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Interview with Federico Enciso on page 8:



In conversation with Paraguay's first openly gay politician

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OXFORD'S TOP CHOIRS LAG BEHIND NATIONAL GENDER TRENDS

Charlotte Dawson reports.

Strolling around your college quad certain evenings of the week, you're likely to catch a glimpse of a sea of waist-high gowns and mortarboards clustered outside. Almost every day, dressed in white cassocks, a select few boys break the silence of college chapels as they lead services in both song and in prayer.

At the age of seven or eight, young boys can apply to sing in Oxford's choral foundations, the University's three busiest and most prestigious choirs: Christ Church Cathedral Choir, Magdalen College Choir, and New College Choir. A choir and school – to educate the choristers – were part of the original founding statutes of these colleges. If successful, until their voices break, they become choristers, in which case they get extensive music training as well as generous bursaries to help cover school fees and the cost of their music lessons. Usually, two-thirds of school tuition fees are paid for.

Christ Church Cathedral Choir, Magdalen College Choir, and New College Choir are Oxford's three choral foundations – so called because a choir and a school were part of their original founding statutes – that today offer choristerships for young boys. At the age of seven or eight, young boys at the associated schools can apply to the choristerships extensive music training and generous bursaries – typically two-thirds of school tuition fees – under the prestigious choristerships.

The 16 boys in each choir typically sing four to six days a week, up to three times a day in the week's most popular services – Evensong, Sunday services, and Communion. Most also learn two instruments and



singing in the choirs' official recordings, broadcasts, concerts, and tours.

Oxford choral foundations' choristerships are some of the most prestigious in the country. They are also the only British choirs outside of London that don't include girl choristers.

Historic and modern background

The tradition of boys and men singing in parish choirs existed in Oxford as early as the 14th century, long before it became popular in the wider Anglican church in the early 19th century (fueled in part by the Oxford Movement, which introduced Catholic liturgical practice in Anglican churches). The

tradition "played a part in making UK choral music the envy of the world," Mark Williams, Informator Choristarum (music director) of Magdalen College Choir, told *Cherwell*.

One argument in favour of boy choirs is that only boys can have the desired pure treble voice – that the discrimination is not based on gender, but rather on sound. Yet most music critics say the differences are barely noticeable and that if young male voices sound unique it is simply because they have benefitted from more intensive training.

More strikingly, the vast majority of adult female sopranos can emulate boy trebles. If the issue

were only about sound, it would be preferable to employ adults, who are more experienced and competent, than eight-year-old boys.

Cathedrals across the country struggling with the cost of educating their choristers have increasingly replaced them with adult sopranos. "Education is an expensive business," Williams observed, but Oxford choral foundations "hold fast to the value of educating young singers."

Tradition, today

Tradition is one reason why foundation choristers have kept all-male choristerships.

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Biology dept. equality displays repeatedly defaced

Selina Chen reports.

The Biology department's EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) noticeboard and flags have been repeatedly defaced, according to emails sent by the department heads. An incident in early March targeting the Progress and Pride flags in the Zoology Research and Administration Building was followed by further instances in mid-April.

The initial email stated that the department was trying to identify the perpetrators, to whom the department promised disciplinary action. The second email described this behaviour as "frustrating and upsetting" and outlined a two-pronged plan in response.

Firstly, the department said that it will offer those responsible a confidential meeting "to try and understand their motives and to offer support."

Since "it may be possible that those responsible do not realise how hurtful and harmful their behaviour is"

However, if those responsible did not volunteer themselves for a confidential mediation, the department warned that an investigation to identify them would be underway.

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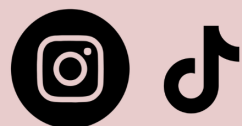


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NEWS SHORTS



Copies of Franz Kafka's works fill students' pidges to mark 100-year anniversary

To mark the 100-year anniversary of Franz Kafka's death, the University is printing a free special edition copy of *The Metamorphosis*. Each undergraduate student will receive a copy given to them by their college. Other events to mark the author's death include a public installation and a collective public reading in the Sheldonian Theatre. Users on *Oxfess* were overwhelmed by the copious number of copies, with one joking: "I've received four in my pidge...WHY?"

Campaigner 'Mr Pothole' justifies the rise in Council spending on pothole-related compensation

Oxford County Council's spending on pothole related claims has almost tripled in the past year, records show. Mark Morrell, also known as campaigner 'Mr Pothole' said many roads need "proper, full-depth resurfacing." The Council blamed this on "perfect pothole-forming weather conditions" and the Department for Transport said the council would receive an extra £82.3 million for maintenance over the next decade.

Magdalen receives backlash for replacing a Saint George's Day formal with an Eid formal

According to critics, Magdalen College has 'cancelled' a traditional St George's Day formal in favour of a banquet marking Eid for a second year. Although records show the St George's Day dinner had taken place annually in the years preceding the pandemic, the College denied that the dinner was an annual event.

New humanities faculty building to open in 2025

Poppy Littler-Jennings reports.

A new humanities facility, located in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter along Woodstock Road, is to join the faculty buildings of Oxford University. The Schwarzman Centre is set to open in 2025 and it will house the institute for Ethics in AI and the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre.

This new facility's move to the University has been made possible by a £185 million donation by the Centre's eponymous benefactor, Stephen A. Schwarzman, co-founder of the Blackstone Group, as well as short-time chairman of President Donald Trump's Strategic and Policy Forum.

The Centre will consist of a 500-seat concert hall, a 250-seat theatre, a 100-seat 'black box' laboratory for experimental performance, a café and a new library. It promises to "encourage experiential learning and bold experimentation through cross-disciplinary and collaborative study."

In order to comply with the University's aim to halve carbon emissions by 2030, the building's construction will adhere to Passivhaus principles, including the use of solar power generation on the roof and high levels of insulation to reduce the heat needed in the building.

Professor Daniel Grimley, head of the humanities division at Oxford, told *Cherwell*: "It will be a place to share knowledge and ideas, attend

events of a varied nature, and ultimately to find innovative answers to the fundamental question of what it means to be human in an increasingly complex world."

As well as housing seven humanities faculties, this facility will now host the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre. It will be moving to the University from its previous host, the British Institute of International and Comparative Law, after having been awarded extension funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The centre was created in 2019 to "enhance public understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of laws and policies designed to address it."

Professor Grimley told *Cherwell*: "Working in this innovative manner has helped the centre to influence decision-making at a regional, national, and global level." The recent example he cited was its work in support of the Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, chaired by Theresa May, "for which researchers gave evidence at Parliamentary groups, and showed how human and evidence-led research can improve the world in tangible ways."

The Schwarzman Centre will also be home to Oxford's new institute for Ethics in AI. Sir Tim Berners-Lee, founder of the World Wide Web, has remarked: "If AI is to benefit human-

ity, we must understand its moral and ethical implications. Oxford with its rich history in humanities and philosophy is ideally placed to do this."

Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey has highlighted the promise that the Centre holds to "benefit

teaching and research in the humanities" and "to be a place which makes a genuine contribution to the local community in Oxford as well as the national and global cultural sector."

Image Credit: Oliver Sandall.



Linacre College names boat after river campaign group

Emily Henson reports.

Linacre College women's first team has named their new boat after anti-pollution campaign group. The unveiling of River Action took place on 20 April at Linacre College Boat House.

The College named the boat to praise the campaign group's efforts in "drawing attention to water pollution on the River Thames, believed to be caused by Thames Water." River Action, the namesake group, aims to promote awareness of river pollution and pressure companies into changing their

practices to improve water quality.

River Action recently tested the River Thames before the Oxford versus Cambridge Boat Race, finding E.coli "up to 10 times higher than what the Environment Agency considers acceptable for designated bathing waters graded poor."

Linacre College Boat Club President, Sydney Rose, said: "Linacre Boat Club is proud to support the vision of River Action UK to preserve the health of this cherished historic waterway and the people who gather around it."

A University rower recently blamed the loss in the Boat Race

on a significant portion of the team being ill with E.coli. The crews were advised against entering the water, and told to cover open wounds and wear footwear getting in and out of the boat.

River Action CEO, James Wallace, has said River Action is honored, commenting: "Rowers spend so much of their time on rivers, and they know better than most, because many of them are getting sick, the awful state of our waterways."

"Together with the rowing community, including all the rowers at Linacre College, we are standing up for river health, placing

the polluters on notice that we will hold you accountable."

Linacre College principal Dr Nick Leimu-Brown has said: "We are horrified that its polluted waters are now such a risk to wildlife and public health." Pollution in Oxford has been of increasing concern in recent years and Port Meadow has been classified as having "poor" water quality for two years in a row.

Thames Water has recently published plans to upgrade over 250 of its sites, which would "improve performance and reduce the number of overflows during heavy rainfall."

Image Credit: Simon Ho.



Delayed New College accommodation which forced students into hotels officially opens

Emily Henson reports.

New College's Gradel Quad has officially opened after month-long delays. The Quad, opened by Oxford's Vice-Chancellor, Irene Tracey, was built to provide college accommodation for the majority of third-year students. However, construction delays left students living in a hotel for Michaelmas term. The hotel, four miles from the City Centre, left students with long daily commutes, and an incident involving an escort was reported by a student.

Speaking to *Cherwell*, a New College student said: "Living in Gradel Quad has been a great experience so far. Having recently injured myself it's been amazing to have disabled-friendly accommodation so close to college."

The opening was attended by the Lord Mayor, Lubna Arshad, and key donor, Chris Gradel. It marks New College becoming the latest in a string of colleges to assure accommodation for nearly all its undergraduates. New College Warden, Miles Young, told *Cherwell*: "We are immensely grateful to Chris Gradel as the foundation

donor of this project. It allows us to house 94 third-year students in college, releasing pressure on the Oxford housing market."

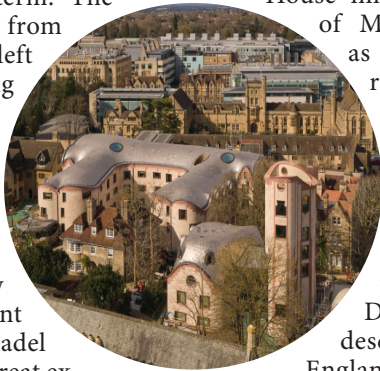
Although the majority of residents moved in at the beginning of Hilary term, the opening was delayed to allow for the completion of New Warham House. Parts of the development were opposed by Mansfield College, who argued that the tower on New Warham House impedes the privacy of Mansfield students, as it overlooks their residential quad.

The accommodation includes student flats with kitchens and accessible rooms.

The buildings were designed by David Kohn as was described by Historic England "one of the very few instances where contemporary design can be considered genuinely outstanding."

Young has said: "We are thrilled that, as novel and as original as they are, these buildings already feel like an intrinsic part of student life at New College. Even though there's still a little more work to do, they've already shown their usefulness."

Image Credit: Will Pryce via New College.



Academics criticise Oxford's loss of political diversity

Éilis Mathur reports.

The Head of the Equality and Diversity Unit (EDU) at Oxford University has been criticised by academics for his support of Belgian police's attempts to close down a conservative conference. Scott's social media post celebrating the attempted shutting down of the National Conservatism Conference has provoked comments from Oxford professors and tutors and the University itself.

On since deleted post on X, Vernal Scott said: "I applaud the mayor and police of Brussels for their decision to close down this conference." Scott has been Head of the EDU since October 2023, having previously led Diversity and Inclusion at Essex Police.

The National Conservative Conference, which was attended by Nigel Farage and Suella Braveman, was shut down by local authorities "to guarantee public safety". The local mayor, Emir Kir, feared the conference could "be homophobic, offend minorities or incite public disorder." This was later reversed by the local court and de-

clared by the Belgian Prime Minister, Alexander De Croo, to be "unconstitutional".

Academics and tutors at the University of Oxford expressed their upset at Vernal Scott's support of the attempted shutting down. Professor Lawrence Goldman, a history lecturer at St Peter's College, said: "Vernal Scott's comment sums up the problem in our universities." He noted that universities have allowed "intellectual and political diversity to wither away."

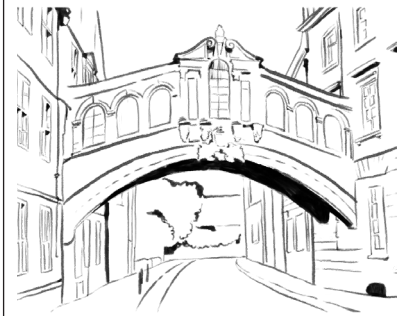
Sir Noel Malcolm, a research fellow at All Souls College, said: "It's very troubling to think that someone appointed to promote 'diversity' has such a narrow concept of what diversity is." He also expressed concern that "students will never learn the basic habits of respectful argument...if they are encouraged to think that the best way to deal with such people is just to silence them."

The University of Oxford released a statement that Scott's comments "do not represent the views of the university."

Image Credit: James Morrell.



CROSS CAMPUS



Cambridge investigation finds that private schools benefited from 'widening participation' measures

An investigation carried out by *Varsity*, a Cambridge University student newspaper, found that over the last three years, 300 private schools were flagged for low participation with Oxbridge. Privately-educated students make up nearly a fifth of applicants despite only 5% of UK students attending private schools. Among these schools which benefited was Gordonstoun School, which was attended by King Charles III.

Harvard Women's basketball games reaches peak popularity

There have been crowds of over 1,000 at Harvard Women's basketball home games – a record high. This is an increase of around 300 since the previous year and puts the average number of attendees only 100 people less than that of the Harvard's men's team. This basketball season also saw the viewership for the women's championship game surpassing the men's championship.

University of Toronto launches plans to fight food insecurity

Recent investigations have found that several graduate students at the University of Toronto are experiencing food insecurity. Around 60 people, the majority of whom are graduate students, use the University of Toronto's Student Union food bank every week. The problem has been attributed to low grants and funding for graduate students. The University of Toronto's funding packages have not increased since 2003.

Cornmarket Street and Queen Street to undergo 'extensive repair works'

Ellie Yau reports.

Oxford's Cornmarket Street and Queen Street are scheduled to undergo "extensive repair works". Andrew Gant, head of

transport management, announced at Oxfordshire County Council's full meeting on Tuesday 16 April that the repairs are expected to take place over the summer.

Oxfordshire County Council told *Cherwell*: "Extensive repair works

are planned for both Cornmarket Street and Queen Street in this financial year." The plans involve the pavements of these streets being replaced and refurbished, which will start on Queen Street, before extending to Cornmarket Street. However, the initiation of the project is also dependent upon the "delivery of specialist materials from abroad", and as such there is no confirmed start date yet. Overall, the repairs will take between 9 to 12 weeks, subject to external factors and conditions, such as weather.

The two streets in the historic city centre were described as being "in a shameful state" in the meeting by Susanna Pressel, Councillor for Jericho and Osney. Pressel pointed out in her question to Gant that these streets were "possibly the most prominent and heavily used streets in the county, at least by pedestrians", with Gant admitting they were "a bit of a mess" in his response. Following his reassurance that plans to repair the streets were underway, Pressel expressed support, stating she was "very glad to hear"

of the plans.

The announcement follows a series of other maintenance-related works in the city and wider county. Oxford Road, the main road from Banbury to Oxford, shut for two weeks at the beginning of April to undergo sewer repairs. In the rest of Oxfordshire, pothole-related compensation paid out by the council has nearly tripled to over £230,000, with the authorities blaming "perfect pothole-forming conditions". The Oxfordshire County Council told *Cherwell* that: "The budget estimate [for work on Cornmarket Street and Queens Street] is approximately £600,000."

Gant has also revealed previously that Woodstock Road will be resurfaced in August, pointing out that the repairs would take place "overnight and during the school holidays to reduce [the] impact." This work would therefore take place back-to-back with the repair works on Queen and Cornmarket Street.

Image Credit: wuppertaler / CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



Biology department urged to stand against badger culling

Ellie Yau reports.

The Department of Biology at the University of Oxford is facing calls for action against badger culling in Oxfordshire in a petition presented to the department on April 17. *Cherwell* can confirm the receipt of the petition by the Department of Biology. The Oxfordshire Badger Group has accrued over 16,000 signatures on change.org. It calls attention to the “misuse” of research from the Department of Biology by the government to justify the badger cull, and urges scientists to “[deploy] their

scientific authority” to help end it.

Despite badgers being a legally protected wild animal in the UK, the cull is mandated by the Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) as a mitigation tactic against bovine tuberculosis (bTB). Current DEFRA policy holds that culling is an effective means to reduce the transmission of bTB from badgers to cattle.

Parliament responded to a previous petition against culling in 2016 with over 108,000 signatures by arguing that there was a “broad scientific consensus” on the role of badgers in the spread of bTB, and that they

were determined to “use all available measures necessary to eradicate the disease as quickly as possible.”

According to DEFRA statistics, over 210,000 badgers have been culled nationwide as of 2024, although badger protection groups estimate a figure between 230,000 to 250,000. Recently, the controversial introduction of “epidemiological culling” has been proposed, which could reduce the badger populations to almost zero in high-risk bTB areas according to the Oxfordshire Badger Group.

The petition was presented with an open letter to the Department of Biology, following the opening of a public consultation by DEFRA on badger control policies. It points out how the research from the University demonstrated that culling badgers would “not help control bovine TB... yet the government simply overturned your conclusions to justify introducing badger culling. Many of you vocally opposed this in 2012 and 2015 but you were ignored. Now 250,000 mostly healthy badgers are dead.”

Oxfordshire Badger Group views the region as “a heartland for badgers over the centuries”. Previously, the group has also taken to the streets, holding protests outside the Biology

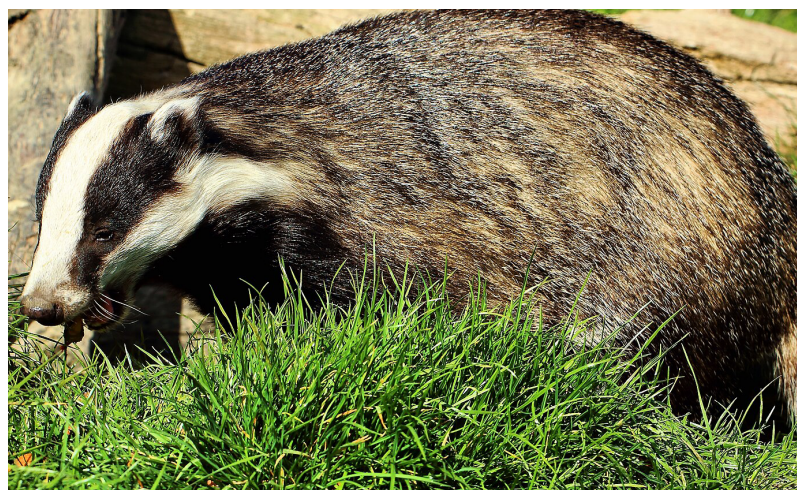
Department and some colleges, such as Merton.

Eileen Anderson, trustee of the Oxfordshire Badger Group, told *Cherwell*: “We think Oxford scientists should give DEFRA the benefit of their expert opinion. Their silence means that the scientific debate is highly polarised. That allows politicians to cherry pick evidence to support killing badgers. That’s not good for science, for badgers or for cattle farmers.”

Cherwell received the following response from the Biology Department via the University News Office: “As a department committed to scientific inquiry, we prioritise academic freedom of speech and support the right of individuals to engage in constructive discourse around causes they believe in, including relevant petitions.”

The DEFRA consultation was initially set to close on April 22, but the closing date has since been extended to May 13. Oxfordshire Badger Group told *Cherwell* that the extension was “in response to legal pressure applied by our friends at the Badger Trust and Wild Justice, challenging the lack of information and problems with interpretation of the consultation”

Image Credit: Airwolfhound / CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons



Biology department equality displays repeatedly defaced

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Defacing the EDI noticeboards is unacceptable because it is a form of harassment, according to the email. It further stated: “The university has wide-ranging powers to act against those who are found guilty of it, and we will follow University policy and procedures. In extreme cases, the University can decide to discontinue



students from their course of study or terminate the employment of staff, with lesser punishments including removing responsibilities and formal warnings.”

Cherwell has contacted the Biology Department and the University of Oxford for comment. The University did not respond to *Cherwell's* questions but states that it is “actively investigating” the incidents.

Image Credit: James Morrell

EDI report reveals only one in three Oxford academics are women

Roy Shinar Cohen reports.

The new University equality and diversity report shows women make up only one in three Oxford academics. The workforce is significantly more diverse in the younger age groups, with growth in both ethnic and gender diversity being notably slower amongst older employees.

The University of Oxford has published its annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) report for 2022-2023. The reports, prepared by the University’s Equality and Diversity Unit (EDU), have been published since 2016, and are rooted in the transparency requirements of the 2010 Equality Act. Data of this sort was first released ten years ago.

Among its findings, it shows

that the proportion of women diminishes as the ranking of academic positions increases. Regarding professors, in 2023, 28% were women, but among less senior positions their share was higher (over a third of

“...it shows that the proportion of women diminishes as the ranking of academic positions increases.”

Associate Professors). Ten years ago, the share of women across the University’s staff was 49%, however, only one in four of the academic staff were women.

Similar trends follow in ethnic diversity. Change among the University’s lower-level and younger staff is happening faster than at higher levels. Between 2014 and 2023 there has been an increase of only 3% and 4% in the share of black and minority ethnicity (BME) professors and academics respectively. Yet, among researchers, there has been an

increase of 10%. It should be noted that, according to the 2023 EDI report, researchers are younger than academics: nearly 40% of researchers are under the age of 40, compared to 21% of academics.

Oxford University has far more diversity amongst its younger employees. For employees under 30, women made up at least half of the workforce in each department,

at some points representing up to two thirds. Yet, when it comes to older age groups, gender inequality grows substantially. Female academics are half of the under-30 group, approximately 40% of academics aged 30-49, approximately 30% of academics aged 50-64, and only 20% of those aged 65 or more.

Image Credit: Daniel Stick

Analysis: ‘A step in the right direction; much more to be done’

Alfie Roberts comments.

