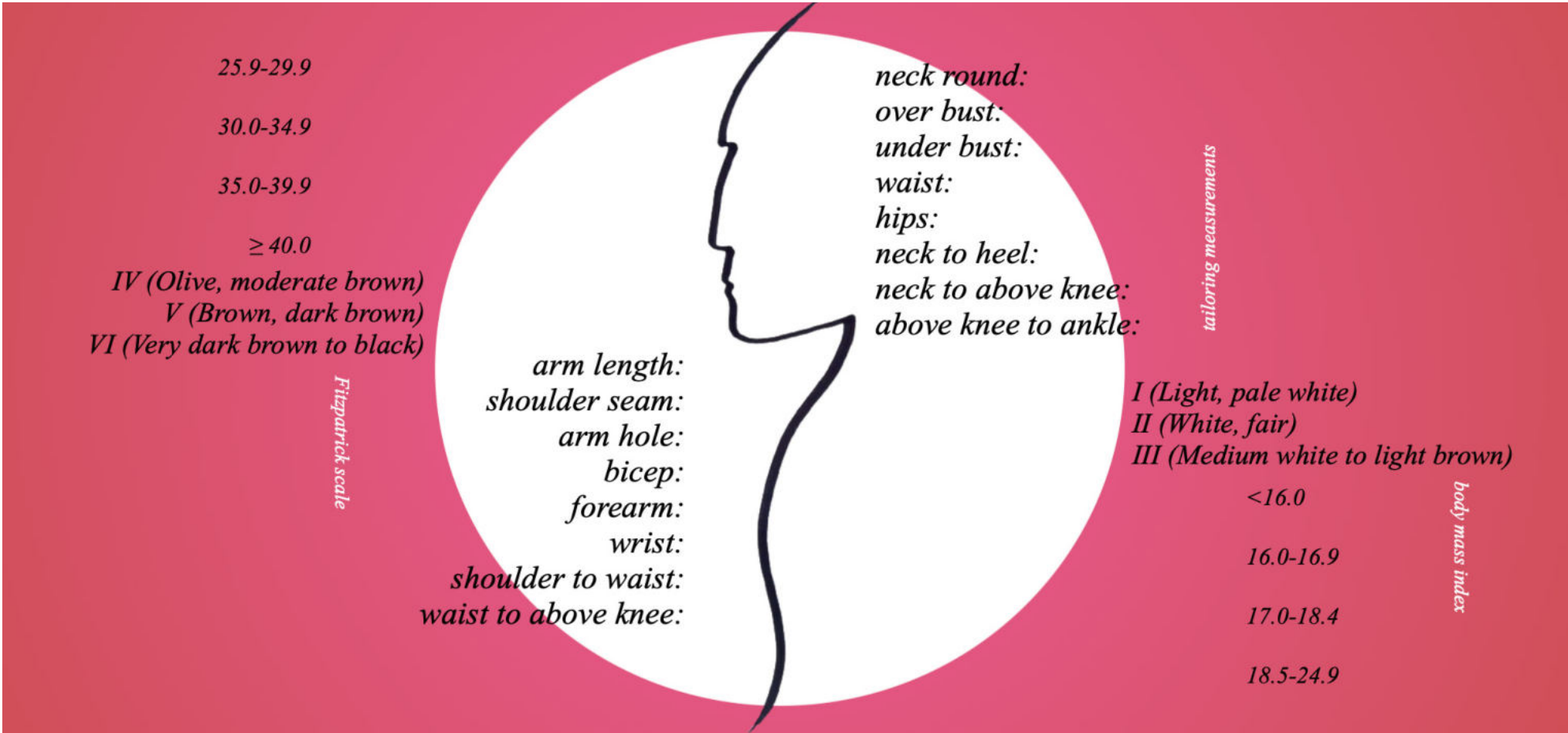
If one thing is for sure, it’s that whilst John may have struck gold with a generation-defining film script in his early years as a writer, he hasn’t lost his touch. As for what we can expect to see from him in the future, he tells me: “I’m developing a film with Danny [Boyle]. We’ll see what happens with that.”

“I certainly think that there’s been a long period in which the government has known about climate change and refused to do much about it”, he tells me. The root of this, he argues, links to Naomi Klein’s analysis of climate change. “If you really took climate change seriously,” he tells me, “you would understand that what it is an indictment of, what requires massive transformation is capitalism itself. And none of the elites here are particularly thrilled about that idea...I think capitalism doesn’t have within it, the the instruments to be able to sufficiently care and repair for the planet.” To tackle climate change adequately, therefore, he argues capitalism must be fundamentally reconsidered.

I ask Raj, in looking at the material impact of colonialism in causing food insecurity whether he sees a role in this for reparations to be paid. “I think there’s a necessity for reparations,” he affirms. Rather than paying the high sums that have been suggested, though, he argues that “what needs to happen is for Britain to acknowledge that, in fact, there is a bill to be paid”, that Britain can only gain humility and begin to rewrite its history once it recognises the role it has played, historically, in food insecurity and climate change.

‘The Ants and The Grasshopper’ sought to show the real, material impact of colonialism, patriarchy and more on climate change and on food insecurity. Yet, Raj shows in his work that there is a proactive approach that the West can begin to take. To begin to fight climate change, we need to fundamentally reconsider capitalism, and acknowledge the bill we must pay to save our planet and end hunger.

Photo Credit: Sheila Menezes



The ugly truth about pretty privilege

How pretty privilege has shaped the experiences of Oxford students, for better and for worse

Sahar Malaika

CW: Eating disorders, racism, body dysmorphia, references to sexual violence.

Before I begin, I'd like to say thank you to all students that interacted with the forms and polls that were released to gather information for this article. To those of you that are struggling with the issues addressed, please seek help from your college welfare supporters or the University's welfare service. The appropriate contact details can be found at the end of this article.

Charlie's Angels (2000). A film adapted from an old-school TV show about gorgeous women spies. What's the tactic? To take advantage of the fact that men are unsuspecting of beautiful women, making them the perfect spies. Whilst this nurtured an adoration for films and was somewhat empowering for young Sahar, watching it recently, I've realised that this is a prime example of pretty privilege. Yes, I'm basing this article off of a cheesy 2000s film that was probably my queer awakening, however, it doesn't remove from the fact that pretty privilege not only exists but has a deep-seated place in Oxford. Growing up with films like this in conjunction with ideas of what it was to be "pretty" or conventionally attractive – and more the fact that this was not what I looked like – I was taught that pretty privilege was just the way that the world works. This didn't change when I matriculated, even though my relationship with my appearance improved, and I would come to realise, especially in a

context where I was expected to be more outgoing, that there were moments in which I would be overlooked in the "attraction" department.

I started writing this article as part of an exploration as to whether anyone else felt like this as well. It turned into a revelation about how prevalent pretty privilege is at Oxford. 72% of people that responded to our Instagram poll recognised that pretty privilege is a problem and 34% even acknowledged that they'd been positively affected by it. It's safe to say that most people can at least come up with a definition for it:

"For me, pretty privilege means greater freedom and social opportunities."

"Pretty privileged to me is being treated like you're worth more than others, just because of appearances."

I think you get it.

Pretty privilege has a diverse impact on Oxford students, not only in the way that it is advantageous for certain people but also in how very many students oppressively feel it in their lives here. Of course, where most people feel it most is in the dating scene:

"I got into my first and only proper relationship at the big age of 19. I never thought I was pretty enough to have a partner."

Before I carry on, I want to linger on this statement for a minute. A lot of the time, you'll hear an Oxford student say that they never dated or were in a relationship before university because they were working or studying. Therefore, when we get to Oxford (especially in Michaelmas term of first year), the overwhelming pressure to get with the person to your left can be incredibly

terrifying when you haven't, first, addressed possible factors that will have knocked your confidence in the dating scene that can be attributed to pretty privilege. Now, I'm not saying that everyone who has said this has the same experience, but I also want us to realise that it is possible for these things to come hand in hand. One response, even without naming pretty privilege, showed how this was strikingly present in dating apps:

"Once, I was added to a group chat of unknown numbers where they made fun of my appearance... There's a reason I don't use dating apps. I don't know what pretty privilege is, but it's probably avoiding that harassment."

Whilst dating apps can be used to facilitate healthy and long-term relationships and romantic interactions, I don't think we acknowledge how often they facilitate pretty privilege when someone is only deciding to go on a date with you based on your appearance. After a conversation with a friend, we also realised that the reason we felt so insecure on dating apps was because we didn't fit into the cookie-cutter image that appealed to most others on it. These people shared this experience:

"I feel like people overlook me, before they get to know me."

"There are moments that you remember yourself, and you realise that you're not attractive here. This is not your space to be loved or appreciated for the way you look."

"It just feels like men often don't want a woman who is bigger than them - they want someone small and slim and kind of dainty?"

Dating apps, completely based around pictures with "a few questions" to keep up the pretence of connecting people through their personalities, exacerbate so many issues around body image such as body dysmorphia and possibly even eating disorders - especially as a woman because of the way that the heterosexual dating scene expects women to fit a certain image for the sake of men. A couple of interviewees who identified as queer described how pretty privilege seems to exist less frequently in the LGBTQ+ scene at Oxford; "embracing the queerness" of their appearances - in the way that they didn't fit into the male gaze - allowed them to become more confident with themselves and alleviated the pressures to look a certain way. However, unfortunately, the queer scene is not immune to the influence of pretty privilege. This was a heart-breaking response to our google form:

"I think all of these issues with body image and the lack of plus size people in Oxford is heightened in the queer scene - it feels like there's a cookie cutter image of what 'queer' looks like at this uni and that's often very skinny and white. The only place that I've actually been verbally assaulted about my weight in Oxford is in the gay club Plush, on several occasions by queer men/nbs who have shouted things like 'fat bitch' and worse at me while I'm just dancing with my friends or trying to get out there in the queer scene and meet someone."

"As a queer woman, I feel particularly insecure when getting with other queer women/I feel myself comparing myself more which is stupid."

This need to be more "feminine" might not be as present amongst the queer

I was taught that pretty privilege was just the way that the world

I feel like people overlook me before they get to know me

community here, but it still presents itself when queer students “seem to care about the male gaze much more than the female gaze”. One student also said that, regardless of how feminine they were, they were worried that they weren’t “‘gay enough’ for women.” Pretty privilege also presents itself in the queer scene through the way that it affects trans and non-binary students:

“It’s difficult navigating dating - wanting to be seen as attractive and seen as my gender can feel at odds with each other. I worry I am only considered attractive when I’m not being seen as my gender.”

“Trans women especially I’ve seen be more likely to be misgendered and mistreated if they aren’t deemed attractive or feminine enough to “pass”.

Whilst the queer scene can serve as some sort of an escape from cis and heteronormative standards of beauty, there are still people within this community that hold these values.

I also received an overwhelming percentage of written responses from people of colour. Before I show them to you, I want to give you a quote from Candice Carty-Williams’ Queenie which came to me when I read these responses: “You know, when we go out, my friends get chatted up by guys who say, ‘I’d love to take you for dinner, and in the same breath they come over to me, put their hands on my bum and tell me they want to take me back to theirs and fuck me”. I think it perfectly encompasses the disparity that is felt between the treatment of people of colour and white people, especially in the dating scene. The only thing that I would add is the way that there were other people of colour who these same guys would overlook. These were a couple of other responses that I received:

“I’ve never dated so I wouldn’t know, but I’ve low-key accepted that I might be single for the duration of my degree, because I think it’s harder to date as a POC here. Not only do I worry about not meeting the beauty standard, I do want to meet someone who’ll like me for me, and not fetishise me.”

“Look around and ask why so many beautiful WOC are passed over in Oxford compared to fairly average-looking blonde upper-class counterparts - there are exceptions but it’s so weird to see attractive people at uni regularly discussed without

anyone mentioning this.”

I’m sure at this point you’ll have noticed that I’ve focussed a lot on the dating scene at Oxford. This is, in part, because many of those who responded to my survey would bring up how they’ve been impacted by pretty privilege in Oxford without prompting. It is also because I think that the impacts of pretty privilege are exacerbated and demonstrated more strongly in the prominence of the dating scene in Oxford. It is a brilliant demonstration of how those who benefit from pretty privilege receive more attention or free drinks based on the way that they look.

When asked about how others have experienced pretty privilege, this was a common response that I received:

“A lot of people who have pretty privilege don’t particularly like to admit it, I’ve found they like what they get from it. It’s not a bad thing and it makes a lot of sense, no one would pass up the opportunity realistically.”