It is good to see that the University is focusing not only on the undergraduate side but also among staff. The growth in the proportion of women in academic positions of 8% is a welcome sign of progress. The similar growth of BME researchers, an increase of 10%, is another sign that change is taking place.

This is necessary at Oxford – with its 900-year history of student populations predominantly including privileged men. Furthermore, while the gap between researchers and professors is concerning, this should shrink over time as these new staff members gain experience and move up the academic ladder.

It is vitally important that an institution such as Oxford sets an example for other institutions on how the policy goals of diversity and inclusion can be promoted. As one of the world’s leading universities, it has a real power to set a positive precedent.

Diversity and inclusion benefits any institution in increasing the sense among minority groups that they are welcome in academic spaces, but they also provide the space for creativity and innovation to come from traditionally neglected voices.

Nonetheless, there is much more to be done to make Oxford a place where all those who attend or work for the University can feel included. The data, highlighting a 5% discrepancy between the success rate for general applicants, at 17%, and the success rate for

black applicants, at 12%, is highly alarming.

Alongside this, the comparatively low increase in BME professors and academics in the last nine years, suggests that Oxford needs to further develop their strategies for incorporating diverse groups within their institutions.

The ultimate goal should be that, when BME students and academics think to apply to Oxford, they’re able to feel encouraged. This report highlights how Oxford as an institution has much more to do to make sure this happens.



Oxford's top choirs lag behind in national gender trends

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Boys have sung for New College Chapel since the College's foundation in 1379, as originally provisioned by the founder of the College, William of Wykeham. Magdalen College Choir have worked with boy choristers since the foundation of the College in 1480, and in Christ Church Cathedral Choir since Henry VIII founded the College in 1546.

Salisbury Cathedral became the first-ever cathedral to introduce girl choristers in 1991. Since then, most across the country have followed. In 2022, St Paul's Cathedral in London announced the establishment of a choir of girl choristers who will share the singing of services with the choir of boy choristers. In 2023 Westminster Abbey established a choir of girl choristers to sing some services, separately to the boys choir.

Williams told Cherwell: "... all three of Oxford's choir schools are boys' schools. It is, therefore, not possible to offer girls a singing experience that would have parity with that of the boys, as girls would not be able to attend the choir schools that educate the children in those three choirs."

“Young girls should have the opportunity to be a chorister...all children should have this chance.”

Current Research

A research paper on Oxford's choral system also found that "construction costs and difficulties in putting up girl's toilets and facilities" have been cited to justify their reluctance to accept girls to choirs.

Another argument for protecting boy choristers is that these positions have become less and less popular amongst boys, and so if girls were allowed to sing in them fewer boys would join choirs. In 2019, *The Times* reported that the number of girl choristers was higher than the number of boy choristers in the UK for the first time.

Mark Williams agrees that people must be careful not to discourage young boys from singing. "Boys [need] a safe space in which to sing and to be proud of singing at a high level, in a world where dressing up in robes and singing in church doesn't align with preconceived stereotypes of what boys should do."

Elisabeth Stenlake, a first-year lawyer, is one of the two female singers in Magdalen College Choir this year. She joined Magdalen after singing as a chorister in

Durham where there was both a girls choir and a boys choir. She told *Cherwell*: "Young girls should have the opportunity to be a chorister [just like the] boys do... but it should be done in a way that is an addition rather than replacing the boys with girls, as all children should have this chance."

Two years ago, St John's College Cambridge admitted its first girl choristers to sing alongside the boy choristers in a mixed soprano line. St John's College School Cambridge is one of many choir schools that provide education for both boys and girls. Last month St John's faced criticism after ending funding for a separate mixed voice choir, the St John's Voices, in a move called "fundamentally regressive" by the former archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams.

In Oxford, Christ Church's Frideswide Voices, created in 2014, and the Choir of Merton College, both have more than 20 girls aged seven to 14 singing around twice a week for them. But the programmes are not as intensive as those at the choral foundations.

Obstacles for older singers

The gender imbalance in top choirs permeates past youth. The three choral foundations choirs were all-male until 2016-2017 and today there are between one and three women in each of them. Some other college choirs have only a few female singers.

One reason for this is that some men – countertenors – sing the same line as the altos, who are typically women. Traditionally the female voice was associated with the soprano role, and male countertenors were chosen over female altos, irrespective of musical skill and voice quality. The Choir of St Paul's Cathedral, for example, which has existed for over a thousand years, appointed its first female alto in 2017.

Women in Oxford choral foundations told Cherwell their experiences have been positive. Stenlake said: "There have been few female altos in this choir before me, but I have found, especially as there is one other [woman], that it has been a very welcoming and supportive environment. It's a very fun and social choir where I've made so many friends. [I] never feel as if my gender impacts my role within the choir."

Magdalen College Choir is also unique among Oxford Choral Foundations thanks to its Consort of Voices, as it is the only one which gives the opportunity to adult sopranos to sing with the choir. It is made up of clerks from the College Choir and from sopranos from all over the University, and it sings evensong every Saturdays during term time. They occasionally also sing extra services during school half-term.

There are also active mixed choirs around the University which advocate for gender inclusivity. Many college chapel choirs, including all of those that are non-auditioning, are mixed. Quintin Beer, the Director of



Music of the Choir of St Peter's College, told Cherwell: "Our choir is 50/50 gender and it's important that it remains that way... SPC is dedicated to providing equal opportunities to male, female, and non-binary singers."

Professional musicians

The gender imbalance persists in professional choir music, as well. Out of 29 Oxford choirs studied by Cherwell, 25 are conducted by men. Of the four remaining ones, two are conducted by women professionally – Christ Church

College Choir and Hertford College Choir. Trinity College Choir and Lincoln College Choir are conducted by a pair of student organ scholars, with one female and one male student in each.

A study conducted by the Church of England also shows that in 2020 in Church of England cathedrals 350 choral scholars and lay clerks – that is, professional adult singers – were men, against only 70 women. This means 80% of professional singers were male. These figures are very different to those for voluntary choirs, where 410 adult singers were men and

710 were women.

There is hope that as choristerships are becoming more accessible to girls and as choirs are starting to appoint female singers, women will start gaining more choral experience, and more will choose to pursue music at university or even professional level. We are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel, but the road will be long before we reach access to choirs to all.

Image Credit: Rob Deutscher CCBY2.0 via Wikimedia Commons. // Front page artwork by Camille Simon.

Christ Church Picture Gallery recovers stolen painting

Enrique Normand Velarde reports.

One of the three paintings stolen from Christ Church Picture Gallery during a high-profile heist in March 2020 was returned, according to a joint press conference held by the Christ Church Picture Gallery and Thames Valley Police on 19 April.

The landscape painting, *A Rocky Coast*, with *Soldiers Studying a Plan*, by the baroque Italian master Salvator Rosa is once again on display in its original place in the Gallery.

Police in Romania were contacted by a man who possessed the painting. The same man also previously sold

the other two artworks stolen from the gallery, which are currently understood to be somewhere in Europe. Romanian authorities have not arrested the contact and are treating him as a witness.

After police recovered the painting, it was temporarily safeguarded in the National Gallery of Art in Bucharest. The official handover of the artwork to the gallery's curator, Jacqueline Thalmann and Detective Chief Inspector (DCI) James Mather of Thames Valley Police took place in the Romanian capital on 26 March.

"We have harvested a large amount

of forensic material from the painting when we recovered it in Bucharest", DCI Mather said in a recent video statement.

"I'm really hopeful that the forensic opportunities combined with the ongoing investigations ... provide good opportunity and good line of inquiry in relation to the burglary and the recovery of the further two paintings."

No additional information on the exact whereabouts of the other paintings has been released.

Anthony van Dyck's "Soldier on Horseback" and Annibale Caracci's "A Boy Drinking" were two of the most valuable and significant pieces in the picture gallery's collections.

Two frames remain hanging empty in the gallery "as a symbol of hope for their return." The total estimated value of the heist was £10 million and the heist was one of the highest value art thefts in British history.

DCI Mather stated that the man in Romania who had sold on the remaining stolen artwork, did so "not realizing their significance."

Following recent developments, Thames Valley Police issued a fresh appeal for any information on the missing works.

Image Credit: Daniel Stick.



What's wrong with Oxford's music?



CHERWELL

Morien Robertson discusses the need for more music in this week's editorial comment spotlight.

Where in Oxford can you see experimental or alternative music?

Maybe I'm biased in coming from Bristol, which, in an attempt to harness its grimey post-industrial exteriors, portrays itself as 'cool' (aka, rampant gentrification combined with heavy quantities of marijuana), but has the music scene to go: everything from basement jazz improv sessions to the new 'festival of ugly music'. There's even a great newsletter that collates all the weird and wonderful listings!

In contrast, Oxford's music is fundamentally classical. (I'm ignoring all references to clubs, as whatever noise is played in Bridge is more akin to a dirge than music, compounded by the sorry state of the O2 listings, which are either cover bands or the blandest of bland indie). And don't get me wrong, the classical stuff is great: £5 tickets to amazing quality performances in the Sheldonian, and plenty more in colleges. But having seen one too many stately Elgar symphonies, it can leave something to be desired.

Perhaps the grand architecture of Oxford is less conducive to experimentation than Bristol's graffiti-filled streets, and of course it's much smaller. But Labour lost control of the City Council due to its position on Gaza for heaven's sake: it epitomises the 'tofu-eating wokerati', the demand for experimentation is surely there!

Till then, the best I can see coming up is Schoenburg in a couple weeks – and to be fair, he used to have crowds walk out on him – see you then!

Tutorials and the art of the blag

Alfie Roberts

Oxford is a unique place to study at an undergraduate level. Its centuries-long history of elitism, pomposity and academic excellence separate it from the other Russell Group universities. However, as the only member of my 'home' friendship group to have gone on to study at Oxford, I find myself trying to convince them that it is not all that different.

When my friends have come to visit, they have enjoyed the novelty of punting and the charm of Turf Tavern. Seemingly, they have always left with a sense that, while Oxford may have its quirks, the place and its people are not fully alien. They're not completely wrong – as brilliant as it is to go to Oxford, it's ultimately just another place to get a degree. When it's all over, we will still struggle to find a job and have heaps of student debt to pay like everyone else.

However, the notion that Oxford is in any sense normal is a brazen parody that can often deceive the visitor. The Oxford that I present to my friends from back home is a much more ordinary version. This is because the people here, myself included, are masters in the art of the blag.

When I, or any of my friends from Oxford, have hosted 'externally educated' companions, we will tend to pick a time that contains the least amount of work possible. Oxford won't allow you to take a friend into any of its grandiose, historic libraries, so the prospect of working with

a friend when they come up to visit is a near impossibility. Luckily, this practical issue works in our favour, presenting the illusion that at Oxford we don't just work. While this may be true – we might, from time to time, have the chance to go to the pub in the evening – this is only at the end of another seemingly endless 9 a.m. shift in the library.

Alongside pretending to do much less work than I truly do, I will also host my friends to a night at The Bullingdon with the sweet melodic rhythms of drum and bass ringing, rather than the incessant compilation of 'Love Story', 'Timber' and 'Angels' at the moribund club, Atik. I try to convince them that we don't

“The last tutor I had would vape as the session took place”

do the latter far more often.

Ultimately, I suspect that I am not the only one who commits this act of tampering with Oxford's coolness scale. I think, like me, some Oxford students are rather successful at this forgery because they have learnt how to be, somewhat, economical with the truth. The tutorial system is one of the key culprits.

Before my first tutorial at Oxford, I was shouted at for coming in too early, accidentally disturbing the tutorial before mine. This gave

me the sense these were incredibly personal, intense, even sacred spaces that must never be interrupted. But, over the last five terms I have spent at Oxford, I have had other tutorials with a much different feel. One of my tutors once popped out at the beginning to buy some Twix and Cherry Bakewells, something that effectively threw away my initial fears as a fresher. Even worse, the last tutor I had would vape as the session took place. Maybe this suggests that our meetings were so intense that he needed a hit to relax, though I lean more on the side that it may have just been a nicotine addiction.

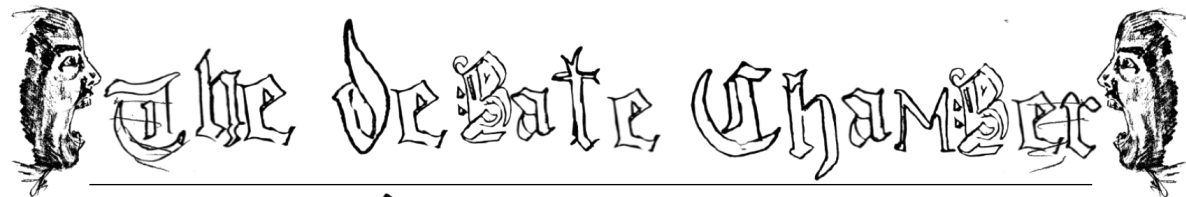
During my time at Oxford, I have had a range of tutorial experiences. But what they all have in common is that they forced me to think on my feet. The system teaches you to try to come up with something profound and interesting on the spot. This means I often find myself arguing a point with the conviction that suggests I have been reading on the topic for at least several weeks when, in reality, I came up with it five seconds prior. Tutorials teach you to give the impression that you know more than you actually do.

Tutorials do have other merits of course. You are taught not to consult your notebook of information and produce a heavily evidenced opinion with several points to prove your argument. Yet that's not the point. It's to be able to cope with the scrutiny of a world-leading expert, on a topic they have studied for many decades, and come up with something interesting. Through this process, you

are taught to make connections you have never made before. The tutor will sneakily puppeteer you to an answer, making you join the dots. I have found through this process that these freestyled ideas are my best ones, which stick in my head when it comes to an exam.

By this point, you may suspect I'm a paid employee of the Oxford tutorial system. Perhaps I can reassure you by arguing that fashioning new ideas for a future exam is not the most useful element of the tutorial system. The most extraordinary, and potentially most surprising, consequence of the unique pressure of tutorials is that it teaches you to become a masterful 'blagger'. To be able to deceive the tutor into thinking you're much better read than you truly are, which is a necessary skill in such an environment. Tutorials have taught me the art of false impressions. This has allowed me to convince my friends at universities, where they may have spent half of their first year hungover, that Oxford is a much more normal university than they might think. I have been able to assure them that we shop at Tesco, not Waitrose (this is actually true); we hardly ever go to formal dinners (less true); and that we always go to The Bullingdon to enjoy our weekly dosage of EDM (completely false).

Oxford presents many opportunities, including teaching us how to create an illusion of knowledge. By extension, this offers us the ability to create an illusion of 'coolness', an underrated skill. We have the tutorial system to thank for this.



Laurence and Ebony-Coco go head-to-head, debating whether the SU can be successfully reformed

Thanks to its collegiate structure and individual JCRs, Oxford may be different to other universities. Yet some issues, like inter-college disparities, can only be addressed at the university level. Working to engage students and pressure the University on these issues would be a step in the right direction.

Other issues, such as welfare provision or the fight against sexual harassment and racism, are simply too important to be left to the contingencies of individual college policies. Campaigns exist for these causes but without funding they cannot continue. What good is the SU's million-pound budget when it seems to go on next to nothing?

The only way, surely, is up. The SU can build on the positive work of these campaigns, revive JCR 'recon' meetings, and deliver en-

agement workshops with freshers (maybe even offer holders) right from the get-go in order to be more relevant to the student body. There's much more margin for digital engagement, like an app gathering all society events in one place: a sort of rolling-basis freshers fair. And what about an SU social space, shared garden, co-working area, or café?

Fatalism about the SU is not helping anyone. Even if not all of these reform ideas sound appealing or plausible, they're ideas all the same. The priority is that the SU does less

thinking about the SU, and more about actually making tangible improvements to the student experience. Perhaps this means less fuss around elections and the infamous personalities involved, and instead more employed 'grownups' in the room who just get on with the job.



It seems that any mention of the SU, consequential or not, provokes an instinctive disappointment from Oxford's student population. News on the Student Union can send an innocent library hermit oscillating between fits of rage and sorrow.

And it's a warranted reaction. Accusations of a relinquishing of non-partisan, democratic practice and the grave misconduct of some officers have resulted in scandals which are just a few of the accusations. These issues have undermined the body's primary function – to act as a representation of us, the students.

Like the Oxford Union, which brands itself as "the last bastion of free speech", the SU seems to have been marred by power-seeking, blazer-donning, corporate hacks. Often they offer themselves up to run primarily for two reasons. First-

ly, to have something particularly 'striking' to put on their CV and, secondly, to impose their will upon the masses. It is this tragically ironic truth that will be the inevitable downfall of the SU's resurrection.

If the SU continues to be dominated by students who seem to be possessed by an innate need to wriggle their way to University-wide recognition, we cannot expect anything different. The centralised initiative that has been proposed may not be able to halt their resurgent wrath. The

University's implication in the change is meaningless. These individuals will run for office, end up elected and continue in their pursuit of infamy.

What is the Student Union without students at its helm? And what is democracy without those truly driven in their aims to represent and champion our views?



'Runfluencers': Another commodified wellness trend?

Lara Foxon

Running has always had bad PR. Hating running has been far from contentious, liking it reserved for the smug, self-congratulatory type. The consensus has seemed clear. Running is something marred by tedium, pain, and memories of the Beep Test. Looking at it like this, it is easy to see why running has been so unpopular.

And yet, miraculously, my Instagram is suddenly full of praise for it. Public opinion seems transformed. A quick search on Instagram shows that '#running' racks up 93.2 million posts. It takes me less than a minute on Reels before I scroll past someone vlogging their 'long run', their get ready with me, their 'outfit of the day'.

Maybe I am in an echo chamber of my own making. I tell the algorithm I like to run and it rewards me with its steady churn of content. But, the fact that new 'run clubs' are springing up, and more people are taking on the mantle of 'runfluencer' suggests otherwise.

More importantly, this apparent surge in popularity seems to have encouraged people to try running for themselves, on their own terms. Outside of being forced to run the school cross country, it seems that running can be likeable, enjoyable even. Seeing more people running changed my own opinion of it. Like many, I started running during the first lockdown. I'm not sure I can remember exactly why I started, but the popularity of 'Run 5 / Donate 5 / Nominate 5' posts certainly made the prospect less daunting. Instagram often has a way of making you try something new by making that something less intimidating, or alien.

Social media seems to be the medium, then, for running's popularity. But what does this mean for its message?

Tempting as it is to accept the latest trend as running's long awaited reimagining, we need to ask how it is being presented. In short videos, is the simple answer. Peppered with all the hallmarks you would expect to see on Instagram. A running rucksack and a slicked back pony (extra points for a giant scrunchie) complement a nice outfit – preferably coupled with a pastel top and colourful trainers. All of which is best viewed through the inevitable 0.5x lens shot. It is curated, it is trendy. And it is no secret that to be big on Instagram, you need to be able to sell. Personal brand, salient message, and product alike must trade on their currency. Running, in this format, is the perfect saleable commodity. It links lifestyle to product. It sells a fully integrated package.

I don't think that this is the whole message, or what 'running influencers' explicitly set out to do. But formats like Reels trade on short clips, shorter attention spans, and the desire to just. Keep. Scrolling. What is lost in such an endless medium is the detail. What is remembered is the gilt of the veneer.

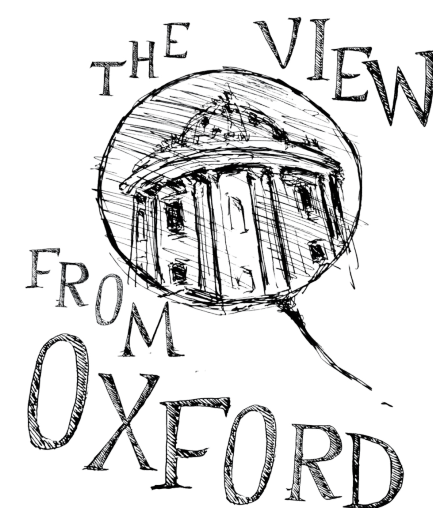
This gloss perfectly combines consumerism and fabled self-discipline. Buying these trainers, this look, that is what will realise your potential. It is attractive, alluring and seemingly simple. It sits snugly with the idea that, if you just muster enough willpower to condition yourself properly, you too can feel, can be, purified. Or, in less effusive terms, you too could vlog your run to work in the City.

If that wasn't enough, this is bedded in with a healthy dose of corporate

opportunism. Run clubs are sponsored or hosted (and posted) by your favourite brands. You can try, then buy, those trainers. Be a part of the lifestyle, be a part of the brand. That is the fully integrated package.

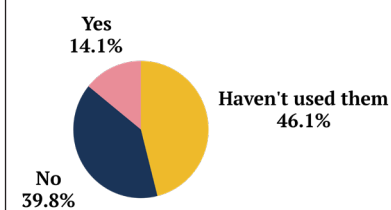
Perhaps it stretches a one-minute video too far for me to pick it apart like this, how much can really be read into its subtext after all. But I think its seemingly innocuous nature makes it more important to recognise and critique. Running has never been apolitical, exempt from the social contexts it exists in. It is easier to see where this newfound popularity has come from when you consider the message this trend promotes. It leaves unquestioned the idea that we can all be perfectly self-governing individuals, untainted and uncompromised. Even in leisure, our self-discipline is productive, and conducive, to the never-ending consumption needed to perform it.

None of this is what running is about, no matter its pretence. Of the many reasons to run, it doesn't jump out – it seems entirely separate from the atmosphere of any races I've ever ran. Gone is the uniform and colour scheme. Instead, the start line is awash with friends and family running together; charity and club vests; favourite t-shirts and trusty trainers. Marshalls volunteer and encourage, alongside supporters who make noise for those they love and those they have never met. This brightness, spontaneity, and community of running will long be its best advertisement. Better than any one minute long vlog or shameless sponsorship. And despite all my railing against self-discipline, I endlessly appreciate the fact it makes it easier for me to get to sleep (sorry Foucault).

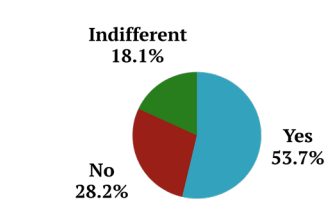


This week, we asked our Instagram followers...

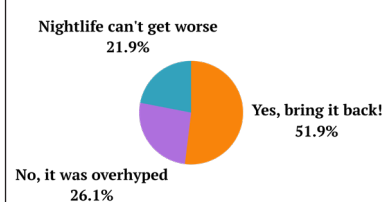
Are Oxford mental health resources adequate?



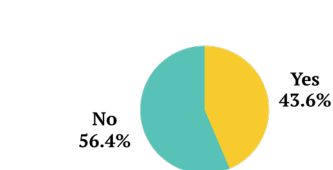
Do you agree with the smoking ban proposal?



Will you miss ATIK?



Can the SU be successfully reformed?



Reading political autobiographies so you don't have to

Seán Timon

Publishing a book has long been a trend for those leaving government in the UK. Memoirs and autobiographies are naturally intriguing, offering us the promise of a peek behind a curtain. We understand that our perception of characters and events is being managed or 'spun', yet we crave authenticity, because we know it's in short supply. This gives politicians an opportunity to sell us their perspectives and narratives on their time in office. In my hastily scribbled notes the names Blair, Cameron, Hancock, Truss and Johnson leap out. When I consider the legacies of this collection, the emotional cocktail is complicated. The adjective 'breathtaking' emerges, begging for unprintable collocations.

In the slow-motion car crash of British politics, how do we feel about politicians profiting from their efforts at self-justification? Tony Blair neatly sidestepped this criticism by donating the profits from *A Journey* to the armed services' charity

the Royal British Legion, who presumably appreciated the money all the more after Afghanistan and Iraq. It seems unlikely that Blair wrote the book for his critics, given the strength of feeling among them. I suspect it was written for his supporters, and himself. If any of you are wondering, it turns out that Blair thinks he did quite well in the circumstances, actually.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, so does Cameron. Dave would have us believe that the Brexit referendum was a political inevitability. What's most interesting about his effort For the Record is that he is very aware of the impact of the errors of his leadership. Disappointingly, he has forgiven himself rather more quickly and easily than the country has. For the record, For the Record is an astonishingly naive title. Sorry Dave, your record definitely speaks for itself. Similarly, Matt Hancock's Pandemic Diaries are not, in fact, diaries because diaries are written at the same time as the events they describe, and he is quite clear in his book that it wasn't. With what he probably believes is bravery,

Hancock is emphatic that he makes no apologies for his handling of the pandemic. This begs the question of whether anyone else thinks he 'handled' the pandemic.

Liz Truss' tenure ("term" would be stretching things) has been mainly known for its brevity and severe damage to the economy. The title of her account *Ten Years to Save the West* completely turns these defining characteristics upside down. Are we to believe that if Liz were elected President of the Western World with ten years of grace it would somehow go well? Much has been made of her husband's prediction that "it would all end in tears", Liz mainly seems to attribute her troubles to saboteurs inside her party, the civil service, the Bank of England, and possibly even the nature of reality itself. There's an old saying that Liz may need to hear, when you point a finger, you generally find three pointing back. In defiance of constitutional convention, she reveals details of the last confidential audience she had with Queen Elizabeth II shortly before the latter's death (almost certainly completely unrelated). After hearing an outline

of Truss' economic ideas, the most experienced diplomat on planet Earth cautioned her PM to "pace yourself", we are told. The vignette ends with: "Maybe I should have listened." 'Maybe?' said everyone else under their breath.

This admittedly cherry-picked selection of the modern British political memoir strongly suggests a tendency to the self-serving. As an optimist, I feel sure that the efforts to ignore the critics and rewrite history are unsuccessful. I wonder how many of the people who would 'rather go for a pint with Boris' will not only buy the as-yet unpublished memoir but also go along with the picture it paints. I also wonder what a psychologist would make of this literary genre. I'm willing to go out on a limb and make some predictions. BJ's book will probably justify his reportedly seven-figure advance payment, and will certainly attempt to justify the choices its author made in power. The title will be grandiose. The portrait will be of an embattled and misunderstood lone wolf, doing their best against impossible odds and going down

fighting. It is always thus. There will be enough inflammatory and previously unseen detail to capture our interest briefly, but the book will misfire, and will not quite manage to achieve its true goal of shielding the ego and record of its author from the implacable weight of history.

These books are too often a magic mirror for their true audience, the author, reflecting a parallel reality that lets them off the hook. It used to be a cliché that all political careers end in failure, politicians were expected to accept their blunders and personal lapses. In contrast, many ex-PMs and ministers today display a kind of narcissistic defensiveness, focused on obscuring, excusing and positioning themselves. I prefer the millennial tendency towards emotional intelligence, the understanding that mistakes need to be owned and genuine apologies are not qualified in the same breath they are made. Ultimately, these autobiographies all reveal and confirm plenty about the people who write them, just not necessarily the things they would prefer us to know.

In conversation with Federico Enciso, Paraguay's first openly gay politician

Adam Noad speaks with Federico Enciso about LGBTQ+ rights in Paraguay, the country's divides, and his political disillusionment.

I am not going to lie. I was pretty much oblivious to Paraguay's existence before being introduced to the documentary, *108: Cuchillo de Palo*. Set during Stroessner's dictatorship, it goes in search of the truth surrounding the director's uncle, a gay ballet dancer who was found dead in his house one morning. It's one of those documentaries that keeps you thinking for days.

A few amateur searches later, I stumbled upon an article headline from *ABC Paraguay*: 'First openly gay candidate speaks out against vote-buying'. Having just read horror stories about the gay experience in South America's most conservative country, I felt that I had to hear from him. A good dose of healthy stalking later, I found his Instagram profile, sent him a message, scheduled a Zoom call, and here we are. What follows is an interview with Federico Enciso: a 28-year-old masters student in social work, and the former candidate for the opposition party, PLRA (Authentic Radical Liberal Party), who just happens to be gay.

Why did you decide to become a politician?

"Ever since I was a boy, politics has always interested me, despite the fact that my family was pretty much apathetic to the subject. I started investigating and became involved in my school's student council. Though we initially only debated issues which affected education, we started contemplating the possibility of getting involved on other fronts, such as party politics. We all

got involved because we wanted to – and still want to – discuss things which are simply not talked about in Paraguay. One of the things which we wanted to talk about was young people that political parties ignore."

Is there a difference between Paraguayan young people's attitude to politics and your parents' generation?

"Paraguay's main problem is that

"In Paraguay, there is no middle class; you are either crazy rich or you live in poverty."

it went through one of longest dictatorships in Latin America, and the main 'achievement' of this dictatorship was to instil fear, indifference, and apathy towards politics in the population. With re-

gard to LGBT issues, I guess things have got better, but they are far from perfect. Above anything else, people are afraid. Even though there is no law against homosexuality in Paraguay, the fear of social rejection is still stronger than ever."

Why has so little changed since Stroessner's dictatorship?

"Paraguay's history is not like that of other South American countries. In Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Uruguay, dictatorships fell, giving way to – more or less – stable democracies with alternating governments. Here, the same party that supported the dictatorship is still in power and this makes change a lot harder."

In which areas besides LGBT rights do you feel that Paraguay lags behind?

"One of the most basic things that I think is lacking in Paraguay is a true democratic tradition. If you look at some surveys, you'll see that most Paraguayans would support an authoritarian regime. Even if we have been a democracy for a long time now, there is still an absence of democratic values. The other big issue, for me, is inequality. In Paraguay, there is no middle class; you are either crazy rich or you live in poverty. This inequality affects all areas of life: education, healthcare, and employment. Most jobs are precarious and pay peanuts. There is no real industry apart from agriculture in Paraguay, and, as a consequence, people cannot find good jobs. All of this is aggravated by the fact that Paraguay has one of the worst education systems in the world."

In the last few years, several important Paraguayan politicians have made homophobic remarks, most notably the country's former president, Horacio Cartes, who said he would 'shoot himself in the balls' if he had a gay son. What do you make of these comments?

"I think you have to split this topic in two. The first problem that we see is impunity. Politicians can say whatever comes to mind because they know that there are never any consequences. However, there is also another issue. In the past, people used to blame everything on

communists in Paraguay. Anyone who criticised the government was a communist. If someone went out to protest against poverty, he was immediately labelled a communist. Not much has changed. Now, in Paraguay, the government blames everything on the UN's 'Vision 2030'. There's a whole band of politicians who scare people saying that the LGBT community wants to indoctrinate children. All of this is merely a tactic to distract the population from the country's real problems. Besides being homophobic, these politicians are also using this discourse with an aim in mind. For instance, Cartes is accused of being involved in narcoterrorism by the US government. Instead of taking these accusations seriously, all of Cartes' political entourage has blamed them on the fact that the US ambassador to Paraguay (Marc Ostfield) is gay. He attributes the claims made against him to the dissonance between [Cartes'] conservative political views, as a defender of God, family and the fatherland, and the ambassador's.

How do you feel being an openly gay politician in such a conservative country?

"What I have noticed, since I am a public figure, is the power of social media. Because of what I do, I receive a non-negligible amount of hostility on my social platforms, but rarely in person. I know that it's not just because I'm gay. It's the whole package, you see? I'm gay, and I criticise the government. I don't really let it affect me. What makes me happy is that I have received lots of messages of support, from lots of people who tell me that they would not have the guts to do what I do and are happy to see someone defending the cause."

How was your coming out?

"My story does not reflect that of the majority. I was also supported by my family and friends, something which normally does not happen here. In Paraguay, if you come out, generally, you have to move out too. Hostility to gay people exists pretty much everywhere; maybe there is not so much discrimination in Asunción [the capital city], but that is not to say it does not exist."

You now live in Argentina. Why did you decide to leave Paraguay?

"First and foremost, I'm here for academic reasons; I came to study here. In Argentina, public universities are good and accessible, something which cannot be said of universities in Paraguay. While education is a right set out in the Paraguayan Constitution, nobody respects the legislation in practice.

The other reason why I am here is because I'm tired. Let me explain. Many of the people I knew in Paraguay who were involved in the same struggle went through a process of thinking things were going to change quickly to understanding that the problem was much deeper-rooted. Paraguay has been a democracy for over thirty years, but not much has changed over that time period. Partially, it was this lack of change which pushed me to leave. I was tired of seeing gay friends suffer for being who they

were. It's all very tiring. To be honest, I think I am going to stay in Argentina."

Is there a difference in attitudes between Argentina and Paraguay?

"Just by crossing the river which separates the two countries, everything changes. It has been a while now that there is legislation which protects the rights of the LGBT community. In my university course, I have a fellow student who is trans in my class, and everybody calls her the name that she has chosen. I just can't see this happening in Paraguay. All of this is a relief for me. Obviously, there are still conservative politicians, and, in fact, the president of Argentina is a conservative. Despite this, in general, things are much better, not just among young people but also among older generations who accept diversity."

Do you not want to go back to Paraguay to try to change the situation?

"I could, if I wanted to, but I would have to give too much of myself. I would have to put in so much energy and put my mental health on the line in the process. I'll give you an example: I remember that about two years ago I had a boyfriend, and we were lying down hugging each other on a beach when a man who worked for the local council came over to tell us that we couldn't do what we were doing. At that moment, I faced two options: either to complain and make a scene, as I usually do, or to keep quiet and leave. The latter is what people usually do, because putting up a fight is tiring. It's so tiring having to explain the obvious. I know this might seem like a bit of a petty example, but it's a

"Paraguay has been a democracy for over thirty years, but not much has changed over that period... this lack of change pushed me to leave."

constant. For now, I am staying put in Argentina. I love my family and friends, but the political situation in Paraguay is just too complicated."

After the interview, I remembered what Augusto Roa Bastos, the country's most famous novelist, had said during an interview in exile in 1986: "Today, Paraguay is a republic of besieged citizens. Half of the population has been corrupted, and the other half domesticated."

Almost forty years later, the phrase still fits. Though no longer a dictatorship, the country still lives in a state of fear and fatigue. Paraguay must not fake dementia about its dark past, but recognise the damage inflicted by the Stroessner's dictatorship. Individuals like Federico Enciso will be the protagonists in the next chapter of Paraguay's history.

Image Credit: Federico Enciso.



“They’re sidenotes in history”

Amelia Dovell speaks to Olivia Wrafter and Olivia Hurton about reviving Oxford’s feminist journal, *Bluestocking*.

Perhaps you’ve heard the term ‘bluestocking’ before. Though it came to be used as a misogynistic pejorative, its origins lie in 18th-century Britain, when groups of women would attend literary societies, which provided a space for literary, artistic and intellectual discussion.

I spoke to Olivia Wrafter, Editor-in-Chief, and Olivia Hurton, Deputy Editor, who are reviving this historical tradition, through *Bluestocking Oxford*, an online journal that investigates the intellectual and artistic achievements of women throughout history. Founded in 2009, the journal was relaunched in Michaelmas of 2023.

Both are students of English literature, whose research interests align with that of *Bluestocking*. “I look at the brilliant 18th-century female playwrights... I’m a playwright myself.” Hurton tells me. “I read this novel called *The Excursion* by Francis Brooke (1777). That captivated me – I found this whole community of brilliant female writers who were able to make quite a lot of money from that art. The things that they were writing about which were fiercely feminist, and the stage gave them a voice, because they were excluded from parliament and government.”

Wrafter’s research also centres around women, particularly in the context of the novel. “I found this large group of women that were writing in South Africa in the English language. [They] massively contributed to the novel form and how the novel changed during that period, but it’s never been studied before.”

Wrafter’s research will take a different angle

on the traditional literary ‘canon’. “I think female novelists don’t get allowed to be credited with having a dialogue with canonical male authors.. at the time”, Wrafter adds. “They obviously were... there were a lot of great Victorian women writers who [had] success during their time.”

But even for women whose work entered the canon, their works and merit were judged differently from their male counterparts. “Image is so bound up with women’s intellectual achievements in a way it’s just not for men.” Hurton says, giving the example of George Eliot, the Victorian novelist. Wrafter describes the narratives about her looks, questioning its relevance to her work. “Obviously, for a male writer that would just never be

“[Bluestocking] has been a baton that women have passed on to each other. [...]

There was so much potential for the magazine.”

commented on. And it’s the same today – that has not changed.”

It would be an opportunity wasted if I didn’t ask them each for a feminist literary recommendation. Wrafter’s pick was Olive Schreiner’s ‘The Story of an African Farm’, considered the first ‘New Woman’ novel. The protagonist struggles to enact her proto-feminist political views to her life.

“I think



that’s just something I find interesting – if you do one thing that’s not in line with your feminist political views or whatever, does that undermine everything that you stand for? [The protagonist is] an amazing character, it’s an amazing story and an amazing piece of work.”

Hurton recommends Lady Caroline Lamb. “She is an amazing figure. She essentially wrote the really first famous ‘Kiss and Tell’. She had a three month whirlwind affair with Lord Byron... he went off with her cousin and she felt completely betrayed. But she didn’t keep her mouth shut: she wrote this gothic novel – *Glenarvon*. She was completely disgraced. But she made a lot of money, spoke her mind and didn’t let him get away with it.”

Taking inspiration from Caroline Lamb, Hurton summarises *Bluestocking*’s goal to empower women to “be heard”.

In many ways *Bluestocking* challenges historical and contemporary narratives around women, and discussions of their achievements, by covering a wide range of voices.

“The magazine is essentially a platform for women who we think need to be better known, and who we just find really interesting.” Hurton says.

“We publish quite different views. One week, I wrote on Barbara Kruger, who’s very left wing, almost Orwellian in her perspective. And then we had Margaret Thatcher the next week. It’s kind of interesting to see

that dialogue happening between the articles.”

Aside from more well known profiles, *Bluestocking* also covers the lesser known. “Sometimes they’re completely random,” Wrafter adds. “They’re side notes in history. Recently someone pitched an article about the first female pirate! It’s amazing to find these things out by running this journal.”

One example of such a profile, which both cited as a recent favourite, was a piece on Clarice Lispector by Lauren Davies. Aside from learning about the Brazilian novelist for the first time, both expressed admiration for the way in which the article was written – experimenting with form in a way that, as Wrafter says, “when writing academic articles... you lose.” In this sense, the journal also provides a creative outlet against the more rigid bounds of academic standards – think of the classic ‘Oxford essay’. “It’s been so liberating,” says Hurton. “I can research other things. There’s no constraints on what we really allow articles for.”

One thing that struck me in my conversation with the pair, was the recurring theme of community, particularly of a female network – reaching all the way back to the namesake of the journal. On one level, the magazine uncovers networks of women from the past. As Hurton says, from reading the articles, often unknown links between the seemingly isolated women are understood.

On another level, the magazine itself fosters its own community, combining those interested in

literature across the university. “I didn’t meet many post grads when I was an undergrad,” Wrafter notes. “I think I would have appreciated [it]... Even when I was an undergrad, the idea of doing a PhD was just so far and impossible. It wasn’t something I could do.”

“When women come together and actually, you know, have the community and sit – they talk and socialise, but also academically nurture each other. It’s so beneficial for everyone involved.”

Bluestocking’s focus is unique, not just within Oxford, but on a wider scale. “I happily devour a *Vogue* on the occasion,” Hurton says. “But it’s quite patronising about what women actually want. Yes, sometimes it’s nice to look at a woman in a pretty dress, and hear about the latest Charlotte Tilbury makeup. But we also want something that’s going to satisfy our intellectual needs, too. I feel like *Bluestocking* is incredibly radical. And I wish there was a national magazine like that, because that’s what women actually do want to see and hear. It would inspire a lot of girls, especially younger girls, to think about themselves in a different way. [To see] the different sides of them, which are impor-

“I wish there was a national magazine like that, because that’s what women actually do want to see and hear...”

tant, which are not just simply the aesthetic side.”

“[*Bluestocking*] has been a baton that women have passed on to each other.” She adds, “We both felt like there was so much potential for [the magazine]. I think it’s amazing that it’s been going on for so long, which just shows that there is a need for this... You know, even if we’ll leave, lots of our team will be leaving, but they still want to grow it while they’re a part of it, and ensure the legacy continues.”

Bluestocking currently operates online, with hopes to see a printed edition in the future. This term they will be hosting a literary salon with Feminist Society on 23 May in Week 5, and are open for submissions from Week 1 onwards.

Image Credit: Olivia Wrafter and Olivia Hurton.

Olivia Hurton (L), Olivia Wrafter (R)



CHERBADLY

Murder of the dancefloor: What next for ATIK?

Recently, news confirming our worst fears broke of the imminent closure of Atik at the end of Trinity term. The club, undoubtedly the city's most popular and beloved venue, has been forced to shut down following a dispute between its parent organisation and the current landlords. This news comes as a great shock to all, especially given the company's earlier statements included "Nothing is happening to ParkEnd. Nothing is shutting down and nothing is moving".

This means that students and high-profile figures alike such as Gordon Ramsay, Pitbull, and even Batman will have to find somewhere else to go on a dark night. A dismayed Ramsay told *Cherwell*: "I f***** hate those stupid b***** donkey c****! Who decided to make my favourite f***** club into some s***** little offices, they can f*** right off, and where's the f***** lamb sauce!?" However, Ramsay was not the only person to voice his concerns about the matter. Faced with the prospect of going to other 'fantastic' destinations such as Bridge, Plush and even Glamourous (although I don't think one of our Editors-in-Chief will be going back to the latter anytime soon), students have begun to let their frustra-

tions be known. Petitions have been signed, oxfesses have been written and one student from Keble has even gone on hunger strike in protest of the decision.

In order to quell this uprising, or 'FanAtikism' as it has been dubbed, Oxford University has resolved to find another suitable venue to replace the outgoing club. Suggestions for a new clubbing venue have included The RadCam (but not during History reading hours), Najars' hut and even the Hildabeasts' stables, but these have unfortunately all been rejected in favour of a different location. This location, much like its predecessor, is a place devoid of both academia and any real standards, a site where Stella is sipped and *flour* is sniffed, a land of fine silk and generational money, teeming with lifeless corpses. This hellhole, or 'Teddy Hall' as it is colloquially known, is set to be demolished next year starting with the removal of that horrid cylindrical tower thing in the middle. Perhaps surprisingly, or unsurprisingly depending on how you look at it, there has been no complaints from anyone (living or dead) from the college, which meant the first 100% approval rating in the college's history. Perhaps now, students from all over will now finally be able to go to Teddy's bar at least.

John Evelyn

20th April 2024

John Evelyn warmly welcomes you back to Oxford and hopes we can make the most of Park End's final few weeks before holing ourselves up for the revision crunch (jealous of those who have just finished collections).

We can all breathe a sigh of relief now that the term's highest stakes elections are out of the way. Thanks to the SWAT team's valiant efforts last term, we got to enjoy an exciting hour touching upon only the most thrilling of topics: Times New Roman, Graduate Officer Electoral Proceedings and, of course, Oxford Brookes. The only Members who can reliably never be found in the library looked uncomfortable as they were forced to explain how they would connect with the masses. Partnering with their debating society was eschewed as an idea – sadly we will not be joining their debates ranging from 'what is your pint time' to 'learning to count'. Instead, our debate this week will feature the West Coast twang of a woman whose musings on populism will surely leave us wanting to put a hammer through our heads.

The most hotly contested race of all was surely the election of Defender of

International Fees to Subsidise Our Degrees. CC had been packed to the rafters to ensure the re-election of the Tiger from Jungle Book, who still only won because no one could spell her opponent's name. One of the voters brought along was the Moghul of Majli, who can safely enter the premises without King Edward leaving him hung, drawn, and quartered. We'll see what he makes of the latest antics and if he'll challenge John Evelyn for the throne of Union satirist-in-chief. Perhaps what packed the library most was the arrival of Union Tweed's Shiny New Toy. He can't wait for the concert by the legendary Harry the Piano Man, who might end up as Tweed's sloppy seconds after Tweed was rejected by the Operatic Operative.