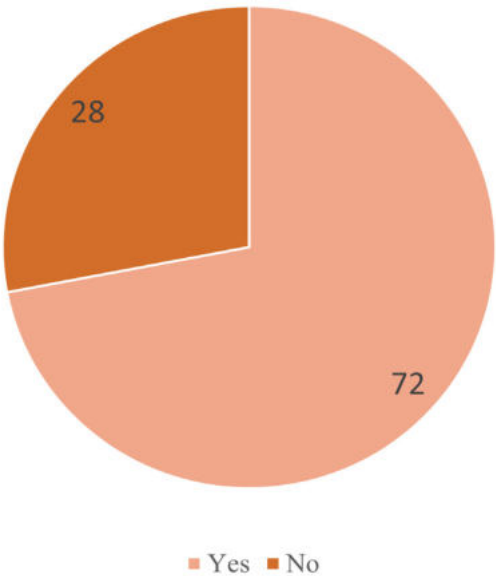
This is a really difficult problem to be faced with because when someone benefits from pretty privilege, they may not realise it because being given a free drink or a discount by someone who likes the way you look could easily be interpreted as that person “just being nice”. They may not even see themselves as pretty and won’t see it as pretty privilege in the first place. But someone else may step up behind them, not as conventionally attractive, and get a nod before they’re charged the full price for the same thing. It’s a sure way to strike down someone’s confidence especially when no-one around you can see what all of these people have done wrong. A lot of the time, it comes across as confidence or sociability:

“Friends who are absolutely beautiful with regard to conventional beauty standards tend to make friends more easily I think - they never EVER acknowledge that their appearance has anything to do with this though.”

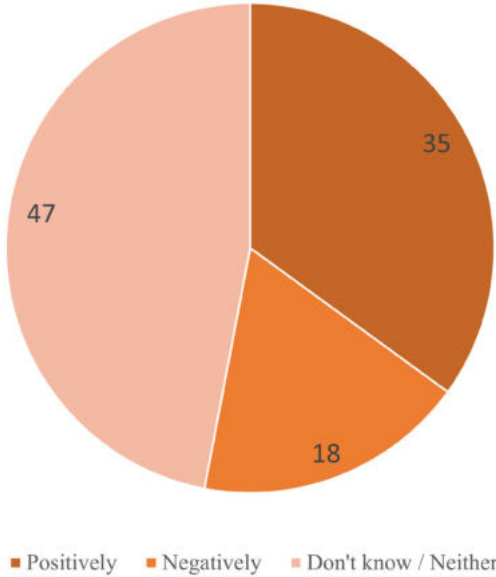
It can take time to realise this. When you first find these friends, it seems as though they’re just confident. It’s inspiring! They serve as role models to boost your own confidence and need to be outgoing. Suddenly, one day, the penny drops. The likelihood is that their confidence comes hand in hand with the fact that they’ve not had to scrutinise every physical aspect of themselves to get what they want. For

“
I might be single for the duration of my degree because I think it’s harder to date as a POC

Do you think pretty privilege is a problem?



How have you been impacted by your looks?



example, one interviewee described how she internalised people’s opinion that her afro-textured hair would be “taking up too much space”. As a result of this, she became aware of how her personality took up too much space. The same has been said by interviewees that felt self-conscious about their weight:

“Being overweight naturally means you take up more space so I have a fear of taking up even more space ‘than necessary’.”

It’s a frustrating never-ending cycle of both external and internal bias surrounding your appearance which means that whether or not we fit into the frame of “pretty” also has a huge impact on our confidence. Even if they share their free meal with you, it may not necessarily soften this blow at all.

However, I don’t want to ignore the fact that pretty privilege is costly to those who might benefit from it. For example, one person brought up how, whilst she has benefited from economic pretty privilege (in receiving gifts etc.), she has felt that she has suffered from “the beauty penalty as a woman in an academic setting” because “if there’s a woman who got somewhere high up, yeah, they either slept their way to the top, flirted their way to the top, or somebody liked the look of them and wanted them to hang around”. Some people also discussed how being pretty opened you up to sexual violence:

“If you’re a woman then [pretty privilege] is sort of balanced out by the fact that you’re going to get catcalled and objectified and have a sexual harassment and sexual violence like that.”

Prettiiness can also be distorted for non-binary and trans students:

“For afab non-binary people - people such as myself, it can be the other way around and “prettiiness” becomes less of a privilege, as it is often be tied to being misgendered as a woman.”

This has been a difficult article to write because, honestly, it seems like there’s no winning, and the only truth that I’ve found in this is that these qualities, these conventions of pretty privilege benefit one person and one person only and that is the (usually straight) tall, athletic, rich, white, blonde man that we all see as the Oxford poster boy.

Well, what’s our solution to all of this? One of my interviewees highlighted that this is not something that can be measurable in the same way that a company could measure how many employees are women/people of colour/non-binary people. However, just

because this is not a measurable bias, this should not be your response:

“It isn’t gonna stop, so grit your teeth and bare it.”

Please don’t let this stick with you, despite the ‘doom and gloom’ feeling of this article so far. Yes, we’ve seen that pretty privilege exists and that Oxford is not immune to it. I don’t want to let the pedestaled image of the Oxford poster boy damage your confidence any more than it has already. We didn’t let that guy stop us from getting here, we didn’t let him stop us from studying the subject that we love, hating the texts we have to read (thanks Milton), or the tute sheet that’s staring at you from your desk. Please! What authority does he have to make you look in the mirror and hate yourself? Or stop you from having a boogie at the musicals night at the Bullingdon, auditioning for your favourite play, or asking out that person you’ve been ogling at in the RadCam? The best takeaway that I’ve had from these surveys and interviews

is that people have felt more able to express their individuality in Oxford. Yes, this place was made for that poster boy, the man who can give you a charming smile or will promise his entire trust fund to the “thin sexy hooker virgin with boobs and hips but not big ones”(see Leading Lady Parts, BBC on Youtube). But look around you. We’re not

all Keira Knightley or James Bailey but nor should we be. If this sermon didn’t do it for you from yet another student journalist, then try my favourite pieces of advice that some of our interviewees would give their Fresher/Term1 self:

“Oxford is a bubble and other people’s perceptions of you don’t matter! Everyone is beautiful.”

“Don’t stress about your appearance, there’s not much you can do about it. Just be grateful for what you have, think of all the things you like about your appearance and focus on being your best self. A beautiful personality goes a long way.”

Stick that on a Fresher’s T-Shirt.

Support information:
For student counselling services please email: counselling@admin.ox.ac.uk.
Nightline: 01865 270 270
Sexual harrassment support service: supportservice@admin.ox.ac.uk [ENDMK]

Image credit: W.S. Luk

CHERBADLY

Magdalen college deer hunting open season to begin today

As of this Tuesday, Open Season for deer hunting at Magdalen College has officially begun. "Our favorite time of year," said Charles Hutton the gameskeeper of Magdalen deer park. Every year for a three-week period, Magdalen College students are permitted to enter the park with a bow and arrow and hunt the deer that are raised there. Open Season is partly a means of population control and partly a way to "release the long-dormant bloodlust of our students," said the welfare officer of the Magdalen College JCR.

Each year, the student who subdues the largest buck in the deerpark is given a celebratory venison feast, during which he or she will ritually consume the heart of the

slain creature. "It's a great way to establish community and to prove that Magdalen College maintains the ancient ways," said the current Dean of Students. Other deer felled by the student body are permitted to be taken home and turned into wall displays or fashioned into robes.

Occasionally, Magdalen will welcome distinguished guests to participate in the hunt. Famous successful guest hunters have included William Gladstone, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Ed Milliband, whose record forty ten-point bucks has stood for two decades. Dame Maggie Smith is remembered for refusing to use a bow and arrow during her visit and instead insisting on taking down deer with her bare hands.

Legend has it that, somewhere deep in the Magdalen Grove, lives an elusive, gleaming white stag. It is said that the student brave enough to fell this brilliant creature and present its horns to the Master of the College will be granted an automatic permanent professorship. No hunter has come close to this feat in recent years but perhaps an intrepid student will take home the prize this year.

Oxford Security has advised students to be aware of flying arrows while crossing Longwall Street over the course of the next several days.



Well, well, well. For a moment there it looked like there would be less shit going down at the Union than in Univ. Poor form - the Union monopoly on university drama is, after all, this column's raison d'être.

It had been a rather quiet few days. The first events of term were well attended, in part due to CruElla De Vil directing her energies towards sourcing not 101 Dalmatians, but 101 social media posts, and in TSC the authorial presence of individuals consigned not just to the bin but the sewer had all the climax of a woman unfortunate enough to partner the Oxshag creator. The term card is out, with committee undertaking the greatest amount of manual labour they will likely ever do.

Yet do not fear, for whilst it has been precious hours since the feminism debate, female solidarity - actually, any solidarity - appears thoroughly thin on the ground. For the Liverpool Loverboy has revealed himself to be more of a Scouse Shark. Turbulent times ensued, with the predictability of this election taking rather as sharp a trajectory as, say, Elon Musk's net worth, the country's opinion of Prince Harry, or the amount of illicit substances partaken of on Society premises. One thing is for sure: the Dark Horse may yet remain a head in front, but she is no longer streaking ahead of the aWoken librarian. Thankfully this was never literal streaking,

although one hears she was banned from McDonald's for entering their premises one too many times barefoot. Jevelyn could not possibly comment on whether he was privy to any of these occasions, only that she is nonetheless reputed to be picking up seccies as successfully as Mr. Davis has picked up his new sobriquet.

The Union's most senior blonde hacks have demonstrated remarkable political flexibility this week, with both the Dark Horse and the aWoken librarian's campaign manager successively putting in appearances at Beer & Bickering and Port & Policy. Or perhaps they are simply, like the rest of us, alcoholics. After all, the Union presidency and a particular drug of choice is a pairing older than time - or, indeed, the Megladonne. Speaking of, internal romantic entanglements have once again penetrated the walls - and with this committee, who knows if committeecest is all it is? Someone check the Who's Who archives, for the love of God.



FROM THE ARCHIVES : SECURITY ALERT

November 17, 1989

Oxford colleges have a notorious security problem. But are things improving? *Jason Burke and Chris Harris* take a look.

A TRAMP on Magdalen Bridge claims that he has a key to almost every college in Oxford and produces a huge bunch to prove his point. Last week the 'Oxbridge burglar' was convicted of stealing over £17,000, much of which came from college pigeon-holes. And earlier this term two men wearing crash helmets smashed their way into Somerville bar. All of these incidents shed light on the problems of security for Oxford's colleges, and things are unlikely to get any easier.

Many colleges already make a considerable effort to combat the increasing amount of 'college crime' taking place. St John's have video cameras installed around the college to keep an eye on things, after 6pm all visitors to St Hilda's have to enter the college through the Porter's Lodge, and porters are employed around the clock at some colleges, including St Hilda's and Pembroke.

According to Kate O'Neal, Brasenose Women's Officer, the college's annexe Frewin Court, is a "reassuring" place to live. Features of the annexe include a permanent Caretaker who lives on the complex, and a locked door and doorbell system on every staircase. Most of the residents of "Fortress Frewin" are grateful for the extra security, she says.

Unfortunately Frewin is the exception, not the norm, even though the measures taken there could be implemented in many places with only moderate cost. Most colleges rely almost solely on the outdated Porter's Lodge, a system often shown to be very ineffective. But even if the main gate of a college is well patrolled there are often plenty of other vulnerable points. Few students fail to know 'secret' ways into college to use if they have forgotten their keys and many walls are easily climbed.

St Catherine's has often been criticised for its lack of

security. The main gates are left open until late at night, and the Porter's Lodge is not even anywhere near them, making it possible to get to almost all areas of the college completely unchallenged. Poor lighting adds to the problems.

Oxford police are well aware of the shortcomings of security at colleges. WPC Ward at St Aldates Police Station highlighted unsecure

Switched on to security: a porter at St John's keeps an eye on things

many from abroad, have heard the police's message so far this year.

The police also offer a 'Security Survey' service to colleges. If asked by the authorities they will send officers to examine security aspects and then submit a report on possible improvements. "Some colleges really go out of their way to improve security," said WPC Ward. St John's was highlighted as an

"The financial situation of colleges often determines the level of security"

locks and windows and badly maintained lighting as persistent problems. "A lot of girls complain bitterly about darkness in quads", she said. Oxford police give talks on personal safety to students at the invitation of colleges and according to WPC Ward over 1000 students, including

example.

"Many colleges need a nudge when it comes to security", said OUSU President Louise Russell. "According to her there is a fundamental conflict between the desire for 'open' colleges, accessible to all members of the University, and security require-

ments. "The whole ethos of open colleges is going to have to change".

However, she accepted that students are not entirely blameless over the problems. A new entry system to the Lincoln library is simply bypassed by propping the door open, and many students still habitually refuse to lock their rooms, or they leave ground floor windows open. "Students need educating as well", said Louise Russell.

A commercial security firm also echoed the view that the 'Human Factor' can always defeat the object of even the most sophisticated security system. "Security is very much people orientated. Technology cannot always provide the best solution. A human solution is often better", said Miss C. Morley, a Security Consultant with Group 4. The firm already provides a mobile patrol service for one Oxford college, involving a uniformed officer

who checks the premises at regular intervals during the night.

The cost of providing security measures is what many colleges argue prevents them taking action. "Authorities often place it low on lists of financial priorities" said Louise Russell, and according to WPC Ward "The financial situation of colleges often determines the level of security. Many would like to but can't."

So the problem of college security rumbles on. Steps are being taken but not on a wide enough scale. Colleges still refuse to place security high on their list of priorities and constantly use financial excuses to explain their lack of action. There are the odd shining examples, such as Frewin Court, and it seems a shame these are not copied elsewhere, because they work. Kate O'Neal echoes this when she says "Frewin is the safest place I have ever lived in Oxford."

Masthead

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Today’s headline for Times2 was Julia Samuel’s warnings against “the perils of ‘promiscuous honesty’”. This headline was attached to a picture of William and Harry—though the article does not refer to the brothers so I’m not sure if this dynamic duo is the best way to open up this discussion. Samuel defines promiscuous honesty as “telling everyone every-thing”, and whilst it’s true that I know too much about Harry’s feelings on being a second child, I don’t think that this topic should be centred around him. We have honestly beat that dead horse one too many times. I too have had to painfully struggle in the shadow of my older sister, but I have braved this suffering in silence like the martyr that I am.

Brothers aside, the concept of dangerously oversharing is a really intriguing one. I never knew that honesty could be promiscuous. Sure, I’ve heard of promiscuous behaviour or promiscuous literature, and I have even dressed as a promiscuous picnic table for Halloween, but promiscuous honesty? I’ve never heard of. Samuel’s theory that “when we express unfiltered feelings, we can disturb those around us” is definitely thought-provoking, but promiscuous? I must admit, some of my friend’s confessions have left me deeply disturbed and confused. I won’t subject you to that unsolicited information to



Iustina Roman
Deputy Editor

When The Source’s editors suggested that this week’s theme for the section could be ‘Homeward’, I was moved. It’s very fitting, as over the past few days, many of us have been settling back into Oxford, ready(-ish) for another term. Before the end of each term, we talk of “going back home” for the vac – but what does this mean in itself? For me, the meaning of ‘home’ has tended to be somewhat nebulous. My family migrated from Romania to the UK when I was young, so a lot of my childhood was split between the two countries during school terms and holidays. Even whilst being in London (which was technically our place of residence), every couple of years we would have to move houses, so I was

spare you the disturb-ance, but I must say that the truth does not only hurt, it also terrifies. Someone’s ‘dirty little secret’ or airing out of their ‘dirty laundry’ can scare you to the core. Honesty can actually involve much more filth than I expected...

Thinking about times I’ve revealed a bit too much about an experience or made inappropriate dinner conversation, I grow more and more inclined to agree with Samuel that some things are best left unsaid. I should not have shared that poem I made the one time my cycle was not perfectly regular and, having learned my lesson, I will now spare you the details. But if the truth is too much or too weird to handle, then what are we left with? I honestly don’t know. All I know is that I can never unsee the look on my friends’ faces after I read them that poem, and since then I am resolved on being a closed book. Samuel was right, not every-one can handle the truth...

Today’s issue has an excellent article from Suzanne about the SU’s withdrawal of a proposal to disaffiliate with the NUS. This has come following a long-drawn-out antisemitism scandal, which culminated in president Shaima Dallali’s dismissal at the end of last year after an investigation which Cherwell has reported on in depth over the last couple of terms. More recently, an independent report by Rebecca Tuck KC into “recent allegations of antisemitism as well as historic matters and broader culture” at the NUS had the shocking claim that “numerous accounts have been given to me of students being identified as ‘a Jew’ then being treated as a pariah at NUS events – subject to rooms ‘going quiet’ when they walk in, conversations abruptly ceasing, being whispered about and stared at.”

The act of bringing a motion to disaffiliate, no matter its result, is potentially useful for the wider conversation around antisemitism in student spaces; you could argue that, by bringing what is an often-poisonous conversation into the bounds of regulated and sensible boardroom discussion (not to



Isaac Ettinghausen
Editor-in-Chief

dignify the SU too much) could serve to make people think more rationally in an issue often overran by emotion. However, I echo Jewish Society president Jojo Sugarman’s concerns over the fact that the motion’s proposers did not first discuss it with Oxford’s JSoc, who – in a debate which largely concerns their own discrimination – indisputably should have among the first groups consulted in any discussion.

The motion was because those present felt it had a lack of clarity. A representative for JSoc was present and asked for clarification on whether the motion was primarily motivated by the potential financial and bureaucratic benefits of NUS disaffiliation, rather than antisemitism. Indeed, the fact that the motion’s proposers did not consult Jewish students suggests – unintentionally or not – a disregard for their opinions, and at worst, a cynical deployment of antisemitism to further other agendas. This isn’t to suggest that those that put forward the motion did not have genuine concern, but it once again shows a disregard for Jewish feelings. Their experiences, documented in such a shocking and comprehensive way by Tuck’s report, cannot just be simply be used as a rhetorical tool, but should be a springboard for student politics to become a genuinely inclusive, progressive space.

Leader: What does home mean to me?

wary of becoming too attached to one place, knowing that we might have to move again eventually. Over the past two years I’ve experienced some of the biggest upheavals in my life: firstly, starting university which meant moving away from London and my family, followed by their decision to move back to our home country for good. I was left in a limbo – our house, which had become the most stable home for me, was sold, but I never really considered the house we had in Romania as my home. I didn’t know where I’d spend my time between terms – a problem that I managed to dodge for a few months while on my year abroad. Then, for Christmas this year, I conceded to my parents’ requests that I spend five weeks in Romania with them. It was with a mixture of longing and dread that I said yes: as a child, spending the holidays in a tiny eastern European village, friendless and hobby-less, felt like a bit of a chore. And yet, whilst I did miss Oxford and everyone in the UK greatly, I found this break to be surprisingly enjoyable. Having matured, I now feel a deeper sense of gratitude towards my family, whom I hadn’t seen in months. This is especially the case since over the years we’ve lost several family members; their empty seats around the

dinner table are now occupied by the unfamiliar faces of new friends, spouses, and children. The house my family lives in also feels strange and unfamiliar, nothing like the one I had spent countless summer and winter breaks in. Last year, I couldn’t help but feel jealous hearing my boyfriend’s plans to go to his hometown for the break, back to his family and the house he’s always lived in, seeing all his childhood friends who also lived nearby. I had none of that stability: my life is a frenzy of hurried weekend trips to catch up with different people in London, constant packing, coach/car rides and flights, and video calls for which I have to factor in time zone differences. But as I’ve come to realise, this doesn’t mean that I don’t have a home – only that my idea of one is different, something less physical and fixed. It’s made up of the little pieces of myself I leave in places or with people (or pets), for example. The corners of my home can be found in various houses, cities, hotels, or college rooms; in bites of my mum’s homecooked meals; in the cafés where I sip coffee and gossip with my friends; in the embrace of someone I love. As I continue to exist, I’m expanding it – so that no matter where I may be, I’ll always have a home to go back to.

Greatly exaggerated rumors: a response to Samuel Moore

Spencer Shia

A recent piece by Samuel Moore in this paper argued that the U.S. Supreme Court's jurisprudence, especially its possible pro-petitioner holding in the pending case *Moore v. Harper*, will "overthrow American democracy". His fears that the U.S. Supreme Court may "misread" the U.S. Constitution notwithstanding, Moore has, with all due respect, failed to grasp some facts about American Constitutional law, the *Moore v. Harper* oral arguments, and the nuances of "independent state legislature" (ISL) theories. Rumors regarding the imminent demise of American democracy are greatly exaggerated.

Let us begin with the clause that gave rise to the ISL theory, which is known to us as the "elections clause". Article I, Section 4, Clause 1 of the U.S. Constitution reads:

"The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Places of chusing Senators."

Moore claims that the ISL reading of this clause gives state legislatures plenary power over state elections, being able to override governors and state constitutions. He also argues that such a reading is legally erroneous. I am afraid that such a view over-generalizes the wide range of views regarding state legislatures having primary authority over election rules.

Granted, Moore is right that the ISL maximalists' view that state legislatures are not bound by their state constitutions is wrong. While the Constitution explicitly requires state legislatures, not state Governors or state supreme courts to prescribe the "times, places, and manner" of congressional elections, state legislatures themselves are creatures of their state constitution. State constitutions established the elections clause's aforementioned state legislatures. In turn, state legislatures could not override the very legal documents giving them their power in the first place. Article VI of the Constitution explicitly declares the supremacy of state constitutions over state statutes; it follows that the original public meaning of the elections clause did not confer a super-constitutional power to state legislatures, as the original text of the Constitution made clear the supremacy of state constitutions. Founding-era practice supports this claim. Almost no drafter of the Constitution, and no State in the early Republic, held the view that state legislatures could override state Constitutions.

However, that is not the only view supporting primary state legislative power over election rules. One could argue that the Moore petitioner's ISL theory is not the only ISL theory. Indeed, it is possible for some form of ISL theory to co-exist with checks on state legislatures. ISL theory is not necessarily "blatantly anti-democratic". Professors Michael McConnell and William Baude, reputable conservative legal scholars, have argued that while state legislatures are cabined by state constitutions, they are still the primary decision-makers regarding election rules. Crucially, their decision-making power over election rules could not be substantively substituted by another body. Such seems in line with the Constitution's explicit textual command of the "Legislature [of the state] thereof" determining election rules. Applying this principle to the facts of the Moore case, while the North Carolina Supreme Court could lawfully strike down the legislature's electoral map, they could not, as they did in this case, order a Special Master and outside experts to draw a new one, abrogating and replacing the legislature's clear constitutional prerogative.

So the Moore petitioners are right about the North Carolina Supreme Court overstepping their authority, but wrong about the State Legislature having super-constitutional power over election rules. State legislatures can win in *Moore v. Harper*, uphold some version of the ISL theory, and not "be able to redraw district boundaries however they want and pass as many laws suppressing voters based on race, gender, and political affiliations as they please". Even if the ISL maximalist view were instituted, it would not lead to state violations of the right to vote on the basis of race and sex, as suggested by Moore. Indeed, the 15th Amendment clearly states that the right to vote cannot be denied "on account of race or prior condition of servitude", whether by States or by the federal government.

While Moore is right that ISL maximalism is bunk, he ignores the nuance that exists in conservative legal thought on state legislative power over elections; independent state legislature theories if you will. They demonstrate that ISL theory is not necessarily anti-democratic. Even if ISL maximalism is implemented, its effects would not lead to the apocalyptic collapse of American democracy. And in any case, it is unlikely that the Supreme Court would uphold the ISL maximalism he derides. We are not at the brink of armageddon.

Read the full article at cherwell.org.

I hate to love *Love Island*, but even I will be switching off this time

Jack Twyman

It's that time of the year again- or is it? *Love Island's* winter series is debuting for a second time after the COVID-era hiatus. Cue the cheesy twitter memes and sorry attempt at advertisers to assert their relevance. UNIDAYS this morning offered me a compilation of discounts that were 'my type on paper'.

So, how to link *Love Island* to Oxford? It's a bit more simple than you might imagine. Though they are both very hard to get accepted into, one may be more so than the other. A 2018 headline claimed, 'Almost four times as many people (150,000) applied to appear on *Love Island* this year as applied to get into Oxbridge (40,000).' For sure, the pool of applicants is bigger in one sense, as grades are not a barrier to entry, but attaining the unrealistic body types wanted for the show is difficult nonetheless.

I must admit, I loved *Love Island* when I was younger. Who can forget Chris and Kem's bromance? Michael's 'childish' line? Amy's 'I was coming back here to tell you that I love you?' Even the iconic moment from the last winter series of Shaughna's 'Congrats hun' to Callum after Casa Amor is unforgettable. Or Davide's 'You're a Liar' to Ekin-su in the most recent series? The easy-viewing drama over the course of the story, and the peak crescendo of the Casa Amor recoupling is gripping viewing.