In a blast from the past, King Keble teleported in, armed to the teeth with questions for the Irish Giant – but the Giant wasn't actually there. Hé'd fled to Ireland, a safe place to dodge both tax-

es and questions about his neutrality. When he returns next week, we'll see if National Treasure gets her apology. If she's not too busy fuelling her caffeine addiction, she might be helped by the henchmen brought in to committee by the qualified Barista. Speaking of, we are yet to find out if anyone is Standing alongside him, or if they'll flip to Barbie's Sequel. She's certainly making a compelling case to them. The Oucaholic also piped up this week to request weekly Piss & Poor Behaviour, promising he would roll up his sleeves and Get P&P Done. Apparently, their society deserves a third (or is it their fourth?) chance even after damaging our property and destroying our reputation.

Another notable absence from committee was the Panda. John Evelyn, and the rest of committee, can only wish him and his family all the best. We hope to see you back in Oxford soon. To everyone else, John Evelyn wishes you a great week ahead and will return with more news next time!



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John Evelyn



Oliver Sandall
Editor-in-Chief

German and Czech (with Slovak) is quite a mouthful. I was quickly aware of this after having to repeat it **four** times to one person in Bridge during freshers week. And the response is almost always something along the lines of: “Wait, you can study that?”

The term ‘Mickey Mouse degree’ is one that has taken off in recent years – and rightly so. But does a languages degree fall into this category? More to the point, does a small slavonic language like Czech teach you anything other than the fact that some languages are not popular for a reason?

Whilst I can’t exactly say I’ve become fluent in Czech (Rajendra, if you’re reading this – I apologise about this term’s collection), I can say I’ve tapped into a largely unexplored linguistic and cultural field – at least at an undergraduate level. To my knowledge, only five universities across the United Kingdom offer Czech as an

undergraduate course.

So what does learning a smaller language like Czech provide, beyond just interesting conversations in the pub and being able to correct people when they ask if I’m spending my year abroad in Czechoslovakia?

First and foremost, an appreciation of language and language acquisition beyond its cold and often unforgiving utilitarian front. Most people, when questioned why they study a certain language, say something like “I want to speak with locals when on holiday and feel more immersed in the culture” or “I want to become more employable”. I, too, wanted to study languages for similar reasons.

Indeed, this degree has also demonstrated numerous times that learning languages is a very selfish act. Unless, of course, you’re learning it for some impressive charitable cause – which I am certainly not. Whilst I love those YouTubers with video titles like ‘Westerner shocks Chinese locals with his Mandarin’, there is something awfully self-gratifying about them. But that’s not a bad thing. Many university degrees are selfish and are often an excuse to delay entering the ‘real world’.

In any case, I like my degree. I’m not sure whether I love it. However, I think you – yes, you, the smug STEM student reading this editorial (who am I kidding, no STEM student is reading *Cherwell*) – ought to reconsider judging your mates studying languages or History. But not Geography or English.

Catch you in week three.



Adam Saxon
Editor-in-Chief

One of the things that I find deeply intriguing about Oxford is its history. I’m sure there’s nothing unique about that. Indeed, I think its history is exactly what makes it appeal as a place to so many of us – possibly with the afterthought of a degree thrown in there somewhere too.

This interest in the history of the University and the city is one of the things that drove me to take on the *Cherwell*’s archives column this term. I’ve already spent more time than I should have digging through the Union’s *Cherwell* archives pulling out stories for the next few editions.

What makes the column so interesting to me is the fact that by looking back at old student journalism you don’t solely learn about the history of the city. In the process of looking back you learn so much more about the experiences of students who’ve been here through the years than you can from almost any other medium.

Last weekend, Keble held a ‘Festival of Sport’, in which old alumni

(‘ghosts’) returned to play current students in sports ranging from football to darts. Following the matches (which resulted in resounding victories for *almost* all of the current students’ teams), students and ghosts filed into the bar for the real festival. It was an excellent opportunity to hear some stories of life at the college over the years, ranging from incredibly mundane stories of studies and job searches to the exciting and life defining tales of how some of them met their wives while at University. It was also a great opportunity for some free pints.

Also interesting was hearing how the social side of college sport has changed over the years. Ever known for being rowdy, it was great to hear how much has remained the same over the years in that sense. One ghost told a story of a fellow student being ‘debagged’, his trousers stolen and taken to the roof of the college bar. He promptly went and put on a new pair only to get debagged again – and this time his trousers were taken up to the roof of the chapel. The ghost went on to describe how the next morning he hurriedly climbed both to get the trousers down, before the college could apply any relevant deaning or other punishment.

Truly, what makes our university years so special is the experiences we have and the people we meet. Almost all the ghosts we met on Saturday told stories of how the friends they made at university have remained friends for life. If anything, the whole experience was a chilling reminder of how quickly time goes here, and the inevitability of the nostalgia that will set in once we’re gone.



Alicia Martínez Patiño
Deputy Editor-in-Chief

It’s only been about 10 days since I returned to Oxford for the term, armed with overweight luggage and hints of darkness under my eyes (foreshadowing the rest of Trinity, I’m sure). On my first night back, it rained. And yes, I know this isn’t a rare phenomenon here. But, as I closed my eyes and hid under my duvet, I couldn’t help but be taken right back to my childhood bedroom, just another school night listening to the rhythm of raindrops on my window. Maybe if we’re all just really, really quiet, I might almost be able to hear my parents’ muffled

voices discussing who will take me to class tomorrow morning. Rain is rain – it’s the same sound, in Oxford and everywhere else.

Since moving away for university, I’ve learnt exactly one thing about myself: everywhere I go, I’m looking for home. Frustratingly, I’m always missing something: from my mum’s fancy coffee maker to hearing my own voice in my native tongue. But when I go back to my hometown, I find myself missing the now familiar sight of red brick architecture (and even the frighteningly impersonal bureaucracy) almost equally as hard.

Maybe not the deadlines, though.

Some say language is what makes us human. Does language make a home? I fear I don’t know yet, though I think I would have answered in the negative barely two years ago. When I processed I was actually moving to the UK, I was sure I could take on the world. After all, I’d taken a good few English tests. But really, knowing the words is only half the job. A first friend, a first love, a first death – how can we translate our baggage into another language? I’ll let you know when I finally get the hang of it.



Rufus Hall
Deputy Editor-in-Chief

Can anyone tell me how to cook a potato?

I have tried hundreds of times to bake, fry, roast, steam and boil potatoes, and I still can’t do it. I am cursed to produce either sodden-through-and-completely-mashed-up potatoes, or moist-crunchy-seep-with-starch-when-you-chomp-down raw potatoes.

“Can you cook anything well?” the sceptics rejoinder. I reply that living out of college has given me time to perfect my methods for cooking a number of other starch, tuber and root-based products. I have mastered sweet potato fritters, roast carrot and beetroot salad and

some exquisite parsnip muffins :). But potatoes remain an unknown quantity for me.

Far too often, I bang a tray of vegetables – potatoes inclusive – in the oven for a healthy, but energising mealtime treat, take them out of the oven after half an hour, vegetables: soft and sweet, luring me into a false sense of security, potatoes: FML as my jaw proceeds to snap.

I wonder if the main facet of the potato-problem is the multiplicity of potato types that are available in UK supermarkets. It is, in my view, a testament to the overwhelming and distressing freedoms of consumer-capitalism that we have everything from Maris Pip-

er to Baby New at our fingertips, and whichever sort we choose will inevitably be the incorrect one for the purposes. I rue the many days when I have boiled baking potatoes and baked boiling ones. And don’t be fooled by the so-called “all-purpose” potatoes – as the old saying goes, a jack of all trades is always a master of none.

Like all second-year German students, I am bound next year for no place other than Germany, a country with a famously potato-rich cuisine. I hope that I will have time to capitalise on this fact, return to Oxford with a solution to the potato-problem and be a better man for it.



WaterTok, Stanley cups, and the half-empty glass of consumerism

Evelyn Power discusses the science, history and commercialisation of humanity's favourite beverage.

We all need to drink more water. A 1998 New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center survey of 3003 Americans found that 75% of those interviewed were 'chronically dehydrated' — a condition apparently characterised by fatigue, memory loss, irritability, and anxiety. It is no wonder that, according to a *Cherwell* poll, 78% of Oxford students claim they are 'trying to drink more water.'

Conventional wisdom prescribes that each person drink eight glasses (or two litres) of water a day; an amount so difficult to maintain that it has spawned countless industries bent on supporting our apparent need for endless hydration, and demanded the writing of NHS guidelines and Healthline articles on how to force ourselves to drink more. The internet is full of information on the seemingly exponential benefits of excessive hydration; according to TikTok 'hydration experts', drinking more

water can clear your skin, heal eczema and flush toxins from your organs. Water consumption is no longer a fulfilment of the biological need of thirst, but an endeavour to be a more attractive, healthier, happier, better version of yourself.

But is this true?

I reached out to Dr. Tamara Hew-Butler, a Professor of Sports Science at Wade State University, who explained that, "most people do not need to be drinking 8 glasses of water a day. The amount of water you need to be consuming is dependent on a lot of things, like your weight or the climate you're in. We also get a lot of our daily water and minerals from the food we eat." When I push her on the seeming necessity of driving oneself to drink when not thirsty, she explains that "the gene for thirst is one of the oldest and best evolved in the human body. It is probably the best marker for when you need to be drinking water." On the possibility of health benefits from drinking too much water, she explains

that "it can help prevent UTIs, if you have a history of UTIs, or help prevent kidney stones, if you have a history of kidney stones. Apart

“Water consumption is no longer a fulfilment of a biological need, but an endeavour to be a more attractive, better version of yourself”

from that, the only thing your body is doing with that excess water is peeing it out.”

Yet, despite this evidence, myths surrounding hydration still abound. In fact, water has long been linked both to ideals not only about health, but purity and goodness; see the ostensible healing qualities of Roman Baths, the historical folk medicine of healing wells, even the symbolic purification of baptism. As the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh explains, at different points of history water has been touted as a cure to “all manner of ailments - from smallpox, to gout and indigestion.” Hew-Butler traces the provenance and endurance of these ideals to the fact that water is “readily available, and necessary for life. There also aren't any real dangers from drinking more water, unless you take it to extremes.” There is almost a common-sense element to the promotion of over-hydration — drinking enough water is crucial to health — what harm could come from drinking more?

However, it would be remiss to chalk our modern take on hydration to simple medical misconcep-

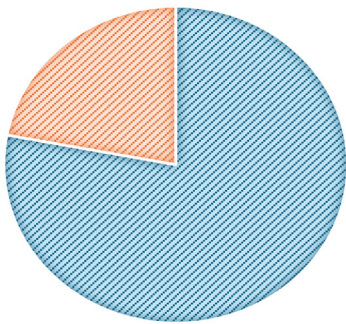
tion. In truth, it is a highly profitable marketing scheme which helps to fuel some high-value industries. As Hew-Butler explains, “these commercial conceptions of ‘hydration’ are really very recent — I first noticed it in Gatorade marketing campaigns in the 90s, then with plastic bottled mineral water in the 2000s.” The academics and research of hydration are therefore saturated with the corporate interests that they support; the Cornell Medical Centre's findings on hydration — which, as you may remember, stated that 75% of adults are chronically dehydrated — were funded by the International Bottled Water Association. Their subjects' ostensible ‘dehydration’ was not determined by medical testing, but by, as Hew Butler outlines, asking if they ‘drank at least 8 glasses of water a day’, and declaring them dehydrated if they did not. When I tried to find their research for myself, I first saw it linked on a website selling flavoured water supplements.

Stoking fears about dehydration

translates directly into real-world profits. As of 2023, the bottled water industry was valued at £2.1 billion in the UK alone — 20 years ago, influencers photographed themselves with Fiji Water, sleekly packaged bottles of water which boasted high contents of ostensibly healthy minerals. As concerns about plastic pollution grew in the public consciousness, fueled by the release of studies finding microplastics in plastic water bottles, the commercial focus shifted towards the development and mar-

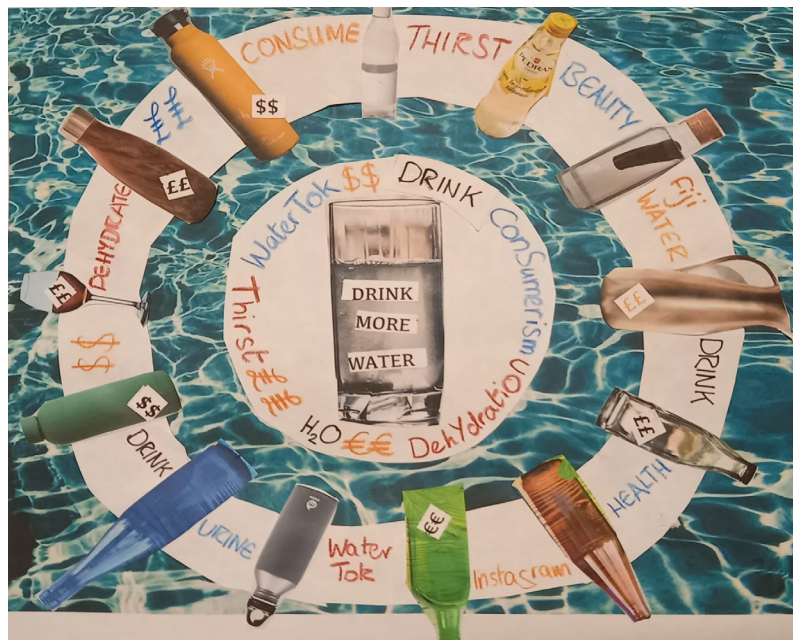
Cherwell poll: “Would you prefer to drink more water than you do?”

■ Yes ■ No



keting of reusable water bottles. Contrary to their claims towards sustainability, these bottles arrive in noticeable trends, and develop into fashion statements of their own — you might remember the seemingly ubiquitous Chillis bottles (and ensuing knockoffs) of the later 2010s, the gallon-sized Hydromates, with their (vaguely threatening) printed encouragements of ‘KEEP DRINKING’, as endorsed by celebrities like Kendall Jenner, or the relentlessly marketed Airup bottles, which promise to flavour water (and therefore encourage its consumption) with ‘scent technology’. Of course, you would be entirely forgiven for not remembering any of these bottles; as with all trends, they have all experienced a brief craze of visibility before their inevitable, ever-swifter replacement with the next bottle on the market.

The current water bottle du jour, however, has raised a little more controversy. Priced at £45, the Stanley Quencher cup is a 1.2 litre tumblr manufactured by Stanley, a brand of previously utilitarian water bottles, which touted its products as construction site essentials. Their shift in advertising has paid off; CNBC estimates Stanley made over \$750m last year, compared with an average of \$70m a year before 2020. Perhaps the most useful tool in Stanley’s rebranding has been the social media zeitgeist that surrounded them. They have quickly become a mainstay of ‘WaterTok’, a TikTok subculture populated by well-hydrated (mostly) women — Stanley Cups are their weapon of choice against the spectre of dehydration. Under the #WaterTok



Hashtag, you can find countless videos of its members making their ‘water of the day’, filling their cups with multiple flavouring packets and sugar-free syrups in order to produce moderately off-putting concoctions such as ‘Birthday Cake’ and ‘Mermaid’ flavoured water. Any use of flavouring is, of course, entirely justified as a means towards the ultimate end of ‘drinking more water’. WaterTok’s cultural prominence, (and therefore the ensuing backlash against it) was precipitated in early 2024 by Stanley’s collaboration with Starbucks to release a limited-edition pitcher, resulting in fatalistic and purge-style video clips of well-manicured American women tussling over the cups in outlets of Target, the American retailer. The videos

“Perhaps the most useful tool in Stanley’s re-branding has been the social media Zeitgeist that surrounds them.”

were quickly followed by backlash from social and conventional media alike, of varying legitimacy. It is true that the flash-marketing and mass-collection (many WaterTokers boast huge, multi-coloured collections of Stanley Cups) of ostensibly sustainable products does undercut the environmental benefits of their production — yet the conversation around WaterTok has been (true to general internet form) one of mockery, rather than discussion.

Much of this ridicule is notably gendered. On the 28th of January 2024, the sketch show Saturday Night Live released their ‘Big Dumb

Cups’ sketch, in which members of the show’s cast sport thick Southern accents, blonde wigs, vacant stares, and, of course, Stanley Cups. The Stanley Cup, therefore, seems to have grown from a simple product to a shorthand for a type of person; to mock the bottle is to mock the buyer. The surrounding discourse is, of course, entirely aware of this — one comment lauded the sketch for having “Absolutely NAILED this type of woman!”, while others discuss how they are “slaying the white mormon mom!”. Each snide aside locates the cups’ users within a distinct societal archetype, one profiled as white, lower-middle class, Christian (somehow?), and, of course, female. Mockery of the cups, therefore, manifests not only as a reaction to the consumerism they represent, but as an excuse to mock the ‘type’ of woman to whom they are attributed, an outlet for internet users to purge themselves of their (apparent) vitriol for blonde Mormon mothers of three.

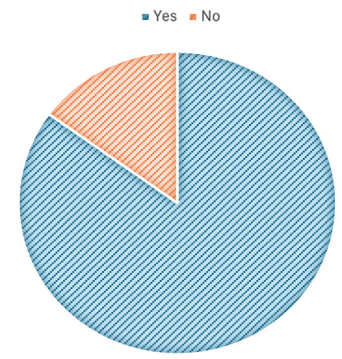
When viewed through the lens of the gendered ridicule it enables the scale of the backlash generated by the cups begins to make more sense. J. B. MacKinnon, author of *The Day the World Stops Shopping: How Ending Consumerism Gives Us a Better Life and a Greener World*, characterises these flurries of outrage as “finger-wagging”; the consumer frenzy surrounding Stanley Cups seems to be facing disproportionate criticism compared to its relatively insignificant impact on the environment, compared to, say, the ever-churning behemoth of Fast fashion or the massive emissions produced by commercial air travel.

It is not only the trend’s detractors who use the cups as a marker of identity; like many products peddled to consumers, they inhabit the cultural zeitgeist as more than just a water bottle, but as a declaration of values. This, of course, is not only unique to water bottles; consumption, in recent years, has equated to its own form of communication. Products have increasingly become coveted, not for what

they do, but for what they mean. A friend of mine who bought a Stanley claimed she was motivated partly by seeing “so many people on socials” with them, and the hope that it would push her to do “cute aesthetic work with it.”

As far as purchases go, the cups are clearly aspirational; Hew-Butler described them as a “symbol of health”, a sign that their user is drinking their water, taking care of the environment, consuming in the marketing-approved right way. My friend largely attributed her Stanley Cup purchase to the fact that she felt it would “help [her] to drink more water”; and when water is falsely equated to health, attractiveness, and happiness, there is more to drinking more water than simply drinking more water. It is not only a reach for self-betterment, but, in the cases of cups like the Stanley, a public communication of this reach.

Hew-Butler’s summary of the over-marketing of hydration is simple; in her words, “to be told you need to drink more water is to force you into thinking that you need something that you really don’t.” Perhaps this is what is so objectionable about the overconsumption of Stanley cups — there is something bleakly metaphorical in the whole cycle of buying a bottle that you do not need to own, in order to force yourself to drink water that you do not need to drink. Certainly, when Hew-Butler explains



Cherwell poll: “Do you use a reusable waterbottle?”

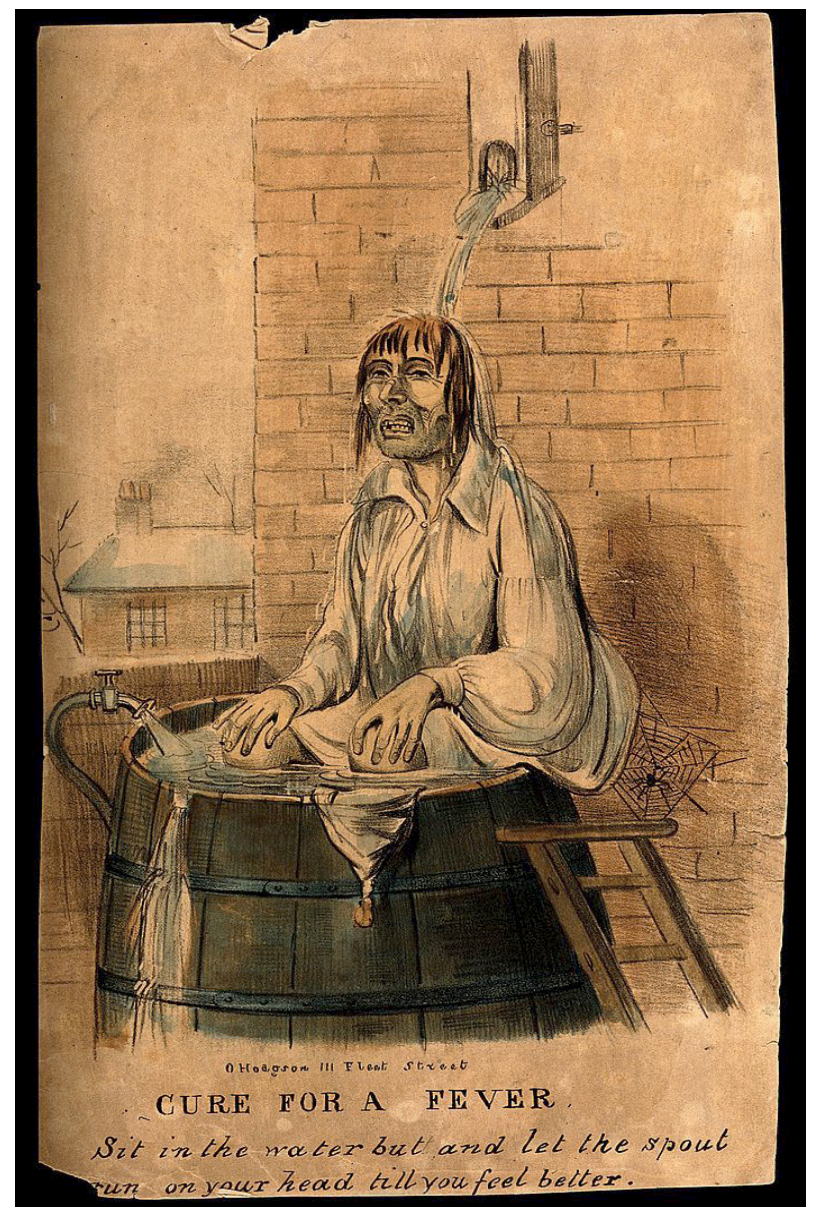
that “people are constantly sipping, so they are never really thirsty, and so they think their thirst is ‘broken’, and they feel like they should be drinking even more,” I am struck for a moment by the utter futility of the scene she describes.