Love Island is successful because of such a spectacle. However, it is a spectacle with sinister undertones. It feeds into the tabloid-culture that loves to make us judgemental, polarised and angry with ourselves and others. *Love Island* lost its magic for me when Caroline Flack took her own life after being pursued by the tabloids, who called her an attempted killer and hounded her hundreds of times in the months leading up to her death. It was by those same papers who ran headlines describing the 'tragedy' of her death soon after, egregiously arrogant to the role they played in her death. It was a devastating tragedy marred by the quick return to airing of the then mid-way through season, and a sobbing Laura Witmore in the live final tribute. It's not the only suicide associated with the show, three have occurred to date; all have been directly attributed to the mental health impact of during and after the show.

The artificial environment stoked by the show and drama-fuelled opinions of viewers who only see an edited hour of a 24-hour day, are symptoms of a Colosseum-like arena where the public declare who receives their favour and who receives their disapproving wrath. The competition element of the show is emblematic of our society. Those who go in there do not generally look for love, but for public favour which returns brand deals and big money. The social media-centric nature of the show ties into society. The ethos of *Love Island* - become an influencer and live a luxury lifestyle - are seen in the depths of social media that induce insecurity, reduce believed self-worth, and encourage competition between acquaintances at a much more local level. Links can be made to neoliberal individualism and capitalism here, and though they may be unconvincing to some, it is these events that influence the subconscious to a profound extent. The focus on appearance and looking better is a recipe for trouble.

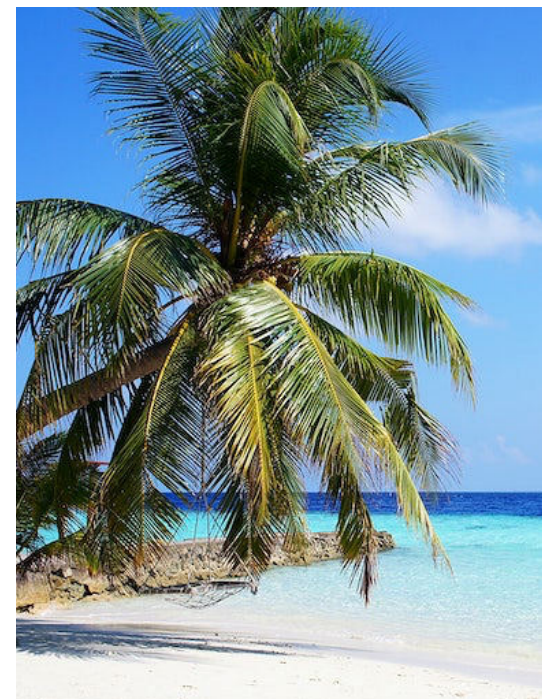
Even if you don't think *Love Island* will give you appearance insecurity, the powerful tool of prolonged exposure to judgement based on physical appearance alone is strange. *Love Is-*

land encourages a relationship built on physical attraction, not genuine connections. The effects are not normally productive. Very few couples remain together for longer than six months after leaving the show. Sure, there are a growing number of *Love Island* babies, but the percentage of couples that are successful remains low - the heartwarming story of last summer's winners Davide and Ekin-Su will remain a rarity for now.

I think my falling out of love with the show came from my realisation from progressing maturity that relationships are nothing like what *Love Island* portrays them to be. Relationships are complex, require commitment and connection, and are not as easy as waiting for someone to walk through the door and fall into your arms. It's a nice myth to believe, but it's also unrealistic. Advertising this as a brilliant way to find a committed long-term relationship is not healthy for an impressionable young teen audience. Furthermore, in a climate where Andrew Tate's ethos of a manly man is increasing sexism in the younger echelons of society, *Love Island* enforces a culture of a petite girl needing a muscly man to couple up with by making it seem desirable. The lad culture of the boys, seen in full horrific glory on Casa Amor episodes, shows their immaturity without challenging or critiquing it at all. In fact it enforced the glorified double standards that decides who wears a badge of honour for any forays, and who gets labelled a 'hoe'. Should we encourage our teenagers to talk to everyone else but the person who their issues are with? Is conflict inducing immature compromise right?

For me, applying for *Love Island* could never happen, because I'm not straight. The lack of LGBTQ+ representation was grudgingly permissible for practicality during earlier seasons, but attitudes have moved forwards, and a great way of changing the binary boy/girl gender roles on the show would be to include this representation. Sure, most gay people love *Love Island*; we are normally seen on the *Aftersun* commentator panel, and we feed off the drama, but I want to ask this, relevant to this show and wider society: Do we have to be spectators or can we participate?

Image Credit: [rawpixel/CC0 1.0 via RawPixel](https://www.rawpixel.com).



Spare review: a step on the path to a united republic?

An in-depth look at the recently released, hotly anticipated autobiography from the rebel prince.

Matthew Oulton

Met by long queues outside major retailers, Harry’s tell-all book gives audiences around the world an insight into the inner workings of the British Crown. It gives British readers a unique glimpse of how the royal sausage is made, as well as a healthy dose of personal angst and intrigue. However, by exposing the cruelty of the press, the bizarre lifestyle of the royals, and the hierarchy inherent to a monarchy, it also raises a barrage of questions pertinent to the constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom.

But does it answer any of them? *Spare* is strangely silent on the nature of the British constitution. Apart from an incongruous section where Harry reaffirms his nominal commitment to monarchy, he barely mentions the fact that he is where he is by dint of aristocracy. He writes as though the son of an American celebrity, not the British monarch.

Why does the book remain silent on the most pressing questions it raises? The answer is that this is not a book written for Brits. Like the Beatles in 1964, this book is aimed at one thing only - the American audience.

The signs that the book is written for an American audience are subtle; a slight over-explanation here and there of things that are obvious to a Brit, with little explanation to those things that are obvious to Americans. There’s also his sensitive discussion of issues of race but his glaring ignorance of colonial undertones in many of his experiences. His treatment of war is also a hint, especially in Afghanistan. Far from interrogating the rights and wrongs of conflict, Harry wholeheartedly embraces the ‘glory of war’ rhetoric that is universal in America, but more of a debate in the UK. It adds up to the book feeling slight off to a British reader.

Far from discussing the constitutional elephants in the room, Harry deliberately ignores the topic. He doesn’t differentiate between anachronisms and necessary parts of monarchy, or between the bad behaviour of individual family members and the nature of the institution. If Harry had written a book calling for the abolition of the monarchy, that would be understandable. Unfortunately, writing a book which simply points out some of the absurdities and cruelties is a weak effort.

Harry completely lacks self-awareness. He oscillates from complaints about very serious things that everyone can empathise with- losing his mother, being ejected from the military, very serious

infringements on his safety and privacy - to minor trifles such as the position of a car outside his home at Sandringham or the size of his flat when he met Meghan. In one notable passage, he complains about being denied a tiara for Meghan on his wedding day in the same breath as complaining about a lack of adequate police protection. One of these is trivial, one is not, and that Harry doesn’t differentiate between them shows an astonishing lack of self-awareness.

His account is completely one-sided. He complains, justifiably, about the intense scrutiny and lack of privacy afforded by his status, without discussing the privilege he experiences. His jet-set lifestyle and endless trips to clubs, bars, and fancy restaurants is merely a backdrop to the story, never discussed. The role of the British class in his life and position is neglected exclusively, apart from a few sidelong references to ‘class envy’ that he perceives to have been directed towards him.

I can’t help but feel he does this because he knows that an American audience will overlook it. He will come across, to American eyes, as an ordinary heir to an enormous family fortune. The American reader will not, I’d wager, appreciate that despite his complaints, his wages are paid by the British taxpayer.

Likewise, that Harry maintains Meghan did not, and indeed could not, have anticipated what being his wife would be like is absurd to a British reader. Prince Harry was one of the most famous people on earth. He is the grandson of arguably the most famous person in world history. It’s not fair that the pair of them were forced to experience what they went through, but to feign ignorance about it beforehand stretches credulity.

That Harry’s book offers only a one-track view into his life and the monarchy does not make it a waste of paper. In fact, because people always assume that to be a prince would be an unalloyed pleasure, he offers a useful counterweight to prevailing views. However, *Spare* does not offer what it could have - a clear-eyed look at that most private of institutions. It also doesn’t expose much of substance that we didn’t already know.

Of course, it’s not right to trap someone in a gilded cage. A clear and obvious conclusion of the plight of Meghan and Harry is that royals need a way to exit gracefully, a way to opt out of the monarchy if they don’t want to be involved that doesn’t involve acrimony and conflict. They also need to be able to earn money in their own right and be afforded adequate protection so that they don’t need to fund themselves through

salacious books and documentaries. Further, Harry’s treatment as a child was unfair. Royals deserve a degree of privacy as minors, in the same way as the press often offers privacy to the children of serving and former politicians. Until they are old enough to decide whether to remain part of this strange ritual, children should not be subject to the feral interrogations of the press. Harry does not suggest this, however, merely relaying his experiences in a way that is neither analytical nor self-aware.

These are fundamentally British questions. They refer to our press, our monarch, and our constitution. Harry is silent on these questions because he is writing to an American audience, and

in the process he is criticising a British system, and his British family, when he knows they cannot respond.

It is possible, therefore, to feel intensely sorry for Harry, treated as he has been, without forgiving him for this very public falling out with the nation. Harry should not have been forced to give up so much, but nor should he have been afforded the lifestyle he wanted without any of the obligations that royalty entails. Harry has made himself both

more sympathetic and less in one fell swoop. I hope, likely in vain, that this can mark a turning point with Harry’s relationship with his family, the press, the UK, and the Commonwealth. What I think, however, will not sway him, because I am British, and *Spare* proves that he has left our country behind.

“
He knows they cannot respond”

Scotland’s gender recognition bill



Oliver Hall

The move from Sunak to overturn the decision of the Scottish Parliament is being framed as a purely pragmatic one, but it’s hard to believe that there isn’t something more behind it. So far, this government has made admirable efforts to breakaway from the culture wars of Johnson and Truss but this signals something of a reverse. More than anything, the PM is almost certainly seeking an easy way to appease the ERG right-wing of the party, one that he is danger of losing.

Jakub Trybull

Sunak’s government disregards the need for reform and action when it comes to transgender rights, with another U-turn on including trans people in the long-awaited conversion therapy ban proposal. In this recent disagreement both Sturgeon and Sunak have been provocative, using this already contentious issue as a battlefield for their differences regarding the constitution and devolved powers. One thing is clear though, Westminster’s denial of both gender self-identification and sovereign self-determination.



Adam Saxon

The UK Government blocking the Scottish gender recognition bill this week highlights the distance still left to cover on rights and equality in our nation. Those who do not experience gender dysphoria should not be debating the rights of those who do. The backwards stance of the Conservative party is unsurprising, while Keir Starmer’s assertion that you cannot change your gender at 16 highlight his pathetic attempts to win back the socially conservative vote lost by Labour in 2019.

THE SOURCE - ‘HOMEWARD’

‘Home is wherever you are, leaving a trace of your presence. This world is just a mosaic of everyone’s existence.’ - ‘Long Lost Home’ by Thisuri Perera

SIMPLE PLEASURES

A half-sung prayer lingers in the house’s thatched roof,
ransoming out the sound of rattling copper spoons
to the chronicler’s faithful tune.
His books are shining bony beacons
of what we once had, the fists of the past
bursting from the ground, eager to wrest control
of good and bad.

Who knows?
We might have even floated
if we let them take away our bricks and sand
but instead we held tight to life’s simple sadness;
the prayer rots in the attic, all hopeless hot air,
but at least it insulates from the alternative.
It’s better to flush through the affirmative
than force the fists back down low.
The house is sad but silent, exquisite in its setting,
slowly being eaten by the quiet madness of the snow.

by Charlie Bowden

EDITOR’S NOTE: SIMPLE PLEASURES

In ‘Simple Pleasures’ nothing is as it seems. Bowden’s evocation of a childhood home is hypnotic, filled with sights and sounds that are arresting yet just out of reach – ‘a half-sung prayer’, a ‘faithful tune’. Every image is just about to fade away, the house’s inhabitants continually turned from us. Bowden asks the question on our mind in the second stanza – ‘Who knows?’. Who really knows what a home was, once we leave it? Sometimes the only way they can exist in our memory is in a perpetual state of decay, as the final lines hauntingly express, ‘slowly being eaten by the quiet madness of the snow.’

by Leila Moore

EDITOR’S NOTE: SEVEN TIMES AROUND THE SUN

‘Elsewhere’ is a word which strikes a newly meaningful chord here. The dizzying expanse of space is reduced – or maybe expanded? – to a feeling, a crushingly helpless longing. Any sense of the corporeal is replaced by a wistfulness that soars and floats seven times around the sun and countless other stars, never headed homeward. ‘We lose the sun to different skies / though I still look for you’: nothing stays for long, but the traces never go away.

by Max Marks

SEVEN TIMES AROUND THE SUN

I remember us running towards its falling frame
too slow for earth
who held the sun in changing skies elsewhere.