On the flip side of water’s commodification lie its consumers, for whom thirst is characterised as an endless, cavernous need. It is insatiable, even in the face of all the products sold to help sate it; you cannot quench a thirst that you do not feel, and you can never have enough of something you never really needed at all.

Image Credit page 12: Kate Joie via Unsplash.

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Artwork by Oliver Ray.



Sharron Davies and the place of transgender athletes in pro sport

Victoria Tayler discusses the former swimmer's talk given at the Oxford Literary festival.

The bell chimed for 2 o'clock on Thursday the 21st of March and the doors closed for the Oxford Literary Festival's most controversial talk: 'Sharron Davies, Unfair Play: The Battle for Women's Sport.' I stood on the step of the main entrance wearing my 'festival steward' lanyard, and contemplating the politics of being a volunteer at what felt like a history-making event. There had been no protest, no commotion, and the courtyard around the Sheldonian was relatively calm, but the moment felt monumental. The memory of philosopher Kathleen Stock's infamous 2023 visit to the union weighed heavy on my mind. The event was a watershed moment for what has become a particularly intense transgender debate here in Oxford, famously spawning public tensions between faculty and student activists that foregrounded important critical questions about the limits of free speech and the power of student protests.

The Davies talk was a weird episode in the current history of the transgender debate in Oxford. As festival volunteers, we had the option of attending the event for free whilst tickets ranged from eight pounds to twenty, but the decision to hang around felt loaded. The Easter vacation had essentially flattened the student response to the talk, in stark contrast to Stock's term-time visit. The ticketed entry seemed to further limit attendance, and although student tickets could be purchased at a discount, the issue of handing money over to figures like Sharron Davies poses its own problems. The student reaction was certainly voiced in a condemning Instagram post by the LGBTQ+ campaign of the Oxford Student Union and an article by Éilis Mathur for *Cherwell*, but in the quiet courtyard of the Sheldonian, there was not a protester to be seen. And unlike the other events, no members of the press showed up at the door I was ticketing; indeed, reception of the event, both local and national, has been incredibly quiet. It was the subdued atmosphere of the theatre which tipped me towards attending Davies' talk. As it seemed the lofty Sheldonian could become a literal echo chamber, it felt important that I take advantage of my free seat and expose the conversation to the wider student community.

Sharron Davies is a former competitive swimmer, who competed for England in three Olympic games. Since retiring from the sport, she has worked as a sports commentator for BBC and was an advocate for London's bid to host the 2012 Olympics. She is a supporter of the Conservative party, endorsing Kemi Badenoch in the 2022 leadership election. Since 2019, she has become well-known as a vocal supporter of the separation of cis- and transgender athletic spaces,

a concern which rests on her experiences swimming in the 1980s at the height of the infamous East German doping scandal. It's a powerful opener. Davies had been frontline in the affair, racing against no fewer than three East German swimmers who were participants in a program which saw female athletes deceived or bullied into taking 'vitamin pills' containing anabolic steroids. Davies outraced two and came in second place behind the final East German swimmer, Petra Schneider. The Oxford literary festival website refers to her as the athlete who "infamously missed out on an Olympic gold."

These experiences underline her conviction that Olympic Sport committees, plagued by systemic misogyny, have continually allowed the mistreatment of women to go un-

"... a sense pervaded the event that she is conscious of LGBTQ+ and student sensibilities on this sensitive issue."

ticed and unchallenged. Part of this misogyny, she argues, is the willingness to turn a blind eye to the 'unfair' participation of transwomen in women's sports. As with the doping scandal, Davies suggests that Olympic boards have not been willing to properly invigilate women's sports because they do not value women's victories as much as those of men. This undervaluing of women's sport has, the argument goes, led to committee boards 'taking the easy route' by denying that there is a difference in performance capabilities between cisgender athletes and transgender athletes which she does not find to be a workable solution.

Convincingly, Davies exposes the complications inherent to the debate, identifying that the effects of 'male' puberty, which are not reversed by HRT – such as increasing bone density and muscular development, and a narrower angle between the hips and knees – can provide an unfair competitive advantage, particularly in fighting sports. It certainly seems important then, to differentiate sports categories in more than simple 'male' and 'female' categories. Whilst many of us would agree that these categories do not capture such complexities, Davies' proposed 'solution', which involves separating transgender athletes from their cisgender counterparts, fails to convince.

There is a twofold problem with

Davies' case for a segregated athletic space. As with many of the classic arguments associated with the TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist) position, there is a total lack of intersectional awareness in the argument. The existence of systemic misogyny within professional sport is indubitable. But Davies, despite aiming to appear sympathetic to the transgender experience, mistakenly suggests transgender and cisgender athletes compete for the same space, which they cannot both occupy. As she terms it, "Women already have a small piece of the pie, and it is becoming smaller," a sentiment epitomised in her suggestion that Lia Thomas was a 'mediocre' swimmer when she had competed in the 'male' category, and therefore should not have enjoyed such success as she did competing as a woman. This time round, Davies chooses moderate language, but an article from *The Times* in June 2023 quotes her referring to trans athletes as "mediocre males self-identifying their way out of biological reality to a new status in sport." It's not a good look. While Davies claims to put the crux of the issue on Olympic committee boards, not individual athletes, the idea that transgender women are being allowed to 'take pieces' of the womanhood 'pie' inevitably and unfairly pits athletes against each other.

Moreover, Davies gestures towards biological definitions of womanhood. For example, she talks with sympathy, though not without an agenda, about the tragic effects of the doping program, making specific references to Schneider's struggles with fertility. Another moment sees interviewer Andrew Billen pose a question about the perceived dangers of allowing transgender women to share changing rooms with their cisgender teammates, focusing on the presence of male genitalia in 'female' spaces and the possibility that there is an inherent power dynamic tipped in the favour of male-to-female transgender athletes. Davies contributed to this narrative by drawing attention to the very real financial vulnerability of often single-sponsor female athletes to the problematic effect of suggesting that they are forced to accept the unwanted or (it is implied) traumatising presence of 'men' in women's spaces. The focus on making safe spaces for women would no doubt be more fruitfully directed at handling the abundant cases of sexual misconduct by cisgender coaches, a much more common and persistent fear for young female athletes.

In one especially 'on the nose' moment, interviewer Andrew Billen asks Sharron Davies if she sees herself as a TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist) and she responds by saying that she identifies as a woman, and a mother. It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the only places that



the Literary Festival event shows up on the internet (besides the festival website) is in a forum post on mums.net. The appeal to motherhood as an identifier of cisgender womanhood clearly strikes a chord with Davies' supporters.

A question from an intersex member of the audience provides the first and only real challenge to Davies' views. The questioner suggests that the language around intersex people in Davies' book is awkward and dehumanising, suggesting that Davies had implied that intersex was not an identity but a biological abnormality, and asks if Davies has any advice for intersex individuals who feel excluded from professional sport. After some disagreement on the appropriate way to refer to the intersex community (with Davies suggesting 'Diverse Sex Characteristics', is more representative, whilst the audience member defends their choice of label) Davies then questions why intersex people would feel excluded from professional sport, whether this feeling of exclusion is justified. Her tone – defensive rather than encouraging – and her insistence on the lack of social barriers into a professional sports career is bizarre. I find myself wondering why Davies doesn't simply apologise for a poor choice of language and exercise some of her inspi-

"Davies' talk does leave room for optimism..."

rational-speaker-meets-life-coach muscle and deliver some token inspiration about chasing dreams and overcoming hardships. Instead, she chooses to argue about the language of a community she does not represent, adopting a tone-deaf approach to an invitation for words of encouragement. Although the end of the talk sees the two shake hands relatively cordially, it is not a flattering or compassionate moment.

Despite all of this, Davies' talk does leave room for optimism. Although Davies was only directly challenged by one advocate for the LGBTQ+ community, a sense pervaded the event that she is conscious of LGBTQ+ and student sensibilities on this sensitive issue. For example, Davies' use of gender reaffirming terminology, her tempering of some of her former sentiments about Lia Thomas, and diligence in professing her sympathies for the struggles of the transgender community demon-

strate the kind of awareness brought about through protest and activism, such as the interruption of Kathleen Stock's appearance at the Oxford Union and the SU's LGBT campaign callout post. The result was that the voice of student LGBTQ+ activists was 'present' in the room, even at an event that saw limited attendance by Oxford students because of the vacation. One comment in the mums.net forum read, "Oxford, eh? I hope that a horde of screeching blue hairs doesn't turn up to ruin the event." Perhaps we should see this 'blue-haired Oxford effect' as a small win for activism.

What should we make of these observations? It is difficult to be an activist. It is often the case that the activist space feels dark and defeatist. Hopefully, the indications that Davies is more conscious and attuned to the sensibilities of an LGBT audience suggest that activism has worked to the effect of forcing public figures to be held accountable for their language. The movement should take some pride in that accomplishment.

However, the subdued atmosphere at the Sheldonian and the framing of Davies' potentially trans-exclusionary arguments reflects an uncomfortable reality. There is talk everywhere of a 'tide turning' towards the Conservative position on the sports issue. Sharron Davies states her conviction that she would not have been platformed at the Oxford Literary Festival even just two years before. Sports committees are increasingly banning transgender athletes from competing with their cisgender counterparts, without an effective solution having been reached.

I reflect on the quiet and uncontested filter of people into the Sheldonian, the sparse ticket queues. The event is not even close to selling out. The initial storm of debate about the inclusion of transgender athletes seems to be fading away. I hope that we might capitalise on the increasingly omnipresent concern for accountability to enter a compassionate debate on the right way forward, rather than leaving the decision to be quietly made uncontested in the boardroom of the Olympic committee. It is essential to prevent such significant cultural moments from sliding quietly under the radar. But inevitably we are forced to accept the classic, if hard-to-swallow reality that there is still more work to be done.

Image: Sharron Davies in *The Optimist*.

Image Credit: Pebble Bay Entertainment / CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Fashion

Nailed it! The evolution of nail art at our fingertips

Connie Hilton and
Aniya Boranbay

Nail art has truly taken the world by storm. With over 233 million people sharing their designs with #nails on Instagram, it is clear that this is not just a passing trend. In fact, it is one of the oldest trends to ever exist! Dating back to as early as 5000 B.C, the evolution of nail art is a fascinating exploration of beauty standards through the ages. What is now an obsession with jewelled acrylics, relaxing manicures and intricate gel designs began as an expression of complicated social expectations. When we delve into this complex history, we uncover the deep political entanglements that come with this ancient trend. It is not as pretty as a pedicure!

Surprisingly, nail art began in an era that was almost as dominated by beauty standards as the one we live in now: ancient Egypt. Henna was used on the hands and nails as not only a way to display status amongst the elite, but as a natural supplement, believed to have medicinal qualities.

Women of the lower classes used more neutral shades, while the upper classes had access to deeper, brighter shades that conveyed seductiveness and wealth. This is where nail art's association with femininity began.

However, nail art was not exclusive to women in every ancient culture. Male soldiers in Babylonia adorned their nails with black and green kohl as a symbol of ferocity. Archaeologists have even uncovered a manicure adorned with solid gold dating back to this period. In the 21st century, precious metals and gemstones are employed as a fancy decorative feature, but they were originally used as a weapon in these ancient wars.

The first recorded instance of nail art as we see it today was actually the Inca Empire. Spanning across the 15th and 16th century, the Incas painted their nails with eagles. Although this had much more societal significance than the cartoons we often see nowadays, these intricate and tiny designs have hugely impacted the modern industry.

A fascinating figure in the history of nail art is the Empress Dowager Cixi of China. During her reign

from 1825 to 1908, she was instantly recognisable with her six inch long, decorated nail guards, made of solid gold and jewels. These protected her long nails, which were a symbol of her wealth as they indicated that she did not take part in manual tasks that would easily cause breakages.

The manicure as we know it today stemmed from a European podiatrist, Dr Sitts, who adapted a dental tool for use on nails. This created what we know today as the orangewood stick, a staple tool in any modern nail technician's toolkit. Sitts' niece then expanded upon her uncle's invention, creating a full nail care system and reaching the USA. Salons started to become more mainstream around this time, allowing nail care to become accessible to a wide range of demographics and social classes. Apart from salons, many started doing their nails at home as the first nail varnishes began to hit the consumer market.

The first modern intricate nail designs began with the advent and emergence of acrylic nails in the 1950s. Acrylic nails in the USA quickly became a sign of femininity and style amongst African Ameri-

can women. Donyale Luna featured acrylic nails on her 1966 *Vogue* cover; she was the first Black woman on the cover of *Vogue*. Acrylic nails evolved along the disco culture of the 1970s as artists like Donna Summer, Diana Ross and Millie Jackson sported bright red acrylic nails as part of their style. When Florence Griffith Joyner, a former nail artist, won Olympic gold wearing six inch acrylic nails, news headlines were abuzz with discussions of how her nails matched her running gear. Bright and intricate nails were not yet in the mainstream, therefore Joyner's nails became a big focal point of her Olympic journey.

Nail art's popularity was once again boosted by musical artists in the late 1990s and early 2000s as rappers like Missy Elliot and Lil Kim were seen with acrylic nails in their music videos and concerts. Nail art now is more varied and popular than ever, especially with the rise of social media, as everyone from at home nail enthusiasts to celebrity nail technicians can share their art with the world. Everywhere from Pinterest to Instagram to TikTok is filled with nail inspiration; there is



no shortage of designs for every type of person.

Clearly, the history of nail art is more complex than a gel manicure! It has represented social and cultural values for millennia, before becoming a stellar industry in the 20th century. Much like classical art has developed over time, nail art is constantly evolving and will certainly have a fascinating future.

Image Credit: Public Domain via Pexels.

Music

Men used to go to war – now they DJ

Zaynab Ravat

Why are so many people becoming DJs? This recent obsession has taken the world – and now Oxford – by storm. Love it or hate it, everyone is doing it (or knows someone who is) which begs the question, why?

The term DJ, meaning 'Disk Jockey', originates from vinyl mixing on turntables, however with the digitisation of music, DJing now emblematises the act of innovating music in a live setting, connecting tracks and audiences in real time. Technological development means that brand new decks can be bought for as little as £100. Although these are smaller and simpler, as their price would suggest, they still provide decent reward and are vastly more accessible for aspiring DJs.

Technology has also changed the way we listen to music. MTV and YouTube have become relics, replaced by the growth of streaming services such as Spotify and Soundcloud, alongside social media platforms like TikTok combining music and content. This shift away from visual medium has helped broaden the genres we listen to, as the pop music of A-List performers with the highest video production budgets no longer dominate the charts. Eclectic playlists shifting from the giant music studios to more niche

scenes have become commonplace and trendy. Independent artists are in the best age to be noticed. People who start off making music from their bedrooms – think PinkPantheress who uses GarageBand – are now selling out venues across the globe. Stories like these become inspirations for a new generation of aspiring musicians, but with this influx to an already oversaturated market, it is easy to fade into a blur of newcomers.

But what if you are in your twenties, passionate about music



ing back to the 2010s, DJs like Marshmello and DJ Khaled were collaborating with the most famous names – Selena Gomez, Justin Bieber. Let's not forget *Faded* by Alan Walker which was heard on every high street on the planet, featuring the Norwegian singer Iselin Solheim, who is of course a lot more obscure than the previous mentioned – yet the song skyrocketed. This suggests that it was less about the status of who they were collaborating with, and more about the familiarity and trendy structure that a pop singer could provide, pushing a song onto the mainstream radar.

Nowadays, we are seeing more and more DJs reaching fame for their solo projects. DJs are no longer a hoard of middle aged scruffy men, broken up by faceless enigmas like Marshmello, or awkward nerds like Skrillex. TikTok has propelled a less conventional wave of DJs to fame. Peggy Gou, for example, shot to fame with (*It Goes Like*) *Nanana* which essentially became the song of summer 2023, and her immersion into the sphere of fashion has also made her a distinguishable and chic personality. Now sporting almost twelve million monthly listeners on Spotify, she is one of the most highly regarded DJs of this year, paving the way for female DJs in this grossly male-dominated sphere. In particular, the jungle-esque soundscapes

and keen to get your own content out there, but you lack traditional musical talent? You never learnt to play an instrument and you can't sing to save your life. Whilst this used to be a huge barrier, you can master Rekordbox and a Pioneer mixer in a fraction of the time and price of an instrument, and work with pre existing tracks to connect your taste to your audience.

In the past, DJs' collaborations with pop artists were generally the most significant way of propelling them into the mainstream. Think-

Cherwell Introduces... Phoebe Blue

Joseph Lomax

Joining me this week is Phoebe Blue, a 2nd year classicist at Balliol, singer-songwriter, and bassist. Meeting me on Saturday afternoon, Phoebe told me all about her neo-soul sound, her first busking experience at age nine, and the importance of songwriting as a mode of emotional expression.

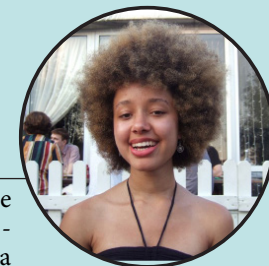
Please introduce yourself!

I'm Phoebe Blue, I do classics at Balliol, I'm in my second year and I'm also a singer-songwriter who plays bass. I mostly play music in the genres of jazz, neo-soul, r&b, but my music taste is widespread...eclectic!

Who is your biggest musical inspiration?

As a songwriter, Aimee Mann. I think that the way she writes her lyrics is so beautiful, when you listen to them it just gives you that feeling - her musicality is also incredible.

As a singer, I find Nina



Simone incredible - a basic answer, but it's basic for a reason!

What has your experience at Oxford been like musically?

I was very lucky to get into the music scene quite early on. From first term I was in DFO (Dot's Funk Odyssey), Oxford University Jazz Orchestra, and Doubletime. Performing with a jazz orchestra is something I'd never done before. Being able to learn about my voice, and how I work with other people and why has been so important. You cannot do this - music - alone, you need people around you. Every musician should value that. Music is, after all, communicating. Especially in a jam, where nothing is prepared.

Read the full article at [Cherwell.org](https://cherwell.org)

Image Credit: Phoebe Blue.

Follow Phoebe Blue!

Instagram: @ph0eblue

of Nia Archives revitalised the genre, earning her multiple awards, and Jayda G's gorgeous house track *Both of Us* was nominated for a Grammy.

For those interested in music, DJing has become a viable hobby to impress your friends with at house parties or for taking some ostentatious Instagram photos behind the decks (guilty!). As always, with every trend venturing into the mainstream, its popularity is ac-

companied by its fair share of hate. I am sure we have all joked that 'men used to go to war, now they DJ', or vowed to never fall victim to this epidemic, but like it or not - its rise is inescapable, and I don't think it is close to dying down soon. In fact, I think it is only growing, but rather than being cynical, I am excited for what new music is to come.

Image Credit: Public Domain via PickPik.

Art

The Christ Church Picture Gallery: Review

William Acharyya

Oxford proudly boasts, undoubtedly, one of the best cultural scenes of any city in the United Kingdom. From the Ashmolean to the Natural History Museum, there is no shortage of ways to spend an afternoon soaking up centuries of history; all without spending a penny. There is, however, a lesser-known and equally exciting place which few students (or tourists) have yet to discover.

The Christ Church Picture Gallery has free entry for Oxford students. It offers a chance to view one of the most impressive college art collections, with pieces spanning the 14th to 18th centuries, beautifully displayed in a semi-subterranean gallery designed by Sir Phillip Powell and Hidalgo Moya. Tucked away in the back of the college, it is easy to miss the gallery as visitors must enter through Canterbury Gate, opposite Oriel college and, from there, signs guide you to the entrance.

The gallery comprises three

distinct rooms that guide visitors through the spaces, beginning with the earliest works. Some of the most captivating pieces are a number of fragments extracted from *Scenes of the Lives of Hermits*, a sprawling work of the Tuscan and Florentine Schools created c.1440-1450. Composed of tempera on panel, this work is a prime example of the more you look, the more you see. There are countless figures depicted, each illustrating various stories and allegories from the Bible. Amongst them, it is possible to spot monks, saints, and comically reptilian devil figures, which have maintained their brilliant detail and colour despite being almost six hundred years old.

As you progress through to the second room of the gallery, prepare to be struck by perhaps the most spectacular, and maybe grotesque, painting in the collection at Christ Church, Annibale Carracci's *The Butcher's Shop* (c.1583). The painting is monumental in scale at almost 2x3 metres and it depicts the interior of a butcher's shop with two butchers, possibly

the artist's brother Agostino Carracci and cousin Ludovico Carracci. The Carracci family were influential in the rejection of the Mannerist style and were crucial in altering the course of Italian art. The importance of direct observation from nature, as stressed by Carracci is reflected in *The Butcher's Shop* where he employs a limited palette of earthen colours instead of the brilliant unnatural hues associated with the prevailing Mannerist style. The painting is also of note for its depiction of tradesmen in a dignified, ceremonious demeanour which is distinguishable from earlier satirical everyday subjects. *The Butcher's Shop* takes pride of place in its current spot within the gallery, yet for a long time the painting was hung in the college kitchen before it was recognised for its artistic value in the 20th century.