That night, when only stars remained,
I watched you trace the air to guess their names
and then you told me that their light could run
seven times around our sun
in any of the countless seconds
of all the days
we beckoned it to stay.

You said, when one of them began to die,
it travelled on in space and time
beyond our distances of days and nights
to disappear from eyes
who could not know the countless suns they’d lost
in a second’s light elsewhere.

That night I reckoned so much change
could not be true of stars,
their light seemed always to remain,

but now we lose the sun to different skies
though I still look for you.

“How passionately you long to return home as though it was long lost, yet it was always here.”
In addition to these pieces, ‘Long Lost Home’ by Thisuri Perera will be published online alongside
‘Waterlogged’ by Ruth Port.

Luxury in crisis

Financially irresponsible or a fashionable staple? Taking a look at the recent phenomenon of young people swapping their housing bills for luxury items.

Hannah Selig

In the run up to Christmas this year with sales galore and Black Friday on the horizon, The Times published an article that has stayed in my head for the past month. Published on Thursday the 15th of December and titled ‘Yes, I live with my parents – but I still buy designer handbags’, it presents the perspectives of two under-30s who choose not to move into their own housing and instead spend ‘rent money’ on luxury goods. Among the high fashion named brands are Prada and Vivienne Westwood, with some items costing thousands of pounds. The £200 Ganni cardigan seems thrifty in comparison with the £1,200 Moncler coat and £2,300 Celine bag. Gowns, cashmere, jewellery – living at home has never sounded so expensive.

Despite how it initially looks, I can’t condemn either of the writers. What on the surface appears to be fiscal irresponsibility and the prioritisation of luxury over practicality, soon develops a far more tragic undercurrent; these young adults spend their hard-earned money on designer clothing and accessories because re-

gardless of whether they purchase luxuries or live frugally, they are nevertheless unable to afford to move out of their childhood home. No amount of scrimping and saving will be able to grant them a path towards independence in the way that it did for their parents’ generation – so why not indulge? After all, the writers – whose names have been changed in the article – defend their choice to “shop sustainably, buying from brands that are pricier but guarantee that their pieces are ethically made”, and purchase “long-term sustainable, timeless pieces” instead of cheaply-made and rapidly discarded fast fashion items. Without rent or household bills to pay, it’s an attractive, even admirable option.

The article describes expensive clothing as a “perk” of living at home, justifying that “in this climate you can’t let the perks pass you by.” But is that all it is? The writers both brought up environmental responsibility so I feel obligated to widen the conversation a little and wonder whether it is a financial privilege to have so much disposable income, despite the sad situation that has allowed it, or a

sad sign of the times that symbols of success can only be purchased because actual housing security is so far out of reach. There is a much larger conversation to be had about the ethics of designer clothing and accessories in comparison to more affordable yet less durable options, but that is not the reason that this article has stayed with me into the new Hilary term. Instead, I am fascinated by how at odds the Times article appears to be with the views of the (Facebook-using) Oxford student body.

I present Exhibit A, Oxfess #19006 (published on Tuesday 13th of December 2022): “To those girls who wear £300/£400 fashion items around Oxford, read the room. The constant flow of y2k Coach bags, D&G clothes, Burberry scarves, Vivienne necklaces etc shows a lack of understanding that most of us have to work for our money especially in this economy. Oh, and don’t justify with the ‘it’s a special piece’ or the ‘I earned it from my summer job/internship’ - you could only afford it because the rest of your life is fully funded for you by mummy/daddy. Please, please, wake up to most peoples’ reality as we struggle this Christmas.” Although the comments section (at the time of writing) remains overwhelmingly hostile towards this view – with responses such as “So long as these individuals do

not mention their expensive items, I see no bad behaviour”, “DRIP IS NOW ILLEGAL”, or simply “What a stupid, stupid take.” However, it seems that the Oxfess-following student body generally seems to agree

with the original poster that it is irresponsible and insulting to flaunt designer goods in this current economic climate. Of the 72 reactions on the Facebook post, 48 are likes, 21 are laughing emojis, and the rest are shocked (3), crying (1), or angry (1). The consensus seems

clear: in this economy, overt displays of wealth are inexcusable.

Of course, the circumstances are far from identical between the writers of the Times article and those referred to in the Oxfess post. At Oxford, there is only a very slim possibility of avoiding battels. Living at home is rarely an option considering that colleges commonly insist on first-year students using campus accommodation and very few students have family in Oxford. Everyone pays tuition fees and battels. To be able to purchase high-cost luxury goods on top of that implies a high level of financial privilege. It simply isn’t fair and I’m not surprised that so many people are angered by the overt display of expendable cash during a period of such economic inequality.

However, I wonder whether this will remain the attitude as we enter the same situation as the writers of the Time article. When confronted with an impenetrable housing market, will the same students who condemned buyers of luxury goods manage to retain their principles? It’s a difficult thing to abstain from glamour when there is little else to be happy about. Maybe the inconsiderate flaunting of luxury goods will slowly start to make sense. Or maybe it was never anyone’s responsibility to hide their wealth for the sake of others’ comfort in the first place. Honestly, I’m still making my mind up about it all. What I know for certain is that, even facing graduation this year with an English degree and a recession on the horizon, I don’t think I’m ready to give up on any hope of someday finding my own housing and instead resort to splashing out on designer items. But I still find it hard to judge those who do. Although I know it’s a slightly ridiculous comparison, I can’t stop myself from reading the words “If we are forgoing our independence, we may as well look good while doing it” and picturing the Titanic’s orchestra playing on even as it sank. The future looks bleak – but that’s no reason not to make the present a little less unbearable.

Image Credit: Teksomolika via Freepik



“
...[the] student body generally seems to agree that it is irresponsible and insulting to flaunt designer goods in this current economic climate

“
It’s a difficult thing to abstain from glamour when there is little else to be happy about

Babel or the beauty of multilingualism

Reviewing the controversial book set in our very own Oxford university.

Emerald Ace-Acquah



My mum speaks Ga, Twi, Fante, Dangbe, French, Spanish and English. My dad speaks Twi, Fante, Ga, Ewe and English.

I speak English and Spanish.

My name is Emerald Ace-Acquah, and I am a walking inferiority complex. This feeling is amplified by ten in regards to the languages of my heritage – being unable to speak them feels like a connection to my identity has been severed. I often think about whether my kids will feel equally untethered and whether there’s anything I can do to prevent it.

Somehow, *Babel* captured this feeling, and highlighted it but didn’t berate me for it. *Babel* unashamedly expresses the beauty and intricacy of language, the impossibility of translation and yet the honour of its pursuit.

R.F Kuang gives a multitude of examples of how translation brings to light different insights in other languages, particularly in Chinese and I found this fascinating and enriching. But I will provide an example from Twi touched my heart and made me realise how much I had underestimated my own culture.

In Twi, the phrase ‘odo yewu’ is an endearment that people use similarly to ‘my love’ or ‘my dear’. I heard it in lots

of songs but could never quite figure out what it meant. When I asked my mum, she told me that ‘odo yewu’ means ‘love is death’. The fact that my Twi ancestors appreciated the depth and strength of love enough to acknowledge it and use it as a term of endearment is equivalent to some of Shakespeare’s best turns of phrase to me.

I never saw Twi as romantic and I never gave it the credit it deserved. Just knowing the translation of that one. But the resounding message, to me, is that there is so much more that I’m missing.

In *Babel*, multilingualism is a magical ability that gives you a portal into another world. You have to understand the language in your heart, or maybe feel it in your soul. The language has to come alive to you. *Babel* juxtaposes two Chinese boys – one who left China when he was too young for Cantonese to fully come alive, and one who lived in Cantonese before he lived in English. Throughout the book, the yearning and anguish of the former brother – who had been deprived of magic - resonated sharply with me.

Babel brought to light truths about myself that I was never fully comfortable admitting. Given that I’m a linguistics student, maybe this feeling is more severe for me than for the average person

who thinks of language as just a form of conversation. But honestly, part of the reason I even chose to do a whole degree in languages was to unravel this insecurity inside me. I thought I could appease my inferiority complex about not knowing my own languages, by learning more about all of them – it didn’t work.

Now, I don’t want to sell *Babel* short – it’s about much more than these things. It tackles colonialism and the horrors that the British empire perpetuated in China. It even discusses the wonder and delight of being in Oxford underpinned by the struggle of never really fitting in as a person of colour (and as a woman in the nineteenth century). It tackles white fragility. It tackles the tension of being a ‘model minority’ and knowing the rest of your people suffer a much different fate. It spans a multitude of genres and sophisticatedly manoeuvres between humorous, informative, action-packed and sorrowful passages.

Without giving criminal spoilers this article is my attempt to transmit to you why *Babel* had such an impression on me. I hope it worked. *Babel* is a masterpiece and I would encourage almost everyone to read it.

Read the full article at cherwell.org.

Film

Éric Rohmer: a French director’s refreshing simplicity

Appreciating the serenity of one of the New Wave directors

Beatrice Ricketts

In Arthur Penn’s 1975 neo-noir film *Night Moves*, a surly Gene Hackman remarks, “I saw a Rohmer movie once. It was like watching paint dry.”

And in a way, it is. The films of French New Wave director Éric Rohmer (née Maurice Henri Joseph Schérer, 1920-2010) are ever on the brink of boring. Having seen sixteen of these films in the space of a year, the common complaint that they are “talky” and “literary” is certainly true. Made with a low budget in a quite often dull setting, with the presence of music rare, they consist almost solely of dialogue, which can be lengthy, intellectual, and even self-indulgent. In the Rohmerian universe, well-articulated discourse is the action. But, a simplicity underpins all of this; despite all possible off-putting pretensions, these films are simply rom coms disguised in a philosophical edge.

From the *Six Moral Tales* in the 1960s, to the six *Comedies and Proverbs* in the 1980s, and the four *Tales of the Seasons* in the 1990s, Rohmer’s large catalogue of around twenty-six feature films seems all alike: middle class urban intellectuals search for purpose through discussions of love which achieve just about nothing. However, there is a comforting serenity to Rohmer’s films which stops them from quite reaching the boredom towards which they lean. Without any heavy-handed didacticism or 1960s *esprit révolutionnaire*,

they may lack some of the excitement, but also, and perhaps more importantly, they lack the noise of Godard or Truffaut.

Rohmer is one of the few directors to have been awarded an adjective to describe the particular qualities of his films; ‘Rohmerian’ denotes a film based in conversation, where the characters are intellectually and romantically hyper-aware (this adjective could be used to describe Linklater’s “*Before*” trilogy, for example.) Such qualities Rohmer himself anticipated in his own film theory. Beginning his career as one of the leading figures of the ‘Nouvelle Vague’ group writing for the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, alongside influential names like Godard, Chabrol, and Truffaut, Rohmer propagated radical theories on filmmaking. Most evident in his later work, Rohmer’s 1948 essay “For a Talking Cinema,” arguing for a style of film centred in dialogue.

This can seem intimidating. The 1969 *My Night at Maud’s*, Rohmer’s first critical success, and certainly most ‘talky’ film, involves several long dinner table scenes where the conversation revolves around topics spanning from Blaise Pascal, to mathematics, to the meaning of existence. None of these are particularly inviting. And such conversations can last for a surprisingly long time. What can become quite erotic discussions – as the title, *My Night at Maud’s*, might suggest - are never consummated, as Rohmer qualifies his films with a traditional Catholicism; despite any allusions, the ending always points to a

conservative morality.

Such themes do not, surprisingly, weigh down the films. The direct translation of *Contes Moraux* to *Moral Tales* loses in translation some cultural nuance; the French literary *moraliste* is less of a didactic ‘moralizer,’ as one might say in English, but rather an interpreter. Rohmer acts thus not as a missionary, but as a philosopher, looking at human relationships through an analytical but non-invasive lens. Beyond the literary dialogue lie simple tales of lust, destiny, and chance.