Filippino Lippi's *The Wounded Centaur* (late 15th century) continues the evolutionary trajectory seen in Renaissance art. Lippi, a close associate of Botticelli, belonged to a cohort of Florentine artists who pioneered innovative

approaches to painting. Notably, the painting devotes significant attention to the background, featuring caves and reflections in the sea. This reflects a newfound interest in depicting geological formations, a departure from the typical focus of Renaissance painting on the primary subject. Moreover, Lippi's rendition of the story diverges from the traditional narrative found in *Fasti Book V* by Ovid. In Ovid's telling of the story the centaur Chiron sustains a fatal wound while examining the poisoned arrows of Hercules, tainted by the venom of the mythological Hydra. In Lippi's version, the centaur is shown inspecting not the arrows of Hercules but the quiver of Cupid, which is perhaps the artist's warning to the viewer about the dangers of love.

The gallery not only plays host to impressive pieces on canvas but also on paper. Amongst the collection are works by well-known artists such as Albrecht Dürer and Leonardo da Vinci. Few national museums can claim to house works by such giants of Renaissance drawing. For this



reason, amongst the many others, it is surprising how few students that I have spoken to have given this hidden gem of a gallery a visit. If you find yourself wondering what to do this Trinity, the Christ Church Picture Gallery is open Thursday to Monday and entrance it is completely free for members of the University, where tickets can be booked online

Image Credit: PDM 1.0 DEED via Collections - GetArchive.

WHAT'S ON?

Stage: *The Oxford Revue: Live and On Air* @Jericho Tavern

1st - 2nd May

Come down to the Jericho Tavern to witness a live recording of the Oxford Revue!

Fashion: *Oxford Fashion Gala*

@The Randolph Hotel

8th May

Back for another year, join OFG at the Randolph Hotel for a night which promises to be filled with Oxford's creative talent!

Film: *Challengers*

@Phoenix Picturehouse & Odeon & Curzon Westgate
Starring Zendaya as Tashi Duncan and Mike Faist as her husband and professional tennis champion on a losing streak, the two plot an anticipated redemption.

Artificial insights: Decoding diversity and redefining art history with AI

Phillipe Luna

Being an avid art enthusiast, I've always been fascinated by the power artistic expression has to push boundaries and connect people from different backgrounds. Recently, however, I've noticed a groundbreaking shift in the art world—a revolution driven by the intersection of creativity and technology. This revolution, spearheaded by integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into artistic processes, is not only redefining the way we create and consume art but also amplifying voices that have long been marginalised. Imagine strolling through a gallery adorned with vibrant canvases, each telling a unique story inspired by different cultures, experiences, and perspectives. Now, envision these artworks not only created by human hands but also by AI algorithms, blurring the lines between human creativity and machine intelligence. This phenomenon is not science fiction; it's the reality of contemporary art.

A pioneering example of this synergy is the project *DeepDream*, developed by Google's AI researchers. *DeepDream* uses neural networks to generate mesmerising, dreamlike images that defy conventional aesthetics. By feeding these networks with vast datasets of images ranging from Renaissance masterpieces to modern digital art, the program learns to interpret and reinterpret visual patterns, allowing it to challenge our perception of reality. But AI's impact on art extends far be-

yond the world of abstract imagery. It's also revolutionising storytelling and narrative development. Take, for instance, the film *Zone Out*, which was created using an AI program called Benjamin and premiered in 2018. The film showed us how AI can be used to weave together narratives inspired by various cultural mythologies and, consequently, result in a cinematic experience that celebrates the richness of global storytelling traditions.

AI has also been democratising artistic expression by providing a platform for underrepresented voices to be heard. Organisations like Artrendex leverage AI algorithms to analyse art collections and identify patterns of cultural representation. This allows Artrendex to highlight artists whose work may have been overlooked due to systemic biases. For instance, these projects have the potential to uncover a previously unknown female sculptor from the Re-

naissance whose work was overshadowed by her male contemporaries. By promoting diversity and inclusivity in the art world, AI is challenging traditional hierarchies and fostering a more equitable creative landscape.

In the world of art history, it is no secret that the narratives framed around cultural representation have, more often than not, been shaped by biases and Eurocentric perspectives. However, with the rise of AI technologies, there's newfound hope for decoding diversity and uncovering hidden stories within art collections worldwide. By harnessing AI's analytical power, we can challenge the status quo and reshape our understanding of the past.

Another remarkable AI application right now is the *Art Genome Project* by Artsy—a comprehensive database that utilises machine learning algorithms to analyse and categorise artworks based on various criteria, such as artistic style, cultural

origin, and historical significance. With a bold and ambitious vision, this project seeks to create a more inclusive and nuanced way to appreciate art, emphasising the connections between artists across different cultures and eras.

Perhaps the most impactful use of AI when it comes to reshaping art history narratives lies in its ability to uncover overlooked artists and artworks from underrepresented communities. Initiatives like the *AI for Cultural Heritage* project by Microsoft use machine learning algorithms to find patterns of cultural representation within digitised art collections in order to highlight marginalised voices from this new knowledge. By shedding light on artists who have been historically and systematically sidelined or ignored, AI can challenge longstanding narratives and enrich our collective understanding of artistic legacy.

As we embrace AI's transformative potential in art history, it's essential to recognise that technology alone cannot dismantle systemic biases or promote inclusivity. However, for today, I want to emphasise that by using AI's abilities to partner with diverse communities and foster interdisciplinary collaboration, we gain the power to spark positive change and pave the way for a more equitable and diverse artistic landscape. In the age of AI-enhanced art, the possibilities for creativity and cultural exchange are limitless—and inclusive.

AI Generated Tiger Image Credit: Public Domain Via Wikimedia Commons.



Stage

Long Day's Journey Into Night – Review

Ralph Whitworth

CW: Drug and alcohol abuse

I walked into the Wyndham Theatre's production of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* by Eugene O'Neill half-expecting a night at the London Theatre like any other. Beer in hand, I filed in with my family to the gorgeously decorated auditorium and sat watching the stage with the rest of the buzzing crowd, waiting for the show to begin. Initially, there wasn't much to note - the set is a sparsely furnished wooden room, almost grey in colour, remarkable only in its plainness. The initial action was somewhat slow-paced as well. Brian Cox of *Succession* fame plays James Tyrone, an ageing Irish-American actor and property developer, with Patricia Clarkson as his wife Mary - recently recovered from an unnamed illness - and Anthony Boyle and Daryl McCormack as his two unruly sons. We're initially presented with a rather pleasant family set-up, with acting that didn't stand out - I found Clarkson's performance in particular rather clunky, though, as later events were to show, this was entirely deliberate on her part.

It takes time for the plot to unravel in this extremely long play - a three hours and ten minutes run time, with a single interval of

only fifteen - but unravel it steadily does. In a series of sinister underhand comments and hints of suspicion and suggestion, O'Neill's masterful script slowly opens the lid on how fearsomely dysfunctional this seemingly-innocuous family really is. Mary's recent illness is slowly revealed to have actually been a period of crippling morphine addiction, and Clarkson's jittery and unsteady portrayal of her at the start is symptomatic of its recent resurgence. Younger son Edmund, played by Boyle, does not have a mere cold, but is likely suffering from consumption as a result of his heavy drinking lifestyle (his

ungenerous and unsympathetic character is partly to blame for his family's ills. The play is long, and slow-paced in the first half, but never boring. With each subtle reveal the tension mounts and mounts, aided heartily by the high-strung performances of all the actors. A perfect storm is clearly brewing - one which finally breaks in the second half...

O'Neill is known to be heavily influenced by Shakespeare, and this is clearly evident in his portrayal of bitter drunken arguments and moments of deep emotional pathos which punctuate the last two acts of this play. They are relentless and they are devastating. I found particularly powerful the conversations between Boyle and McCormack, offering a gut-wrenching portrayal of the simultaneous beauty and destructiveness of familial love. Boyle, McCormack and Cox all offered spellbinding performances in this half, wrought with passion and heightened emotion. But particularly memorable was Clarkson, whose depiction of a mother slowly losing herself in the grip of morphine was absolutely heart shattering. Thankfully, comedy relief is at points offered by an enjoyable performance from the maid Cathleen, recognisable from *Derry Girls*. All in all, the eventual ending left me emotionally squeezed dry. I truly understood the power of catharsis then - it was

depressing story definitely discouraged me from getting another beer in the second half...). Older son James, played by McCormack, is a wayward alcoholic who spends much of his time in brothels, and Brian Cox gives a stunning performance as the elder Tyrone whose



Books

War, Peace and Writing

Sebastian Hall

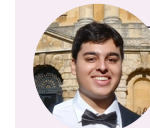
Throughout history, art has left an indelible cultural impact on humanity's collective understanding of war. Picasso's 'Guernica' is perhaps the most famous manifestation of this; but the richer historical tradition is certainly written, with a heritage as far back as Homer's Iliad and its depiction of the Trojan War. As the outbreak of conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza over the past two years have made the public more cognizant of modern warfare and while other conflicts continue to elude that public attention, such as humanitarian tragedies in Myanmar, Sudan and the Sahel it seems the right time to reflect on the power of words to poignantly portray the horrors of war for a civilian audience.

Mark Rawlinson argues that modern war literature is "incontestably a literature of disillusionment", something he attributes to Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869). This "disillusionment" that comes through in the war narratives was true of Tolstoy's own

military past, fighting in the Crimean War during the Siege of Sevastopol (1854-55); but crucially, it also sets a precedent for modern war writing, which does away with the romantic, top-down narratives of battles that had dominated previously. Despite the grandeur of *War and Peace* as a 'historical novel' (a label its author would have disputed), Tolstoy grounds its scenes in the horrible realities of war and with themes of ignorance and cowardice grounded in a realism akin to Stendhal's depiction of the Battle of Waterloo in *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839). As a historian, Tolstoy repudiated the two most prominent theories of history that of 'great men', and that of Hegelian determinism to demonstrate the helplessness of soldiers against the "antagonistic relation" of their countries. It is through this that Tolstoy gives a bleak picture of war, rooted in its grim realities of unglamorous death and wanton destruction: a picture that had a lasting impact on war literature; specifically, its power to resonate with readers' emotions and senses of morality.

Modernist literature of the early

20th century, over which the First World War cast an unmistakable shadow, also reflected a 'morality' which was rooted in the 'reality' of war. Modernist culture itself represented the "cumulative trauma" (Adam Phillips) of that war, which like *War and Peace* sought to reject any notions of heroism or romance in the Great War; this was made clear with the powerful anti-war message of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). The war literature of the early 20th century, while imbued with a distinctly modernist sense of nihilism, also harked back to Tolstoy's insistence on the futility of war: Andrei's "jeremiad" (Rawlinson) on page 775 is not dissimilar from some of the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon. Modernism in literature involved the desire to overturn traditional modes of representation in light of war's horrors, placing the soldier's experience at the fore to emphasise the true depravity of which mankind is capable. While modern media exposes the terrible humanitarian cost of wars to the public through ever-more-accurate photos and videos. In the days before technology there was something uniquely powerful about the written word in questioning the value, cost and morality of warfare. This liter-



Book of the week: *Disraeli*, By Robert Blake
Hassan Akram

Robert Blake's *Disraeli* (1966) is said to be the greatest Prime Ministerial biography ever written. It gives a sweeping account of Benjamin Disraeli from his youth as a novelist and man about town to his parliamentary successes at "the top of the greasy pole" (his own phrase). It's a bulky tome, with a few too many chapters on Victorian tax, but the duller bits are skippable, and there are enough good anecdotes to make it worth reading.



Film of the week: *The Remains of the Day*
Billy Jeffs

Emma Thompson and Anthony Hopkins co-star in this 1930s period drama, the last great film from the iconic Merchant-Ivory partnership. Adapted from the Kazuo Ishiguro novel of the same name, the film explores the friction that arises between the servants of a country home when they disagree with their master's actions. You'll come for the lavish sets and beautiful cinematography, but stay for the moving performances from the two leads.



Music of the week: *No Me Queda Más*, by Selena
Joseph Lomax

Whilst doom scrolling in 0th week, impatiently waiting for my friends to be done with their collections, I was reminded of this beautiful song by the Tejano icon Selena Quintanilla. On what would have been her 53rd birthday, I decided to delve into her discography. The song is an emotive renunciation of love, filled with longing, and painful acceptance of unrequited love. Despite the anguish, you cannot help but get swept up in the joy of the music - thoroughly recommended for those either pining, longing, or rotting!

so overwhelming as to actually be refreshing upon its close.

Long Day's Journey Into Night is not an easy play to watch. At times, it is in fact, excruciating. It is not fun, it is not hopeful, and it is totally unrelenting. But it is masterfully written and masterfully acted from all parties, and I left it somehow feeling better about myself. For a Shakespearean inspired tragedy rewritten for the modern

era, I would advise you to look no further. Though maybe mentally prepare yourself for the emotional rollercoaster...

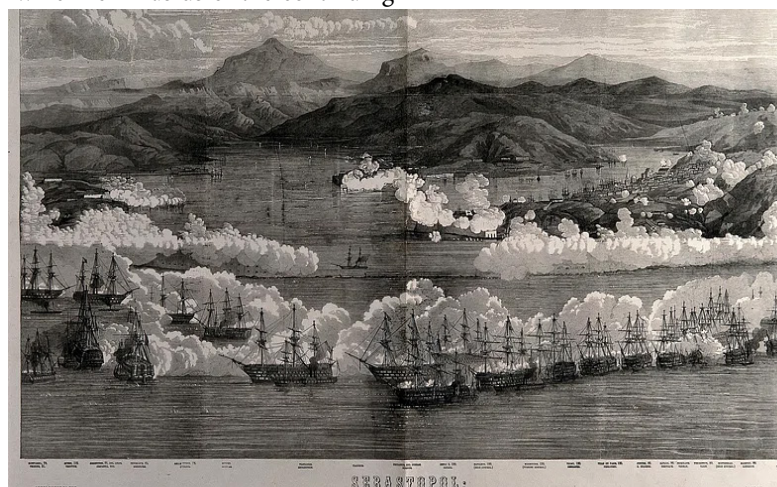
Long Day's Journey Into Night runs at the Wyndham Theatre, Charing Cross Road, London until 8th June.

Image Credit: Thomas Berg / CC BY-SA 2.0 DEED via Wikimedia Commons.

power of literature to act as a cultural bulwark of peace. Yet while the writings of Tolstoy, Sassoon and Martin Luther King present necessarily bleak anti-war messages, we must not lose sight of the power of war literature to bring hope during the bleakness of war itself. As Berthold Brecht pointed out in 1939, there would be singing during the dark times ahead about the dark times, but singing nonetheless.

Image: Tolstoy's *Sevastopol Sketches*, published in 1855, recorded his experiences during the siege of Sevastopol in the Crimean war.

Image Credit: CC0 1.0 DEED via Rawpixel.



Film

Film around the world: Turkey's Atıf Yılmaz

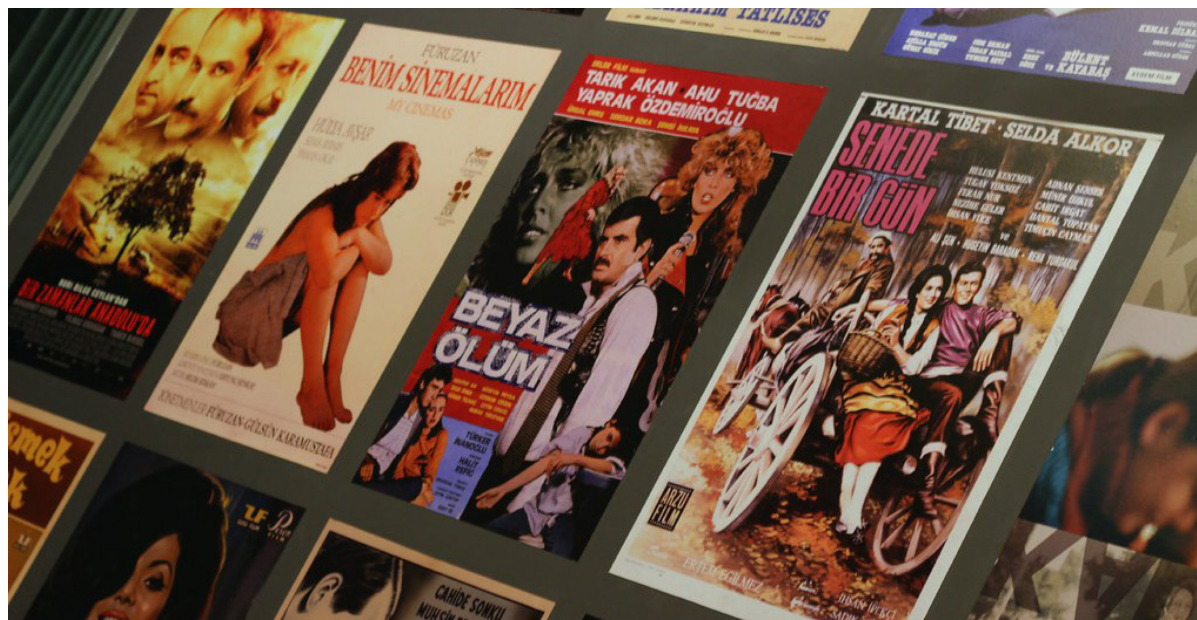
Ali Sezgin

Atıf Yılmaz was a Turkish film director. Until his death in 2006, he was extremely prolific and directed films across every decade of Turkish cinema starting in the 1950s. He directed more than a hundred films in total – I'll write about two of them.

Two of the films he made during the 'Yesilçam Era' (the name given to what is usually considered the 'golden age' of Turkish cinema between the 1960s and the '70s) were *Kibar Feyzo* and *Selvi Boylum*, *Al Yazmalım* both of which were released in 1978.

Kibar Feyzo ('kibar' means 'kind' or 'polite') is a comedy film. It stars Kemal Sunal, who is probably the best-known Turkish comedian. *Kibar Feyzo* may be the funniest film I've ever seen, although most of its comedy is derived from the ridiculously clever wordplay that I'm not sure a non-native speaker would comprehend. At any rate, if you're not Turkish and have decided to watch this film, you'll still find it funny and have a good time. You might just not laugh at every other sentence like I did.

Kibar Feyzo's cinematography is drenched in sunlight. It has a bombastically light-hearted soundtrack and a very cheerful cast of characters. Everything about it is jolly, or so it would seem. *Kibar Feyzo* is about a poor villager returning to his home village after military service. He is Feyzo, and he is determined to marry Gülo, the girl he loves. However, he is forced to come up with an enormous sum



of money to appease Gülo's father and receive her hand in marriage. Penniless, Feyzo sets out to secure every bit of money he can, and funny shenanigans start happening from there.

However, *Kibar Feyzo* is also about domestic violence, corruption, ethnic persecution, the exploitation of workers, misogyny, police brutality, and so on. It's one of my favourite comedies, a brilliant exercise in dark humour. Across its 83-minute runtime, its satire and over-abundance of jokes never gets boring. You might find yourself so caught up in Feyzo's amazingly humorous voice-over that by the end of the film, you'll forget that you are watching a flashback. In this last scene at the police station, Feyzo delivers such an abruptly devastating final line that suddenly the film isn't so fun-

ny anymore. Why is he there? I'll let you find that out.

Selvi Boylum, *Al Yazmalım*, Yılmaz's other 1978 feature, is best known internationally with the title *The Girl with the Red Scarf*. I dare not write down its very lengthy literal translation lest I incur the wrath of the *Cherwell* Editor Team. Unlike *Feyzo*, this film doesn't pretend to disguise itself as a comedy. It is a sad – yet very engaging – story of a woman named Asya, who falls in love with a man named Ilyas, has a child with him, and promptly gets cheated on. Asya is in an inconvenient situation: her family has disowned her because she married someone not of their choosing, so she can't go back there. She has a son now whom she must take care of, so she can't just take the bus to the big city and hope to find work and a place

to stay. This is where a third party enters her story: another man, who teaches her the actual definition of love, or she teaches it to both men – I don't know, the last twenty minutes of this is very emotionally intense. Another great thing about *The Girl with the Red Scarf* is that it has the best theme song I've ever heard. I listen to it most days. This is a much better-known film in Turkey than *Feyzo*, which is my personal favourite.

These are two of the four feature films Yılmaz directed in 1978. *Feyzo* was banned for ten years before it became a cult classic, and *The Girl with the Red Scarf* is now hailed as one of the masterpieces of Turkish cinema. I'd say both of them deserve the latter's treatment, and so do many other films of his.

Image Credits: CC BY 2.0, Richard Ha via Flickr.

Where are you from?

This week, Fay Lorien discusses discovering her ancestral culture



After first learning about the full extent of my family history, I arrived at a point where I started to question my very existence. Who would I be now, if I'd found out earlier, if my culture had been shared with me more? I repeat what I've been saying for years: 'I've never really felt Russian.'

My mother surprises me by answering: 'Me neither.' My mother lived a very traditionally Russian life until she was 18. Though having German ancestry in light of the Cold War wasn't always easy for her.

This made me consider the concept of identity and nationality in general.

Identity has always been a hard concept to grasp for me. How do we choose to define ourselves? It makes sense to start with your home, the environment you grew up in. My background though, is complicated and I have always dreaded answering the 'Where are you from?' question. I struggle to figure out the exact information the person asking wants to know. Where I grew up? Where I was born? Where I live now? Where my family is from? Usually, my answer goes something like this: 'My mom is Russian and my dad is German and I grew up all over the place; Germany, South America, Cyprus' It's hard for me to narrow it down to a single country. How any of the countries I've spent my developing years in relate to my identity is an even more impossible question to answer.

However, I have never had to justify my identity or my presence in this country when asked where I am from. For people of colour this experience is unfortunately common.

My friend Malaika says this, in response to how she relates to the question:

'Some people ask me that, and when I say I'm from Leeds they're often like: but originally where are you from? I know what they want to hear, that my parents emigrated from Pakistan, but why should I be giving them a whole rundown of that every time?'

Does our nationality and background necessarily inform our very existence?