This simplicity is reflected in the visual serenity of Rohmer. His films are not stunning, nor impressive, but peacefully pleasant. Rohmer’s low budget allows for a sensitivity to light and weather which contributes to a tranquillity; it is a pared-down documentary style of filming. The Rohmerian world is completely comfortable and manageable, without violence or vulgarity. This is not artlessness, however. Françoise Etchegaray, the producer for most of Rohmer’s films, revealed that the aesthetic basis for each film has “a painter of reference.” MUBI used this remark to create a 2021 video essay series wryly entitled “Like Watching Paint Dry” (recalling Hackman’s line) to explore the direct influence of paintings on Rohmer’s colour scheme; a gradually illuminated painting is set next to scenes from the relevant film, be it Nicolas de Stael for the 1987 *My Girlfriend’s Boyfriend*, or the geometric palettes of Mondrian for the 1984 *Full Moon in Paris*.

Read the full article at cherwell.org.

Cherwell Recommends

BOOKS

The Water Dancer
by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- [Deborah Ogunnoiki](#)

The fictional story of a slave who discovers that his memories trigger a mysterious power that can help escaped slaves flee.

The Doors of Perception
by Aldous Huxley
- [Thomas Bristow](#)

An autobiographical book about Huxley’s psychedelic experience under the influence of mescaline in the 1950s.

FILM

‘20th Century Girl’
- [Deborah Ogunnoiki](#)

‘Bones and All’
- [Kobi Mohan](#)

Othello: a new era of Shakespeare

A review of Clint Dyer’s staging of *Othello* at The National Theatre

Flora Symington

As the audience enters the National’s Lyttleton Theatre for Clint Dyer’s new production of *Othello*, the stage is obscured by a flashing projection in black and white. The constantly changing images are posters from previous versions of the play, with their years of production shown in stark block letters. Although this arresting image might seem to signpost an interest in the time and place of *Othello* and its various reimaginings, from the moment the play starts it becomes clear that this production has chosen to take a step away from a preoccupation with setting, allowing the play to speak for itself – a move carried out with great success, and which future productions would do well to emulate.

Following on from a 20th century obsessed with staging Shakespeare in their own time, or else in a clearly demarcated period to which the company felt the play particularly apt, the current trend in Shakespearean reimagining seems to be a removal of all timeliness and even sense of place. The show begins with Giles Terrera’s Othello spotlit centre stage, performing a solo fight sequence, at the end of which he raises his arms to the sounds of a cheering crowd. This is the only hint we get as to the social context of the play: an ex-slave to judge by the scar marks on his back, Othello has gained freedom through success in the fighting arena and risen through

the ranks of the army to hold a position of status in a white-dominated society. In the crucial ‘temptation scene’, Othello’s fighting background is evoked again through the use of a punching bag steadied by Paul Hilton’s laconic Iago whilst Othello furiously pounds away, reminding us that his rise through physical prowess must create a constant anxiety about losing his position if he ever allows his strength to slip. Indeed, Lucie Pankhurst’s excellent movement direction throughout ensures this frantic energy is never lost, with light and sound transitions almost exclusively cued by actor’s movements making for exceptionally seamless and fast-paced scene changes.

The ensemble cast, or ‘System’ as they are credited in the programme, is also used as a powerful backdrop for the actions of the central characters. They transform Iago’s usually cartoonish villainous soliloquies into public events, making him seem more like a compere introducing his future acts to a delighted audience. At other times they fade into the background and are used to mirror Iago or Othello’s thought process, shifting position in unison on a crucial word. Therefore, when this group begins to move out of sync in the final scene, with individual actors twitching and mirroring at different times, it takes the audience a while to believe what they are seeing. The overall effect is an extremely unsettling representation of an unsound mind.

One of the greatest problems to overcome in a performance of *Othello* is making the anti-hero pleasant enough that we believe Othello can reasonably love and trust him to the extent he obviously does. Hilton’s charm and charisma made this leap, as it was all too easy as an audience member to feel we are being included in the joke being played on the gullible, earnest Othello, whilst really we too are falling under Iago’s spell. Even the moment of highest drama and tragedy, where Iago arrives at the scene of Cassio’s death (carefully orchestrated by him) and pretends to be enraged at the very prospect, was punctuated with audience laughter at the performance I saw due to Hilton’s ridiculously dramatic performance of the pretence. Despite this almost comic characterisation throughout, or indeed because of it, his final scene and slaying of Emilia is shockingly horrific, as we are sharply reminded of the truly repellant nature of this character.

Overall, this production brings a refreshingly stripped-back approach to the play, focusing on characterisation and using striking visual effects to draw focus onto the interactions between individuals and the ‘System’ of collective thought. Dyer proves that Shakespeare doesn’t need an apt historical moment to resonate with its audience, but should be allowed to function, like the work of any other playwright, on its own merits.

Read the full review at cherwell.org.

Music

The joy of Spotify’s ‘Discover Weekly’

A case for the streaming site’s most underrated feature

Thomas Bristow

For the first year of university, I had almost completely ignored Spotify’s other features. For me, it was always more of a place to collect and catalogue music, and I had never really thought it to be a great tool of discovery. Other than the infamous annual ‘Wrapped’, there was never much of a relationship with the platform, and I felt that this was something Spotify was lacking. That was until I found ‘Discover Weekly’.

I can’t exactly remember why, but I began browsing Spotify’s ‘Mix’ playlists and was disappointed to find that it was essentially just music I already knew, I couldn’t see the point of it. But when I listened to ‘Discover Weekly’ for the first time, I quickly became hooked on it. Here, every Monday, were 30 new songs by all manner of weird and obscure artists whom I’d never heard of, and short enough to listen to in one morning of uni work. I created a new playlist and began adding most of it immediately, almost overwhelmed by the amount of new content. Soon, it became very habitual to spend Monday morning listening to ‘Discover Weekly’.

Sometimes ‘Discover Weekly’ is underwhelming, and I won’t add any music from it to my library, instead using it more as background music. But other weeks it coughs up a hidden gem; artists whose music I never would have found otherwise or songs that quickly become some of the

best I have heard. Indeed, many of my favourite songs of all time have been first experienced on ‘Discover Weekly’. To me it is an invaluable resource and one in which all the hard work of finding the music is seemingly done for you. But this begs the question; how exactly does it work? How can Spotify deliver a playlist curated to your taste every single week? And is it really as it seems?

The answer to most of this is actually very straightforward and perhaps obvious: algorithms. Spotify uses the data of its users’ playlists to work out where possible gaps in your listening are. By comparing your playlists with those of thousands (if not millions) of other users who have similar taste, it can find music which should logically suit you. The platform also creates a highly specific music profile for each user, with which it can filter suggestions and thus recommend you music that you have never heard before. As to its legitimacy and fairness, it seems quite sound. While there are YouTube videos trying to explain how to get your own music on ‘Discover Weekly’, it all amounts to data for the algorithm again. For example, 100 streams from people who have repeated the song or added it to their playlist indicates ‘Listener Intent’, and so the song is more likely to be recommended to a specific group of people on their ‘Discover Weekly’. This is opposed to 1000 streams where the song is mostly skipped or the artist’s profile doesn’t receive much attention. Essentially, the



algorithm tries to distinguish between the quality of the music and what people are more likely to enjoy.

Ultimately, ‘Discover Weekly’ is a nifty feature which Spotify possesses to differ itself from competitors. By doing the hard work of actually finding the music for its customers, their loyalty is more likely, and so then is their money. But aside from this more cynical view, I believe that ‘Discover Weekly’ can serve a far greater purpose, if you only choose it do so. It is an extremely effective and simple tool to expand one’s musical horizons. As mentioned, some of the best music I’ve ever heard has come from this momentary playlist. It is constantly changing, evolving and updating itself to suit you, and whilst most of the music won’t make it onto your playlists, it’s worth it for the few songs that do. ‘Discover weekly’ gives access to a truly endless, undiscovered and changing world of music. All you have to do is listen.

Image Credit: Kenny Eliason via Unsplash.

What’s On

2ND WEEK

- ENTERTAINING MR SLOANE*
BT Studio
24th-28th Januray
- THE OXFORD IMPS*
Jericho Tavern
23rd January
- EVITA*
Oxford Playhouse
23rd-28th January

3RD WEEK

- I WILL DELETE THIS STORY*
BT Studio, 31st January-4th February
- BLACK BLOOD*
Keble O’Reilly
1st-4th February

Cherwell Recommends

ALBUMS

- A NEW PERSPECTIVE*
Donald Byrd
- MR. MORALE & THE BIG STEPPERS*
Kendrick Lamar
- ODE TO QUETZALCOATL*
Dave Bixby
- GLITTER*
Pasteboard

SONGS

- MOTHER OF EARTH*
The Gun Club
- CARDBOARD BOX*
FLO
- BERIMBAU*
Bodikhuu
- FISHERMAN*
The Congos

Send us your recommendations on Instagram @cherwelloxford!

In defence of hook-up culture

Is safeguarding your feelings always a positive thing?

Ayaat Yassin-Kassab

The hook-up scene is exciting. There’s the perpetual possibility of meeting someone new, whether you’re at a club or a pub. There’s sex with freedom from commitment. There’s the checking for texts, the late-night booty calls, the sad post-orgasm feelings. Do you get them a birthday present? Do you tell them you love them, just without strings attached...? The reality is hook-up culture is in a dismal place. Something that should be useful, formative, and fun now implies the inability to develop meaningful connections. But can sexual relationships be nurtured in the same way as emotional ones, and is there potential for an evolved hook-up culture; a reformed approach to casual yet meaningful dating?

Whether it’s a one-time thing or a friends-with-benefits scenario, a lot of the downside comes from the apparent inability to express feelings. Being physically vulnerable without being allowed to feel emotionally vulnerable is confusing. Feeling attached but unworthy of the other person’s affection, feeling jealous, feeling used, and then not communicating any of it because you’re not ‘close like that’, is inevitably restrictive. Equally, if you yourself aren’t that emotionally invested, then there is pressure to maintain decency: texting them enough, asking them about their day when you’re really more preoccupied with your own. In a hook-up scenario, you’re either too devoted or not devoted enough.

There is a gender disparity, too. Hook-

up culture does not benefit women in the same way that it does men. On a physical level, women typically find it harder to orgasm, so if hooking-up is all about sex, they glean less pleasure. On a societal level, there is an emphasis on female virginity and ‘purity’ that makes the social stakes a lot higher. While men can boast a high body count, women are seldom allowed that same luxury. There emerges a vicious cycle whereby, however subconsciously, women who are attracted to men are aware of the fact that they are given value according to their level

of attractiveness, and work to meet these standards. It makes sense – we all want to be attractive to the people we are attracted to – but in a world that oversexualises women while simultaneously subjecting them to sexual stigma, they have to be cautious. Many women then feel like they must either settle for hook-up

culture in order to enjoy sex, or be in a committed and exclusive relationship. Now, that’s a big jump.

That’s not to say that men always enjoy and always benefit from casual sex : they don’t. They too are victims of mistreatment, oversexualisation, and feelings of emptiness or unfulfillment. It’s a sex culture that degrades and dismays, and it needs to change for the benefit of all those that participate in it.

However, it’s not too late. We speak about hook-ups as though they’re discardable by definition, we are wary of ‘catching feelings’ or being ‘in too deep’, but it seems we need to embrace our passion in order to revive the art of having casual sex. The potential for complex emotions

should encourage us to explore them, not stray from them. This raises the question: can we nurture sexual relationships while still maintaining a sense of freedom?

For starters, we need to take casualness down from the pedestal. You don’t have to be in an officially binding relationship in order to search for meaning in sex. To fully participate in a purposeful reimagining of hook-up culture, you need to be aware of your boundaries, willing to meet people you may not necessarily like, and able to healthily end things. Not being in a relationship doesn’t excuse being an indecent person.

In the case that attachments form, we need to be more mindful that such an attachment has the potential to improve the sexual relationship, and not be so quick to either end it out of fear, or get to work wife-ing them up. Confidence and security are necessities. You cannot rely on your hook-up for validation and also maintain a sense of stability as the terms of your relationship fluctuate and adapt. In order for hook-up culture to become meaningful and interesting, it must become messier. As the potential for worthwhile connections increases, so does the potential for hurt and rejection. And of course heartbreak is a natural part of life, but you shouldn’t invite it into your life unless you know it will not knock your sense of self-esteem.

So, this reformed hook-up culture relies on maturity, willingness to explore different types of relationships, and ability to shape romantic connections that don’t necessarily conform to a convention. Openness to multiple connections at one time is also very welcomed. The emotional intellect to speak about and experience a range of emotions will change everything. But a crucial component of this new age of sex is a sexual partner that’s equally as

mature as you. You cannot do all of the work and will have to find someone who is like minded and who understands your intentions.