Places and people we grow up with certainly play a part in our development. For some people, their cultural background is a lot more straightforward than for others. As a walking identity crisis, I am willing to argue that's completely fine.

'People will sort of push this imposter syndrome on me. Like I have to choose one nationality or the other. But I think that's all just definitions we get stuck with' says Malaika.

The Source

Matchstick Cats

Matt Unwin

Mark and Trev were surrounded on the bed of the truck by old wooden beams and bits of furniture – debris of a life that wasn't theirs – and had positioned themselves amongst this so that they were looking backwards, watching the road unfurl behind the vehicle. Trev always insisted on facing backwards rather than ahead: he spent most of his life looking backwards, now, spent most of his life reliving old memories, on some subconscious level aware that they were slipping away from him all the time.

Forty miles to California.

As they bounced along the road, whilst Mark stared out at the featureless mountains in the distance, Trev was reliving an event that occurred sixty-four years ago in a kitchen in Oklahoma. He had become again that six-year-old boy smelling freshly baked bread and watching his mum slice a piece off for him to taste. Memories like these would float up from the depths of his mind randomly. He couldn't control when they came, and the rest of the time he couldn't access them, like a dark veil had drifted over them, so when they did come, he clung to them and wrung them dry, sucked the marrow from them, took in every detail. With the passage of time, the details of these memories had become worn and faded like an old photo. He focused hard, trying to remember the smell of the bread, the items on the kitchen counter, what was playing on the radio, his mother's face. He was trying desperately to will himself into the scene –

–and then the sound of the truck bounding over a pothole distracted him from the memory, and he forgot what he was thinking about. As quickly as it had surfaced, the moment was lost again.

He turned to Mark. 'Where we going to?'
'California.'

'Why we going there?'

'You said there was work there – remember?'

'Oh, okay.'

'I don't know where we're going after.'

'What you mean "where after"? There is no "after". If I said we're going to California, then we're going to California. I must have known where we was headed back then.'

'You said the same thing about Elk City, and we kept going on after that.' Mark paused. 'Do you even know where we started from?'

'Course I do,' Trev said, 'Tulsa.'

'Nah, we didn't start in Tulsa,' Mark shook his head. 'Your memory's gettin' worse.' He looked back out at the hills.

When Mark looked back, he saw that Trev was already lost again in some distant memory. The old man's clothes hung over him, caked in dust and dirt.

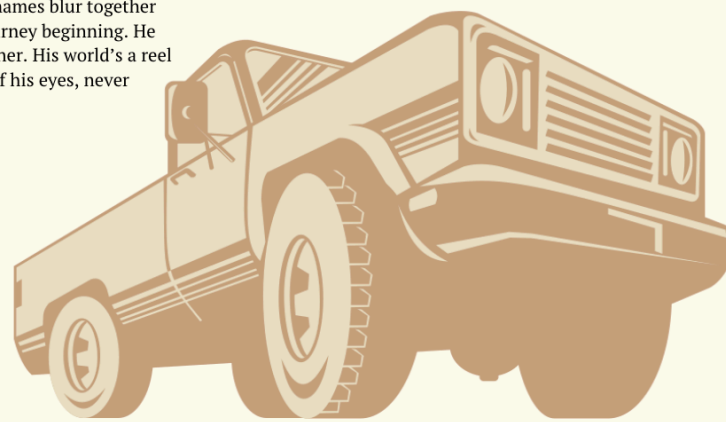
Only thing he remembers clearly now is the road, Mark thought. An endless road. The place names blur together for him. He doesn't remember the journey beginning. He probably can't imagine it ending neither. His world's a reel of road, endlessly unfurling in front of his eyes, never stopping.

Can't stay on the road much longer, he thought. No person can live like this, constantly shifting from one place to another, all in the hope that they'd find work. Even work picking cotton, that would have been enough. But they never did find anything. Yes, Mark thought, I could bow out at the next city, settle down, find something. Won't be much, but there'll be something. Trev'll continue on, probably, and he'll be fine.

But then when he looked back, he noticed Trev's overcoat had come undone at the top and was beginning to slip down over his shoulders. Trev had fallen asleep, completely oblivious.

Mark leant over and buttoned the coat back up. Only after it was done up did he return to staring out over the side of the truck at the unspooling road.

I could ditch him at the next town, he thought. They'd been all over the country. Tulsa. St Louis. Atlantic city. Santa Fe. Pueblo.



Cherwell's checklist

Our life editors list the worst excuses for failing to hand in a tute essay...

1 You're going through a breakup. Although it may feel like your world has ended, your tutor's certainly hasn't, and we doubt they'll understand why you were crying over that mullet-sporting Union hack all weekend. Surely some dense and existentialist reading was what you needed to prevent you from overthinking things? Why process your emotions when you can write about them in 1,500 words?

2 You've contracted the plague. For those of you aware that the plague died out in the late 17th century, feel free to insert any fictitious disease. Just be sure to select your phantom ailment with care; you best believe your tutor will have questions when you arrive for your tutorial lacking a neck brace and crutches. From this author's experience, a broken arm is your best bet.

3 Your laptop has ceased to function. You may try mixing it up with a subtle variation on the classic. Instead of a complete power outage, you take the nuanced approach – a malfunctioning outbox or inability to print. Unfortunately, all will lead to a raised eyebrow and minimal extension. We suggest claiming to have been a victim of laptop theft. Your tutor can't argue that those contract law notes weren't worth stealing.

4 Your dog has eaten your reading list. The only problem is that your dog is 200 miles away. Oh, and also that your digital reading list would make for a rather unappetising chew toy.

5 You've forgotten to turn the hands of your watch forwards. Easily done, and we admire your commitment to analogue time-telling. That this excuse can only be used once per year only adds to its credibility, but be wary: the sole hour you've gained may not be enough to read four articles and produce a mini-dissertation. Apologies for the late notice, but you'll have to wait until March 30th 2025 to try this one.

6 Eduroam has failed you once more. Ah, Eduroam. Perhaps the only credible excuse on this list. If there's anything that your tutor will sympathise with, it's a weak (or, more likely, non-existent) internet connection. This one works better for folks who don't live in the same staircase as their tutor.

'Women in STEM': Is this disempowerment?

Éilis Mathur

We've all heard the phrase 'woman in STEM'; the term is now so well-known that it has left its textbook definition behind and become a sort of half-ironic, half-genuine, inside joke. I'll use it to comfort my biologist friend through her multiple hour-long lab sessions. I'll even use it to refer to myself after I submit my latest linguistics essay (I know, not a real STEM degree). But even in these more ironic uses, the label 'woman in STEM' still carries connotations of merit and success. It's supposed to be a tool of empowerment: a reminder to women that even though STEM fields are often places of discrimination, they can overcome these difficulties. But more and more I'm beginning to realise that this is not the case at all. In fact, all the term 'women in STEM' does is disempower.

It is true that STEM fields are not usually welcoming environments for women. Not only are women grossly underrepresented, but even once the door is opened, obstacles persist: stereotypes, gender-biased assessment, and psychological pressure – to name just a few. We really should be looking for any possible way to rectify this. This is where the label 'woman in STEM' comes in – it offers women validation for their ability and accomplishments within this environment.

The idea of 'women in STEM' tends to encourage people to only view the work of women in STEM fields through a gendered lens, a perception with which the work of men is never tinged. More and more female scientists are expressing their

desire for their work to be valued in its own right and without this seemingly ineradicable gendered dimension. Friends of mine who study STEM degrees tell me about feeling as if they cannot shake off this aspect of their identity in their study. The term 'woman in STEM'

“The term ‘woman in STEM’ doesn't encourage them but serves as a constant reminder of the difficulties they face.”

doesn't encourage them but serves as a constant reminder of the difficulties they face. From male-dominated lecture halls to a lack of women role models in STEM, they are already painfully aware of this. And this tendency to focus on the hardships of women in STEM doesn't end even when you reach high-levels of success. Attending an all-girls school, I was frequently told about successful STEM women, such as Ada Lovelace and Katherine Johnson, during my school education. But these stories always seemed to focus on the obstacles they had to overcome to accomplish anything rather than on the accomplishments themselves. The stories I heard about successful men never did.

Empowering women in STEM, but not women in humanities,

is also undeniably problematic. While the success of an individual is not the absence of one's own, the encouragement of women in STEM fields has led to an inherently sexist depreciation of the work of women in the humanities. The term connotes a sense of superiority which unavoidably implies superiority over humanities. The binary distinction between STEM and the humanities is deeply embedded at all levels of education. They are pitted against each other; every student has to pick a side. I have experienced this distinction most acutely within my family. Both of my parents are doctors, while my sister and I have opted to pursue humanities; although lighthearted, there is a sense of competition. It usually comes out during typical familial arguments over board games, as both pairs assert their area of expertise to be superior. While meant in jest, it does show how deep this fight between STEM and humanities goes.

More often than not, STEM comes out victorious. STEM degrees are widely considered to be more valuable and employable, and as I'm reaching the end of the second year of my humanities degree, I'm experiencing first-hand the worry of 'what on earth am I going to do with a languages degree?' I used to see this fear as a reasonable one, and while there is some validity to it – STEM careers are typically some of the highest-earning – the difference is not quite so drastic as it's often made out to be. After all, the success of STEM students does not equate to the failure of the humanities students. Statistics showing that the proportion of STEM graduates who secured a job within a year of graduation is only 1% higher

than the proportion of those with humanities degrees prove this. So if STEM and humanities are of equal value, why does STEM always win? Granted several factors play a role, but it is no coincidence that the career path deemed less important is that which is female-dominated. I would argue that if it were STEM fields that tended to attract more women than men, the roles would be reserved.

'Women in STEM' may just be a group of words with good intentions behind it, but in reality, the label does not empower women in those fields or in any others. Rather, it bolsters a set of damaging and inhibiting notions for women in STEM fields, all while undermining the work of women in the humanities. Perhaps it is time to stop viewing the term as a feminist force, and instead start seeing it as a tool of disempowerment.

Image credit: Tima Miroshnichenko/ CC0 via Pexels.



Dear Cherwell, I am surrounded by pigs!

Dear Aunty, how do I tell my flatmates that their kitchen etiquette is disgraceful?

You think you know someone, consider them a friend, have accepted the quirks that make them an individual, only to be icked out by their kitchen etiquette. And not just platonically – opening a tin of beans with a pen, or eating a week-old opened yoghurt with a fork is grounds for a breakup. But the kitchen behaviour of the guilty flatmate teaches an important lesson. Too often we rush into things unprepared for the consequences. Perhaps you scrambled to find accommodation with your two-term friends for second year, caught up in fresher enthusiasm, only to discover you weren't the best fit for each other – inside and outside the kitchen.

And that's okay! While you can't ask someone to move out just because they're unable to distinguish plastics and cardboard from compostable waste, you can control how you react. To state a simple fact: everyone is different. We were all raised in different kitchens, and no amount of flat ice-breakers or dynamic WhatsApp group chat is going to synchronise an ideal flat kitchen culture. You may think their behaviour is disgraceful, but have you ever considered what they think of yours? Tolerance is key, even if they don't season their food (pure psychopathy) and leave the kitchen smelling of broccoli. Of course, if it's endangering your health or sanity, call it out. Nurturing a mould colony to rival the nation's insitute of microbiology isn't cool. Frankly, public shaming should be an option – especially for the physicist who left mouldy bolognese in my first

year kitchen for two weeks.

Whether in a house in Cowley or a teeny cupboard creatively labelled 'kitchen,' the culinary space can be a serious source of contention. But it doesn't have to be. Don't stew in your frustrations; let it be known what is bothering you. You'd like the dishes washed up? You're entitled to that much. But remember we all have tough weeks. When it becomes a burdensome pattern, argue your case. Certainly don't build a dossier of photographic evidence – but also, a little blackmail goes a long way. Can you get deaned for leaving grease smeared all over the oven?

We all delve into an unlabelled tub of butter for some cheeky spread, but don't think borrowing your flatmate's hand-crafted Sicilian olive oil, gifted for their birthday, will go down well. Perhaps the item really getting on your nerves is the infamous fridge.

For the last time, CLINGFILM YOUR MEAT. Protection is important, and you should make this clear to your flatmates. Don't stand idly by as your cheese rubs shoulders with 5% lean beef mince.

To soothe any student's fear of dying in a house fire (just me?), I implore you: TURN THE OVEN OFF. A kitchen vagabond with whom I cohabitated once put hash browns in the oven, only to take a nap, returning three hours later to blocks of McCain's finest charcoal. I get it. Your sleep schedule is a mess, but replacing the alarm clock with the smokey waft creeping under the door isn't the best choice.

I will leave you with this. The kitchen is a sacred space. It offers a break from mundane library shifts. Communicate with your flatmates, before your embittered scout locks you and them out!

Got a problem? Need some advice?

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

Navigating being a baby adult

Flo Johnston

After complaining that the Easter hunt had gotten too hard this year, my parents were quick to decide that it had in fact been my last hunt as I was an “adult” and it was “getting a bit ridiculous now”. I took this news super well and felt like my childhood had just died. Not that I had ever truly believed in an Easter bunny, but I did believe that I would always remain a child in the eyes of my parents. Coming to the slow realisation that I am now an adult, and have been for two years, is a reality that most people face at university, yet I can’t help but wonder when the word “adult” will be something I actually feel. Becoming mature and ‘adult-like’ overnight is not realistic, so instead, I’ve compiled a list of mini challenges to help me (and anyone else that also feels out of the adult loop) make the transition into the world of boredom that I imagine adulthood to be.

1. Become Linked-tf-in.

When I think of maturity, I think of a person who understands this app. I genuinely had never found anything so humbling in my entire life, especially when I was told that everyone could see that I’d been stalking them. Since then, I have wisened up slightly and no longer keep tabs on my enemies through this medium. Now I actually check my profile viewers, because obviously my flood of job offers are about to come through, and I feel like this is my grand entrance into the world of work.

2. Stop drinking squadka.

This is a really hard challenge to stick to, especially within the cost-of-living crisis that has made boujee cocktails a luxury of the past. However, I am well aware that a

“...a true adult would never be caught dead with a vodka, water, and drizzle of squash combo...”

true adult would never be caught dead with a vodka, water, and drizzle of squash combo drank out of a bop cup with a straw. Part of my dream for adult life consists of a love for red wine and neat whiskey, which I hope my tastebuds are going to magically start liking in the next couple of months. If not, I might just level up to a vodka, lime, and soda, because even that seems to have more of an air of superiority.

3. Buy a trench coat and wear it with chest.

The trench coat is the epitome of an adult wardrobe and, because of this, I obviously bought one when I came to Oxford in an attempt to not fall victim to the puffer coat epidemic. However, it quickly became apparent that wearing a trench coat is a mental battle which requires a level of confidence that I just don’t have.

I know that sounds ridiculous, but the amount of Sherlock Holmes, Inspector Calls related jokes I have lived through has made me feel like a child playing dress-up. Therefore, the day that I feel comfortable enough to strut around the streets with my detective coat billowing behind me will most certainly be the day that I see myself as a confident, mature young adult.

4. Stop using Snapchat as my main form of communication.

I actually am unsure how this is going to come about; do we all have to collectively agree to make the sad shift to WhatsApp and Facebook or is this an individual decision? I’m going to take a wild guess and say that the CEOs of this world don’t send daily red snaps backwards and forwards for no real reason. Instead, I imagine they communicate through concise WhatsApp messages ending

with “kind regards, Susan”. I don’t think I will cope well with this challenge, but I’m beginning to accept the impending doom of Snapchat. Let’s not mention TikTok – that’s a whole different sacrifice.

5. Complete a half-marathon.

Pretty self-explanatory really. I don’t know one mature friend who hasn’t become a runner overnight and casually signed up for this major life commitment. This is the pinnacle of dedication and precisely what adulthood is all about: mundane routines and a love for boring activities.

This brings me to the end of my whistle-stop tour of adulthood. I know there’s definitely more to adulthood than these trivial challenges but I hope that they will ease us into this terrifying, but exciting experience. Good luck!

Image credits: Bill Tyne / CC BY 2.0 via Flickr



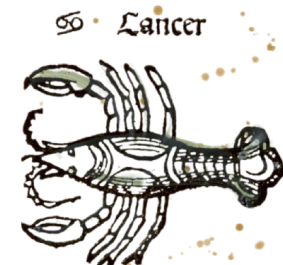
Be kind to yourself and others. That’s it.



The Duolingo bird is haunting you. Time to finally complete that French lesson you never finished. Take our advice before he darkens your college doorstep.



A mysterious parcel will be arriving in your pidge this week. Be careful to take everything it has to offer. Maybe check all the pidges just in case.



The sun is finally treating us. Grab a friend (or a questionable Hinge match) plus a few tins of crackers and get yourself on a punt.

Leo



We are not entirely sure what to do for you this week Leo. There are simply too many issues to address. Take our advice and have a relaxing night in.

Virgo



You are absolutely killing it this term. No notes from us – keep it up!

Soul stew: A column

Georgia Short explores the complex relationship between the body, love and respect

Content warning: disordered eating

I think self-love is overrated compared to self-respect, and it was *Peep Show* that taught me this: specifically, the episode called ‘Threeism’.

Mark, acting as a “slightly corrupt postman” between April and her husband, informs her that “Angus loves you but he doesn’t know if he respects you”, which, despite being made up on the spot in an urgent attempt to sabotage their relationship, is pretty much on the money. It was a pernicious dynamic, I realised, as a young teenager watching the show for the first time, that I recognised from real life. So it was great to have it so clearly articulated for me at this early stage! Now I could avoid it!

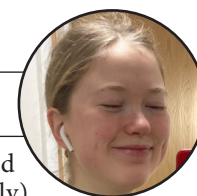
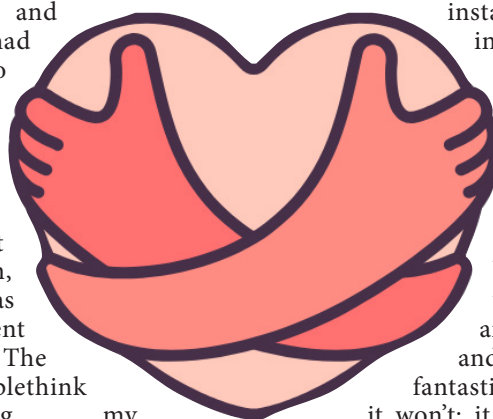
A few years later I developed an eating disorder; a few more years later, it dawned on me that I had basically been inflicting this dynamic on myself, the whole time, and that it had helped to perpetuate my illness. I certainly wasn’t cured at the moment of revelation, but there was a permanent impact. The cheery doublethink underpinning my disorder grew more laboured, and at the same time more fitful and frantic, as if the circuit was failing. My disorder felt logical:

its survival depended upon it feeling logical.

Love, including self-love, is not inherently logical; respect, I believe, is. In this instance the blunt instrument of actual cold, hard logic was what I needed. The thing is, love is fantastic because it will go to any lengths, and respect is fantastic because it won’t: it draws a line in the sand. I found I could feel affection for my body even when – in fact precisely because – it looked ridiculous (and really

quite sad, and undeniably ugly) to me. Developing a varicose vein at 16? Funny. Has to be.

Maybe this is more a problem with my perception of love, but, as I understand it, we can be absolutely horrible to the people we love. The people we respect, not so much. Love says: I will accept you, no matter what. Respect says: hello? What are you doing? You are just a human body. You can’t handle this, and anyway why would you want to? You were made for better things. Love is a bit mad, fundamentally: which is sort of the point, but not without its issues. Self-love might waver every now and again; self-respect, in my experience, is considerably harder to squash.



The ultimate guide to May Morning

Ted Holbrook

Dating back over five hundred years, May Day celebrations (traditionally) present an opportunity to herald in the arrival of spring. Whilst the tradition is now used as a clever marketing tool by nightclubs to get you dancing to even more cheesy ABBA tunes than usual, the historic element still welcomes in thousands of people

“With the clubs open for longer, May Day means starting the evening much later...”

from across the city and beyond. For the clubbers amongst you, as always, options are plenty. With the clubs open for longer, May Day means starting the evening much later – a wise choice if you wish to survive the night to come. Closing times are around five am, giving you

the chance to slowly make your way towards the location of the age-old tradition: Magdalen Bridge. As an alternative to the dancefloor, you could set out to conquer an in-college all-nighter with friends – maybe a movie marathon – before heading down to to cross paths with the club-goers.

In either case, as you reach the bridge, eyes occasionally flickering as fatigue sets in, you’ll encounter a wide variety of celebrations. Whether it is moving your sleep-driven body to the rhythms of samba music, or watching the Morris dancers shake their bells in accordance with age-old routines, the High Street is a spectacle for the weird, wonderful and everything in between. Following your arrival, you will await 6am, when Magdalen College Choir will be heard singing hymns for all to hear. After this is completed, you will have tackled the challenge that is surviving May Day.

And for those who woke up for the occasion, you can treat your adherence to an early start with a breakfast or coffee in the surrounding cafes, who purposefully open to welcome in the celebrants. Whilst you still probably won’t sleep as long as usual in this instance, it can be a wholesome way to enjoy the event and escape the hangover.

Importantly, for those choosing to sack off sleep for the sambuca, know your limits. Whilst there’s a

“...facing the dancefloor is not everyone’s idea of fun...”

high chance that will.i.am will try and convince you that ‘tonight’s gonna be a good night’ in the depths of ATIK’s main room, surviving May Day is no mean feat. Make sure to recognise when you need that glass of water

from the bar, so that the night remains as good as possible for as long as possible. On a similar note, devise your May Day plans around what works for you. While May Day celebrations can be incredibly enjoyable, facing the dancefloor is not everyone’s idea of fun, and even if it is, five hours will strongly challenge even the hard-core clubbers.

Whether you choose to celebrate with a five hour clubbing session or a night in, followed by an early wake, is up to you – but, at its heart, May Day offers a unique opportunity to embrace another one of the many Oxford traditions.