Whether it’s the before or the after, hook-up culture is not for everyone, and doing it well is difficult to achieve, but it’s certainly possible. The empty cycle of one-night-stand to one-night-stand is not fulfilling; it leads to bad feeling and bad sex. So, why continue? It’s time to raise our standards and maintain them.



Aries 21 March - 19 April

Go out! Resting doesn’t have to be chilled for you, Aries. Make sure you charge up that social battery by having fun and going wild.

Capricorn 22 Dec. - 19 Jan.

Team sports. Indulge your inner ten-year-old kid and run around on a field. One goal/basket/point and the world will be yours.

Aquarius 20 Jan. - 18 Feb.

Nerd out. Ignore your degree for an afternoon and deep dive into some obscure corner of the internet. It’ll remind you of how it feels to care about research, and when you’re academic, Aquarius, you’re happy.

Pisces 19 Feb. - 20 March

Heated debates. You feel most empowered when you’re being gritty and honest, Pisces, so give yourself the chance to let your politics emerge.

Taurus 20 April - 20 May

Bash It Out. Put on 1) your favourite song 2) your favourite outfit – no task is too great when you’re in the zone, Taurus.

Leo 23 July - 22 Aug.

Connect with other Leos. You have an outward, extroverted presence and will bounce off of similar energy. Go for drinks together, or even read a book by a Leo. Trust me, you’ll feel seen.

Cancer 21 June - 22 July

Intuitive Painting. Hear me out: whale songs, oil paints, a blank canvas. Let your passion drive you.

Libra 23 Sept. - 22 Oct.

Cathartic Crying. You do have emotions, Libra, but you need to let those feelings emerge. Whatever song/book/film/topic makes you feel, open that door.

Scorpio 23 Oct. - 21 Nov.

Card games. You love friendly competition and sharpening your skills, so up the stakes and play some poker. It’ll remind you that you’re a force to be reckoned with.

Sagittarius 22 Nov. - 21 Dec.

Prepare a luxurious meal. You enjoy a meticulous process and the finer things, Sagittarius. Let your taste buds tingle.

Gemini 21 May- 20 June

Meditation. 10 minutes every morning will go a long way in making sure your nervous energy doesn’t catch up with you this term, Gemini. (You know you need it).

Virgo 23 Aug. - 22 Sept.

Movie Night. You have your wild moments, but you love a cosy night in, Virgo. Gather your favourite food, favourite friends, favourite flick, and relax.

Horoscopes

How to put your best foot forward this Hilary...



CHERPSE!

JULIET

First Impressions?

Tall! And so friendly, I immediately got a good vibe from him and felt he was someone who could hold a conversation. He gives good hugs.

Did it meet your expectations?

In terms of how the date would go, yes. But I wasn't too sure what to expect from the match and felt a bit pessimistic about whether we'd get on. I was pleasantly surprised!

What was the highlight?

The conversation was consistently good, but probably talking about our hobbies. He does a lot of sports that I'm interested in, and it was so nice to be talking to someone who likes to take on as many different things in life as I do. Someone with his attitude was a breath of fresh air.

What was the most embarrassing moment?

There was never an awkward point, but he very kindly paid for me when I was intending to. I felt bad for ordering a pain au chocolat then! And they say chivalry is dead.

Describe the date in 3 words:

Enlightening, charming, fun.



*And they say
chivalry is
dead...*

ROMEO

First Impressions?

First impressions were fairly neutral, but she seems thoughtful and sparky – all positive!

Did it meet your expectations?

It met my expectations, I think, but I'm not sure what those were...

What was the highlight?

There was no particular highlight, but the conversation was great throughout!

What was the most embarrassing moment?

I can't think of one!

Describe the date in 3 words:

Calm, interesting, worthwhile.

Is there a second date on the cards?

Likely not, but who knows!

Looking for love?

Email lifestylecherwell@gmail.com or message one of our editors.

Sex & the Spires

"It's about time you got going, I've an early start."

30 seconds from the time he was inside me, he gives me the heave-ho. Just as if they were at a McDonald's drive-through, "grab and go" is quite often the established sexual philosophy of many Oxford casual daters.

Whatever happened to the cigarette after sex? Gone with chivalry are the days of knowing the full name of the person you're in bed with, I suppose. And what 20-year-old has an "early start" on a Sunday? That particular eviction tactic might need some reworking.

But I got the message and did "get going". I threw my leather jacket back on, stuffed my Victoria Secret thong into my pocket, and bolted out of the room like a cartoon character, dust trailing behind me as I scurried away, convinced that I'd be better off if I could pull a Mission Impossible and jump out of the three storey window. No such luck as my charming date decides he'll walk me out. Or rather, he'll walk with me to the nearest food van. He obviously needed the nourishment for that early start.

This is just the kind of romantic farewell you might receive while you're swimming around in Oxford's pool of casual sexers. It's all fun and games until he shoves you out faster than you can put your bra back on.

The now deleted OxShag website, set up as a casual sex site for the "overworked and undersexed", caused

media ripples last week. Its controversy aside, the premise behind it wasn't unfounded. The site's creator told The Tab that it was set up to "spice up the Oxford casual sex scene which is currently underwhelming".

I'm not advocating for another solution that involves a data breach, but I agree that the casual sex scene tends to be underwhelming here. I discussed the topic with a friend recently in the hopes of being told that I was just unlucky or searching for my suitable casual sex companions in the wrong places. Her advice? Only bang Brookes.

It's obviously a hot topic for discussion, as a forum on the ever reliable Student Room would suggest. The consensus is that it's very hard to find people who are willing to have casual sex at Oxford, but according to one respondent, "there are always opportunities for fellatio with pig heads at parties".

Casual sex is certainly not hard to come by here if you really want it, but just because it's readily available doesn't mean it's satisfactory. It tends to be messy, over-complicated, unsustainable and sometimes just not very good. You may call me a sex snob, and maybe I am. But when you've had full-fat, how can you ever enjoy semi-skimmed again?

Finding the balance between intimacy and casualness can be difficult and often these two things seem to extinguish each other. I drew a line under what I thought was the perfect casual set-up in Trinity when I was asked if I wanted

to join for breakfast in their college dining hall. A kind offer but breakfast screams intimacy. On the other hand, casual sex can make you feel used, as was the case when I was tossed out like a recycling bin. And if you're reading this and think that was you, it probably was and you should be feeling pretty crappy about yourself (but also, hi, I'm free this weekend).

Even when you do find the right person who is compatible with your casual sex expectations, college living often presents its problems. The days of tying a hair band on the door handle to signal "something's going on in here" seem to be over, the consequence of which is a flatmate barging into your room to ask "how was your night" while the 'night' is still lying on the bed, naked. Nevermind a roommate walking in, what about an undisclosed significant other storming in? Some people have not yet managed the art of silent sex and the sound of thumping or moaning may result in a not-so-subtle message on the Whatsapp group demanding that you "keep it down". All of these are lived experiences, fortunately, not all of them my own.

A friend reminded me this week that allegedly everyone will leave Oxford with either a Blue, a spouse or a first. I have 133 days left of uni (yes, I have counted) and I am still no closer to achieving any of the above. Sports and I don't make a good match and I'm still wondering why 17-year-old me chose this degree.

Red flags: Fact or Fad?

Phoebe Walls

Red flags are warning signs. They indicate that a relationship is doomed to end in tears, or that it may never even begin. Online dating epitomises the modern tendency to write people off quickly by dismissing their negative traits as 'red flags'. This arguably creates a culture that is overly judgemental, and treats people as disposable. We become cattle at an auction rather than complex individuals.

In an increasingly online dating world, it is easy to dismiss people on apps like Tinder as 'walking red flags' before even walking a foot near them. Swiping right is a split-second decision, often based shallowly on looks. Yet the 'about me' section can harbour some warning signs. A message along the lines of: "what are you looking for then?" is code for "I just want a meaningless hook-up". There are some troubling accounts of men boasting "I'm only on here until my girlfriend finds out". And a picture can tell a thousand words. Photos that look suspiciously like wedding day snaps should be considered crimson.

Dating within the dreaming spires proposes a whole host of distinct difficulties. It can be hard to tell if

someone is genuinely too busy to meet up, buried in their books, opting for the library over the pub, or if they just aren't that interested and you're soon to be ghosted. Certain degrees are also labelled 'red flags'. PPE-ists are branded 'overbearing' while physics students are emotionally unavailable. One should of course be wary of such generalisations, though universal red flags remain...

Another Oxford-esque red flag is boys who are only interested in love after dark, ideally after a night out when they're looking for a quick ego boost. These boys would never ask you to a coffee, or introduce you to their friends, but you're the first thing on their mind at 3am on a Friday. In fact, friends' opinions can speak volumes. If your closest circle not only dislikes but despises the person you've started seeing, it might be worth asking yourself why that is, although it's a tough pill to swallow.

Over the years, I've realised that mixed signals are not in fact mixed but very straightforward. If someone is remotely

interested in you romantically (although especially in Oxford), they won't always be available, but they will make a point of

meeting up or at least staying in touch. It takes 30 seconds to send a message - nobody is too busy for that.

Labelling people as 'red flags' can sometimes be an attempt at protecting yourself from heartbreak. However, the heart wants what the heart wants. Even if people think you're a strange match, it might feel like lighting one when you're together. Everyone in Oxford

will be looking for something different as far as a romantic connection is concerned, whether that's friends with benefits or an exclusive partner. Perhaps we all have our own unique red flags that we don't like to admit to, but one thing is for certain: we're a lot more complex than red and green.



“swiping
right is a
split second
decision

Dinner date? Here are Oxford’s best spots

Sharon Chau



Image credit: Anon. /CC0 1.0 via rawpixel

A perennial head-scratcher: where should I take my date out for a nice dinner? If you’re stuck between The Ivy and Quod, fear not. Whether you’d like to celebrate an anniversary with your significant other, or splash a little cash on dinner with your bestie, here are your best date night restaurants in Oxford. The price points here are on the steeper side, so these are

places to save up for a special occasion, but they are most definitely well worth your while.

Arbequina
Location: Cowley Road
Cuisine: Spanish tapas
Price: \$\$\$

Tucked away behind an unassuming façade, the Michelin Guide-recommended Arbequina boasts a concise menu of seasonal tapas and is one of the most highly-rated restaurants in Oxford. The service was impeccable - we mentioned it was our one-year anniversary and were gifted two complimentary glasses of bubbly on the spot. Remember though, to book weeks in advance!

Kazbar
Location: Cowley Road
Cuisine: Spanish/Moroccan tapas
Price: \$\$
Lavishly adorned with North African lanterns, kilims and mosaic tables, Kazbar is a tapas restaurant that is also a feast for the eyes. The tapas selection was amazing, especially the meat options, with fall-off-the-bone, melt-in-your-mouth chicken and beef. This is the place to go if you’re looking for a dimly lit, atmospheric and mysteriously romantic restaurant.

Pierre Victoire
Location: Little Clarendon Street
Cuisine: French
Price: \$\$\$\$
A warmly candle-lit French bistro, Pierre Victoire offers some of the best French food in Oxford. Their Prix Fixe menu is great value for money, especially during lunchtime, with large portion sizes and

a generous offering of escargots, steak frites, and fondue, amongst others. Splitting a bottle between two also isn’t extortionate, which is more than can be said of restaurants of similar quality.

Spiced Roots
Location: Cowley Road
Price: \$\$
A classic Carribean restaurant with a charming teal exterior on Cowley Road, Spiced Roots, as the name suggests, serves some of the most flavourful and delicious dishes we have had. In particular, their lamb chops were beautifully seasoned and crispy on the outside, perfectly pink on the inside, while their fried ripe plantain was succulently sweet and savoury. Very reasonable prices, too!

Cuttlefish
Location: St Clement’s Street
Price: \$\$\$
Filled with twinkling fairy lights and fresh, seasonal seafood, Cuttlefish is a cosy bistro offering dishes ranging from oysters to paella to burgers. Their scallops are pan-seared to perfection, juicy and crispy, and their mixed grilled seafood, including multiple fillets of fish, prawns and cuttlefish, is second to none. If you are a seafood fiend, like I am, then this is THE place for you.

A Recipe for Homemade Spinach and Ricotta

Nicole Dimitrova

This recipe— complete with homemade pasta dough— is perfect to make with friends on a rainy day. It will fill your belly and your heart!

I took a shot at trying to make my own pasta from scratch- ravioli! It’s one of my personal favorites and I found that making pasta from scratch is such a fun activity to do with friends on a day off! Here’s how to make it!

Ingredients:
300g flour (plus some on the side for dusting your board)
2 whole eggs
2 egg yolks
Olive oil
250g baby spinach
300g ricotta cheese
2 tbsp of lemon juice
3 minced cloves of garlic
Salt
Pepper
Onion powder

Optional toppings for serving
Parmesan
Your favorite pasta sauce



Image credit: Cyclonebill/CC BY S.A 2.0 via Flickr

Butter

Method:

For the pasta
Put your flour in a big bowl, making an indent in the middle- this is where your eggs will go. Add your two eggs, and additional two egg yolks and mix, moving flour from the side of the bowl into the well of eggs in the middle. Once the mixture has turned into a dough, take it out of the bowl and place it onto a floured surface. This dough then needs to be kneaded until firm- this process should take about 10 minutes. Wrap your dough in cling film and place to rest for at least half an hour. And there you go! A versatile pasta dough that can be cut, shaped and used for so many dishes! It’s super fun and quick to make too.

For the filling
The filling of these ravioli can be adjusted or even swapped for something entirely different. I went for a spinach and ricotta filling as it’s my personal favorite and I think it really highlights the taste of your freshly made pasta dough!

Heat your olive oil in a frying pan and add your garlic, frying until fragrant. Add your spinach and cook until the spinach has wilted (speed this process up by adding some water to your pan!). Add your seasonings to your taste and add your lemon juice.

Assembling your ravioli
Cut the pasta dough into easily manageable pieces and start rolling (use a pasta machine if you happen to have one). Roll the dough thin- it needs to be around 0.2cm thick. After this is done, take your spinach mixture and mix in the ricotta, seasoning this with salt and pepper

as needed. Now it’s time to assemble your pasta! On a well floured surface, place your rolled out pasta dough sheet and cut into two equal pieces. Then, begin spooning your mixture onto one of the sheet pieces, brushing the edges of the pasta sheets with water before placing your plain pasta sheet (the one without any filling) on top of your sheet with filling, pressing them together and sealing. You can now cut out your ravioli, or stamp them out with a round or square cutter.

To cook, boil a pot of water and salt it. Lower your ravioli into the water and boil for around 3 minutes. To serve, sprinkle with parmesan cheese, mix with your favorite sauce, or simply add some butter!

Buy of the week

Every week our Oli picks his supermarket pickup of the week - drop him an email at oliver.hall@magd.ox.ac.uk with your suggestions!

Oykos Coconut Yogurt
Im yet to find a more delightfully indulgent dairy alternative yogurt than Oykos’ range of coconut options. The salted caramel is extremely rich and perfect for an after dinner treat but the stracietella is my go too. A beautiful vanilla and cocunut flavour base is punctuated by dark chocolate flakes to make an ideal treat at any time of day, whether it be breakfast, lunch, or dinner. When on sale it comes ion at around £3 a tub but it’s an investment you definetly won’t regret making!

Oxford Blues have grey day against England Under-20s rugby stars

Tom Farmer was at Iffley Road to watch the men’s first team face a team of future England rugby internationals

After sacking of England rugby men’s coach Eddie Jones, the men’s rugby Blues were the first team to face an England side under the leadership of new Director of Rugby Steve Borthwick. Fresh from their tour of South Africa, as well as strong results against invitational sides like Major Stanley’s XV, how would the hosts fare against a team consisting of England’s brightest prospects?

In short, they wouldn’t fare particularly well. Despite the England side having a winger shown a yellow for a challenge in the air after just three minutes, the Blues couldn’t exploit their advantage and went down 7-0 after a grubber kick was unsuccessfully dealt with. A few minutes later, a scuffed clearance from Oxford fly-half Harry Bridgewater was punished with maximum efficiency by the English

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Looking at the former England Under-20 internationals, from World Player of the Year Maro Itoje to current captain Owen Farrell, it is no mean feat to get a result against the youth side.

youngsters, taking the score to 14-0. As the first half drew on, the England Under-20s dominated set pieces and were remarkably solid in defence, limiting the Uni side’s attacking threat considerably.

The second half began with utter dominance from the England Under-20s, but was met with solid Blues resistance. Big hits from prop Michael Fankah, as well as the discipline led by captain and Harlequins pro Tom Osborne, saw the Blues grow into the game slightly. However, after 18 minutes, the first points of the half were scored when the English youth side were rewarded for their dominance—realistically ending Oxford’s chance of getting a result. England added a further two tries, ending the game with a fantastic example of expansive attacking rugby.

In some ways, a 33-0 defeat to the England

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If there was any doubt that students were becoming apathetic towards university-wide sports teams, this would dispel that

Under-20s is to be expected. When looking at the former England Under-20 internationals, from World Player of the Year Maro Itoje to current captain Owen Farrell, it is no mean feat to get a result against the youth side. Yet, although facing a solid and well-drilled defence, the Blues will be thoroughly disappointed not to get any points on the board. The Blues’ backline too often looked flustered under the pressure from England, limiting opportunities to create attacking opportunities.

Having said that, despite the result, there were a number of positives in the day. After selling over 2,000 tickets, the East and West stands were both full, as well as a thick crowd standing pitchside. If there was any doubt that students were becoming apathetic towards university-wide sports teams, this would dispel that. With cheap beer and cheap food also on offer, popping down to Iffley Road to back the Blues was a great way to spend a Saturday afternoon. Regardless of the result.

What's on?

- OUAFC
Men’s blues v St Mary’s
Wednesday 1st February
- League One
Oxford United V Ipswich Town
Saturday 21st January
- OURC
Isis Winter League C
Sunday, 22 January (Provisional)

Fijian flair, returning villains and unpredictable fixtures: Rugby World Cup predictions

Oliver Eliot-Williams looks ahead to the upcoming Rugby world cup

Once again, the Men’s Rugby World Cup is drawing near. Predicting what will happen in 2023, however, is no simple feat. International rugby in 2022 was replete with upsets, shocks, and tightly-fought matches. It is no longer taken for granted that traditionally dominant nations will convincingly win their games against their less well-established adversaries. If 2022 is anything to go by, the 2023 Rugby World Cup will see David conquer Goliath, marginal victories and closely-fought groups. The beauty of this year’s tournament lies in its unpredictability.

In pool A, I predict that Six Nations grand-slam winners France and the renowned All Blacks will qualify, but Italy cannot be underestimated. After beating Wales in their first Six Nations victory in seven years, as well as managing a 29-28 victory over Australia in the autumn, Italy are in a position to create an archetypal underdog story. France’s form and New Zealand’s

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I tentatively predict that France will lift the trophy. They have the host advantage, they beat every tier one nation except New Zealand—who they did not play—in 2022,

stature, however, are substantial obstacles.

The competition in pool B will be primarily between South Africa, Ireland and Scotland. Scotland have not quite fixed their inability to convert promising play into points and victories, so I predict the reigning champions South Africa and the Six Nations runners up Ireland will qualify for the knockouts.

Pool C is my “pool of death”. It contains Wales and Australia, who have struggled for consistency under their current management. With the return of Eddie Jones for Australia, weeks after his sacking as England coach, this adds yet another interesting layer of narrative in this compelling World Cup. Fiji’s “champagne rugby” that shatters weak defences, and Georgia’s ability to dominate defensively and at the set-piece could plausibly help either nation overcome Wales or Australia, and push for knock-out qualification. Georgia’s 13-12 victory over Wales in 2022 highlights how close the competition between these four nations will be. Portugal are in for a torrid time.

In pool D, all eyes will be on England. After an underwhelming 2022 Steve Borthwick—

former Premiership winner as head coach of Leicester Tigers—has replaced Eddie Jones as England’s head coach. I expect England’s tournament to be imperfect; Borthwick needs more than a six nations and some warm up matches to implement his plans. But they should qualify for knockouts, presumably alongside Argentina, who had a mixed 2022, but beat England in the autumn. Pool D’s winner is anyone’s guess. Also, we must remember what South Africa, Scotland and Ireland know all too well: Japan—2019’s hosts—love a world cup upset. But for Japan to compete, they must dispose of Samoa and Chile, whose tight victory over the USA earned them their world cup place.

That the pools have no guaranteed

winners makes predicting a winner difficult. However, I tentatively predict that France will lift the trophy. They have the host advantage, they beat every tier one nation except New Zealand—who they did not play—in 2022, and have enough individual talent in Antoine Dupont alone to produce magical game-winning moments. I predict they will face the Springboks in the final, but beat them with a patient attack, well-timed kicks and flare. If proven wrong, I would not be embarrassed; I am excited for the 2023 Rugby World Cup precisely because it has no clear favourite.

Image Credit: Carrington & Co, London via wikimedia commons.



Sudoku

7					3			4
	1	3			4		2	
			1	5			6	
4	6					2		
		5				9		
		2					4	3
	9			4	1			
	2		7			5	9	
5			8					6

					8	6	1	3
			4					2
		2	5					
	7				3	1		6
		1		4		7		
3		6	7				2	
					4	2		
2					5			
9	4	3	6					

College Confines

This number must equal the number of squares in the boundary.

10					3		8
		6	2				
				4		3	
		2			6		4
		4					
5							3
			12		6		
					3		

by **Ifan Rogers**

1		2		3		4		5				
										6		
7				8								
9			10		11							12
13		14		15				16	17			
						18						
19									20	21		22
								23				
	24									25		
				26								

Across:

1. Rising up for revolutionary gender bill that “democratic” leader cut (9)
7. One of seven fish turned back (3)
8. “Dam” I sprint – showing error (8)
9. Landlord’s income concerning National Trust (4)
11. Need riot in order to set right (8)
13. Poke around company name (5)
16. Set back about identity in current events? (5)
19. Scam Sara lawlessly for cosmetics (8)
20. Canned meat ends up in junk? (4)
24. Purchase after the job training session (8)
25. Light showed the way (3)
26. Spider natural at acrobatics (9)

Down:

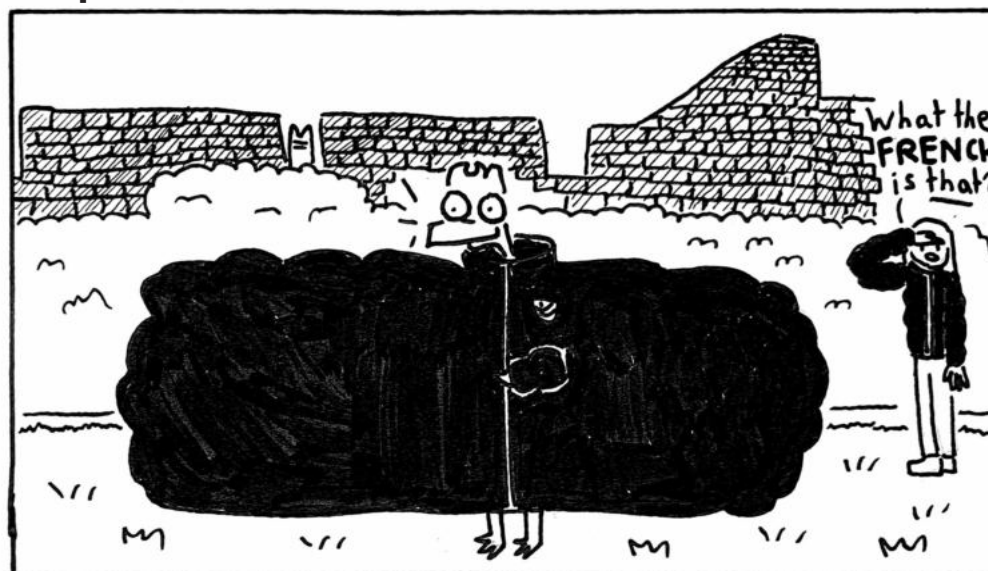
1. Sonar reflected artillery around initial danger (5)
2. Graduate scam giving pig meat (5)
3. 50 current units for electrical appliance (4)
4. Enclose computer key in newspaper (6)
5. Man concealing weapon in piece of clothing (7)
6. Cadet in unofficial counter as part of USA (6)
10. Duo with initial thousand-word objective (3)
12. Record holders? (3)
13. Improvise in a sticky situation? (3)
14. Flowers of interest to astronomers (6)
15. Covering vacant and French (7)
17. Short computer key goes after drive? (3)
18. Cleaner and fastener (6)
21. Rice dish – first plate I liked at university (5)
22. Mum covering most edits for the press (5)
23. Bias goes around? (4)

View last week's answers on the *Cherwell* website...

Kevin and Timmy get puffed up



¹Old College is one of Oxford's 39 constituent colleges



by Sean Hartnett