Image credit: Danny Chapman /CC BY 2.0 via Flickr.



♎ Libra



You may need to make a small pilgrimage to Port Meadow this week to touch some of their sweet sweet grass. Just a friendly pre-warning.

♏ Scorpius



You may be getting stuck in a rut. Spice things up. Try a new kebab van and venture out of college.

♐ Sagittarius



It’s about time you started being more assertive. Remember, we know all – and you are always right!

♑ Capricornus



Hip hop yourself over to Christ Church Meadow this week. Oh, and keep an eye out for any badgers. We hear they can be quite vicious.

♒ Aquarius



Make friends with at least two college pets, skip to your lectures and channel Beyoncé always.

♓ Pisces



You have gone a little off handle recently. Remember any incidents involving glow sticks? Of course you don’t. Maybe it’s time for a break.



Cherpser 1



Cherpser 2



Cherwell sent two lucky readers on a blind date. Find out how it went – from both perspectives...

Itrekked to the unknown land of Jericho for my *Cherwell* blind date and got a coffee. I’d never been up there before, so it was nice to escape the tourists and my collections-concerned college. Upon meeting, my first impression was that my date was very tall. She said hello before confirming I was from *Cherwell*, which was very confident and very sweet. She was also slightly late and I was greatly concerned I’d been stood up.

The café’s contactless wasn’t working, so we got free drinks, which was a nice perk. I knew it was going well when we both admitted to only being on Instagram reels, not TikTok.

The highlight of the date was that, as if by magic, she kept saying things I was about to say (including the phrase ‘worm metropolis’) and finding out we

were both pretty weird, bug-obsessed kids (hence the worm metropolis). Although, when I mentioned Ruby Granger, she didn’t know who she was, which made me feel incredibly lame. I’m not even a fan.

When I reflected on the date, in all honesty, we were more similar than I thought we’d be! My trust in *Cherwell* was relatively limited (sorry!) so I was pleasantly surprised. Whilst I don’t think a second date is on the cards, we had a really nice date and I’d like to be friends regardless.



My date was at Gail’s in Jericho. I’d never been before as it felt quite fancy – Emma Watson was spotted there apparently – but it turns out they do have delicious hot chocolate!

The date being one day before collections, the café was full of people working, so we had to sit outside. My date came across as friendly and chatty from the start, even though the initial “hello” from both of us was a little awkward.

We managed to cover a lot of ground, from women’s sport to Jojo Siwa (which I confess to bringing up).

The most embarrassing moment was when I started to suggest leaving after around an hour and a half and then torrential rain started pouring from the sky.

In the end, we decided to just wait it out under the cover

until it was safe to walk home, and luckily the chat was good enough that eventually I forgot that I had revision to be getting on with.

I’m not sure if a second date is on the cards, but I could definitely see us hanging out as friends, especially as we have some extracurriculars in common.



Looking for love?

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

LOVE EMPIRE

How to be a vegan – and an Oxford student

Thaejus Ilango

I have a disturbing secret to admit, which might cause people to think I'm crazy, and Katie Hopkins to think I'm smelly: I'm vegan.

I have been vegan for over four years, and I can honestly say I have never found it difficult. Choosing a path of compassion and non-violence feels much easier to me than the alternative, and I firmly believe a vegan lifestyle makes positive contributions towards one's mental and physical health, both human and non-human welfare, and the environment. What's more is that one does not need to consume animal products in order to live a healthy life.

I am often reminded how fortunate I am to come from a household that supports my dietary choices, and to have been raised on South Indian cuisine, which can be so effortlessly veganised. I have come to realise this is not the case for my peers from different backgrounds – but university can be the perfect opportunity to assert your independ-

ence and choose your own lifestyle.

Despite Oxford being a fairly small city, it has a surprising number of vegan-friendly places. Some recommendations from a certified vegan are: The Coconut Tree, Chick Pea, Delhish Vegan Kitchen, Dosa Park, and of course, Najar's (they have vegan mayo, ask for it!). A special mention goes to the banana bread French toast at the Handle Bar and the vegan doughnuts at Crosstown. However, I always wish there were more options, especially affordable ones, which perhaps only Najar's gets points for.

But what about students who want more than falafel and hummus? Cooking for yourself as a vegan is not nearly as expensive and difficult as people will tell you it is. While realistic meat alternatives can be pretty

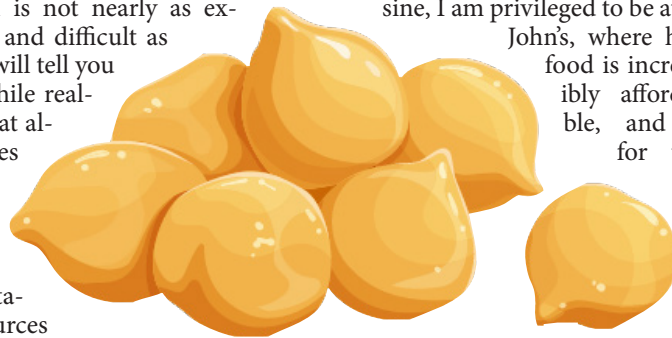
pricey, many staple sources

of protein for vegans, such as beans and lentils, are in fact cheaper than their animal counterparts. Once you've secured said affordable vegan goods, a quick google search for 'easy student vegan recipes' will show you that you are almost definitely capable of executing a simple dhal or chilli. In fact, there are many cuisines around the world which are not centred around animal products. Ethiopian, Indian, and Mediterranean cuisines, among others, have largely vegan foundations, showing that the idea that one cannot live on a diet that is simultaneously sustainable, nutritious, and tasty is entirely unfounded.

When it comes to college cuisine, I am privileged to be at St John's, where hall food is incredibly affordable, and – for the

most part – quite nice, with rare (devastatingly bad) exceptions (including a tempeh I still have nightmares about). A special shoutout goes out to the college café, at which the ratio of plant-based to non-vegan options is 2:1, not to mention the fact that there is always at least one vegan cake to choose from. By contrast, although I have generally had good experiences at formals, I have consistently been disappointed by my dessert. I just want to consume a meal that doesn't inflict pain and suffering on others, whilst still having a sweet treat that looks like what's in front of everyone sitting around me – is that too much to ask? Apparently so, considering the number of delicately plated fruit platters I've reluctantly eaten at the end of a John's formal.

My friends make fun of me, I am persistently asked 'where on earth do you get your protein from?' and I will, tragically, never have a post-club night kebab. But I will always prefer it to the alternative, and I am proud to be happy, healthy, and 100% plant based.



Balancing Act

George Exley brings you another lesson in healthy eating...



Fibre is the black sheep of your diet, unglamorous on the way in and much the same on its way out. But this is an important part of fibre's job; by going the distance and swelling with water en route, it bulks up your stools while keeping them soft and easy to pass. While this might not sound appealing, it is certainly more enticing than straining on your shared toilet at 2am wishing you hadn't skipped your Shreddies.

The UK government recommends including around 30 grams of fibre daily for a balanced diet, but the average UK person falls short of this, only consuming around 18 grams. Both soluble and insoluble fibres exist, each serving a different purpose. To simplify things: soluble fibre becomes gel-like by absorbing water and helps to lower blood glucose and cholesterol, while insoluble fibre moves throughout the full digestive tract to keep you regular. Plant-based foods often contain good amounts of both, particularly fruits or vegetables of which you eat the skin (containing lots of insoluble cellulose), as well as the juicy pulp with soluble fructans and pectin.

Increasing your daily fibre is relatively straightforward; simply swap out foods you already eat. Changing out processed white rice, bread and pasta for wholegrain varieties is a well-known practice, but there are other easy fixes. Replacing juices at breakfast time with whole fruits, or blending a smoothie yourself, will not only increase fibre but also help you better control your blood sugar. This is because drinking fruit allows you to consume a larger quantity than you may have otherwise, and the fibre in whole fruit will slow down fructose absorption to prevent insulin spiking. Add supplementary ingredients such as flaxseeds to your cereal or oatmeal to boost the fibre content. If possible, look for milled seed varieties, as this makes the soluble fibre inside the seed casings more accessible.

An increased-fibre diet is widely associated with improved gut motility and anti-inflammatory properties; a 2011 study even demonstrated an association with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer-related death. However, it is important not to go overboard; an excess of fibre can cause bloating as your gut bacteria struggle to cope with the increased demand. To avoid this, increase your intake slowly and pair with drinking plenty of water.



Vegan spring onion pancakes

Many cultures cook vegan. My dad made me vegan spring onion pancakes for years; I've adapted his instructions into an easy, low-cost recipe.



Mix 300g plain flour with ¼ teaspoon salt.

Add 200g of hot water to the flour and stir until there's no visible flour, then shape it into a ball. Leave to cool slightly while chopping the greens of two spring onions.

Next, knead the dough until it becomes smooth like a pizza dough. If the dough feels too wet, add flour as necessary. Add some oil on top of the dough and flour your workspace so the dough doesn't stick, then roll it out thin into a vague rectangle; the thinner your rectangle, the more layers the eventual pancake will have.

Brush a layer of oil on top and add a few pinches of salt and white pepper (and chinese five spice if you have it). Add your scallions on top. Roll your dough along the long side so you have a long cylinder/rope of dough. Cut the cylinder into five pieces (fewer if you want bigger pancakes, more if you want smaller) and flatten the pieces with your hands into a vague circle shape.

Pan fry the pancakes for about 3-4 minutes per side on medium heat until both sides have browned. Serve with soy sauce.

Coffeesmith: The pawfect café?

Theo Mama-Kahn

I can't think of many better ways to be welcomed into a café than with a wall of dog photos. Customers at Coffeesmith are treated to just that.

This charming independent café is tucked away in the Golden Cross shopping arcade, which is adjacent to the Covered Market and accessible from Cornmarket Street. Its location is ideal: simultaneously tucked away in a quiet area and close to the city centre.

Its unique selling point? Its dog-friendliness. Although not immediately useful to Oxford students, this did positively influence my opinion of the café before even entering. Customers are first greeted with a wall of polaroids of very cute dogs, labelled with their names, which I confess that I spent an embarrassing amount of time examining. Pets are not only tolerated here, but taken good care of – Coffeesmith offers dog treats.

I was greeted by the friendly baristas and took a seat by the window. There were tables outside in the arcade, which I hope to return and make use of when the weather warms up. I visited at lunchtime, and despite the relatively limited menu – consisting of toast, bagels, and grilled sandwiches – Coffeesmith is one of those places which may have few options, but executes each of them very well. I also caught a glimpse of a wide array of sweet treats at the counter which looked varied and interesting.

I opted for the avocado toast, which cost £8.20, and – trying to convince myself that summer has arrived despite the 12 degree fore-

cast – an iced americano, which was rather reasonably priced at £3.30. Though I'm no connoisseur, I was able to recognise that the coffee was great. It's a goal of mine to visit as many independent cafés as possible in Oxford, and I can confidently say that this coffee ranks highly.

My avocado toast arrived before long; the two pieces of sourdough were topped with a surprisingly generous amount of sliced avocado, and sprinkled with spicy and salty seasoning. I was expecting something akin to the boring, hardly seasoned avocado toast I make for myself at home, but Coffeesmith's take on that modern classic opened my eyes to its potential. The subtle hint of the olive oil used to toast the bread combined with the seasoning to infuse the well-ripened avocado with flavour, a welcome addition to an ingredient which can be somewhat bland if not prepared well. Overall, I was really pleased with my choice, and I recommend it highly to those both new to and familiar with the dish.

I was also lucky enough to be able to try a bite of another toast option, topped with smoked chicken, rocket, sun-dried tomatoes, and – the star of the show – pesto aioli. Once again, this classic combination was taken to new heights and I found the alternative creamier texture for the pesto taste to be a triumph. I would seriously recommend this too – perhaps to those who consider avocado toast too basic a choice.

All in all, I was thoroughly pleased by my visit to Coffeesmith. If I had to find one gripe with it, it would be that my phone was not able to connect to the internet when I was inside, so it may not be the ideal location for your academic work. But for dates, lunches, brunches, or an afternoon coffee, it's the perfect spot – whether or not you have a dog to bring along.

Image credit: Bex Walton / CC-BY-2.0 via Flickr.

Food: 3/5 Price: 4/5 Atmosphere: 5/5

Overall: 4.5/5



Was India Bazball's graveyard or its baptism by fire?

Raghav Chari

It has been 22 months since Brendon 'Baz' McCullum's appointment as head coach of the England Men's cricket team, and the calls for him and for his 'Bazball' approach to go have never been stronger. What else can you expect when a coach and team strut confidently into a series, and receive a 4-1 drubbing in response? There will be backlash. But Bazball doesn't need to go; I don't think this England team can make it without Bazball anymore.

England went into this tour of India with confidence. The last 22 months, under the coaching of 'Baz' and the captaincy of Ben Stokes, have been characterised by a revitalised English team taking the attack to their oppo-

nents. The turnaround is famous (in cricket circles, at least), from England winning just 1 of the last 17 matches in the pre-Bazball era, to winning 13 of the next 18. With Baz/Stokes' aggressive approach, England upped their scoring rate and suddenly found the killer instinct needed to become a successful team.

Playing India in India is undoubtedly the toughest challenge in all of Test cricket; they haven't lost a series since 2012, and in that period have lost just 4 Tests out of 51. It's presumptuous for any team to claim that they're confident of victory. But Bazball *is* presumptuous; it makes bold claims because it genuinely believes in them, and this collective positive mindset in all the team members is what makes their winning streak pos-

sible, even if it appears ludicrous to outsiders. Let India think we're bluffing or stupid; they won't know what hit them. That's what Stokes wanted to do, what he planned to do in the five Tests.

In the first Test in Hyderabad, it seemed like what Stokes had predicted was going to come true. By the end of day 2, it seemed like the match was India's, with England trailing by a heavy 190 runs. Yet the Bazballers believed, and from that belief came one of the greatest away victories of recent times. Ollie Pope produced a magnificent second-innings 196, and Tom Hartley bounced back from a first-innings beating to take seven wickets and seal an England win. At all points in that match England looked fearless, and the 190-run deficit only made them more excited to win. For the first time in over ten years, India felt uncomfortable at home. How often can you make the other team put on a lead of 200 and have them still think 'is it enough'? It's not unfair to say that the first Test felt like the harbinger of a monumental away series victory.

But what followed in the next four Tests was a nightmare come true for the Bazball faithful. India adjusted, their batsmen piled on the runs, and the bowlers recalibrated to torment opposition batsmen like they have for the last twelve years. Match by match,

the series slipped out of England's grasp, concluding in an innings defeat at Dharamsala, where it looked like everyone had run out of steam. The last time England toured, they lost 3-1. This time, they lost 4-1. It leaves a bad taste in Baz/Stokes' mouth to admit that they did worse under Bazball than they did before.

It's not like the series was ever unwinnable either. There were moments in the third and fourth Tests where England were on top, and had they capitalised, could have notched further wins. Through the series, they lacked the killer instinct, that aggression that was so sorely needed, to make use of the good spots they were in. Where they should have ground India into the dust, there were batting collapses and bowling brainfades. In the third Test at Rajkot, England collapsed from 224/2 to 319 all out, blamed on a senseless Joe Root reverse scoop straight to second slip. In the fourth Test at Ranchi, England had India at 177/7 before letting them get to 307 with insipid bowling. Then they collapsed horrendously to just 145, and then while reducing India from 84/0 to 120/5, couldn't finish off the job. England definitely could have won, but the ruthlessness, the ability to dig in, just wasn't there.

So, now that England have been humbled, it's inevitable that there's disappointment among fans. Anger

and irritation with Bazball has been ever-present; from the very beginning, the insular, cocky arrogance and reckless aggression had not sat well. Yet Baz and Stokes could always point to their winning record. If it worked, it worked. Now they don't even have that. Even the most fervent converts to Bazball sit uneasy; I know I do. Perhaps it is time for Baz to go, and his foolhardy mindset with him. Perhaps England needs to return to good old-fashioned Test cricket if it wants to win again. Perhaps that's what's needed for the next Ashes.

I am a Bazball convert, I will admit. My worship at the shrine of the Holy Trinity (Baz, Stokes, and Rob Key) is motivated by the belief that Bazball is the best approach for this England team, with these players, at this time. England cricket needs to understand Bazball.

Bazball is not a philosophy of going out there and slogging every ball. At its heart, the philosophy is quite simple: it's just cricket. It is just a game; it doesn't matter all that much. When Stuart Broad says that playing under Bazball feels like 'playing for a club side', he means that there's none of the oppressive pressure and scrutiny that English cricketers have to play through. It reminds them that Test cricket is about having fun and loving what they do, and that they should play the way that suits them best, no matter what outsiders say.

*Read the full article at [Cherwell.org](https://www.cherwell.org)
Image credits: Jim Parmeter.*



Sport vs studies: Can a balance be found?

Isabel Valovin

First and foremost, Oxford is known for its academic rigour. The University's prestige is found within its own history and influence, both of which are rooted in the academics of many political and notable figures. However, from 1896 to 2020, a considerable 170 Olympic medals have been won by Oxford alumni in a whole range of sports. This certainly is impressive, but is it possible to uphold this standard of achievement in sport whilst still studying at one of the most academically challenging universities?

Polly Maton, a track and field athlete, was selected to represent Paralympics GB at Tokyo 2020 whilst reading History and Politics at Oxford. Having previously competed at the 2017 London World Championships and the Paralympics GB in Rio 2016, Maton was able to continue balancing both her academic and sporting successes at Oxford. Speaking to Oxford University Sport on how to balance sport and academia she stated:

"I have always been a strong believer that the two genuinely aid each other. Exercise is a great way to take a break from studying and is likely to stimulate your brain for when you return...Generally, I think knowing your priorities is key, as well as planning."

Studies from both the universities of Strathclyde and Dundee found that intensive exercise boosts the performance of teenagers in Maths and

English. Likewise, a study from UCL noted that physical exercise releases proteins in the brain that can help improve memory and increase cognitive performance. Therefore, studies and sport seem to go hand in hand. Due to the University's increased focus on the mental health and welfare of its students, low-pressure sport at Oxford is becoming more celebrated as a great way to de-stress from the pressure of work, but how does this fare when a high level of performance is expected in both studies and sport?

Michael Allison, a 2nd year Physicist at Oxford who has competed for GB multiple times in athletics, including at both world and European U20 championships, told *Cherwell*:

"Balancing studies and sport has been difficult, and I can only imagine it will continue to get harder. I would say you need to be able to prioritise your goals and sometimes this means being 'boring.'"

Clearly, trying to succeed in both your studies and sport is challenging and takes a lot of sacrifice, but has Oxford provided any support for these students? Allison added:

"I am seeing improvements in the way Oxford views sport, however the support I get is somewhat limited to what I could get from other universities. I am enormously grateful to Vincent's club from which I received a financial award which has been enormously useful and I would encourage any top athletes at Oxford to apply for them."

One thing Oxford certainly has access to is facilities. Vincent's, a private

members' club in Oxford, provides a space for students who are exceptional athletes, with many alumni who went on to compete at the Olympics being members. Iffley Sports Centre is the epicentre of Oxford sport, most notably known for where Sir Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile in 1954. In 2018 it became apparent to Jon Roycrob, Director of Sport, that Oxford was not providing adequate sporting provision. Therefore, in June 2018, the Acer Nethercott Sports Centre facility was opened, providing Oxford with a four-court sports hall, new changing rooms, and the Gallie-Lewis-Dean Gym. This facility has provided more clubs with increased training hours and shows the realisation of the importance of sport in the image of Oxford.

There may be a shift in how Oxford views the importance of sport for these elite athletes, as from the 1st of January 2023 Professor Irene Tracey became the Vice Chancellor of the University. Tracey is looking to further Oxford sport so more funding and support can be provided in order to align the performance of students in both their degree and sport. The aim to integrate both sport and studies into the internationally recognised image Oxford portrays is a challenging one. But frequently praised for willingness to take on the hard tasks, Tracey certainly encourages a wider recognition of these students so that a balance can be found between sport and studies. Only time will tell the outcome, but it's definitely looking hopeful.



Results Round-up

This week, we bring you results from last term, and upcoming fixtures from weeks 1 and 2

Swimming (Varsity) - Blues and Seconds

(Open/Male) Oxford 56 - 34 Cambridge	(Open/Male) Oxford 62 - 25 Cambridge
(Female) Oxford 58 - 32 Cambridge	(Female) Oxford 60 - 30 Cambridge

Cricket (League) - Pools A and B

Christ Church vs St Catherine's	Queens vs Keble
Trinity vs Brasenose	Oriel vs Somerville
Magdalen vs LMH	Lincoln vs SEH

Cricket (League) - Pools C, D, and E

Balliol vs St Anne's	University vs St Hugh's
Corpus Christi vs Kellog	Exeter vs St Hilda's
Pembroke vs Worcester	Hertford vs St Peter's
	(Friendly) St John's vs Merton/Mansfield

Futsal (League) - Group E

Wadham 1s vs Lincoln 1s	St John's 2s vs Oriel 1s
Wolfson 1s vs Pembroke 1s	Oriel 1s vs Lincoln 1s
Exeter 2s vs Wadham 1s	St John's 2s vs Pembroke 1s



With 1st May rapidly approaching, it is almost time for Oxford's students to descend first upon the clubs of Oxford and then Magdalen bridge. For this reason, this week I bring you some of *Cherwell's* coverage of the frankly bizarre Oxford tradition from over the years.

Coverage has ranged from 'mania' (1970s) to 'mayhem' (1997), to 'madness' (1964). One year in the eighties, *Cherwell* advertised a 'Breakfast and Tequila sunrise' deal. In 1997, students went straight from celebrations to voting in the general election. Time and time again, reference is made to sunken punts and people jumping from the bridge into the river. From the latter there is a number of horror stories through the years – stay safe folks.

Resoundingly, however, much of the coverage from the last sixty years paints the same caricature of Oxford more recently depicted in *Salt***** (we've had too much coverage of that film in this paper for me to mention it again). Mayday has often been an embodiment of

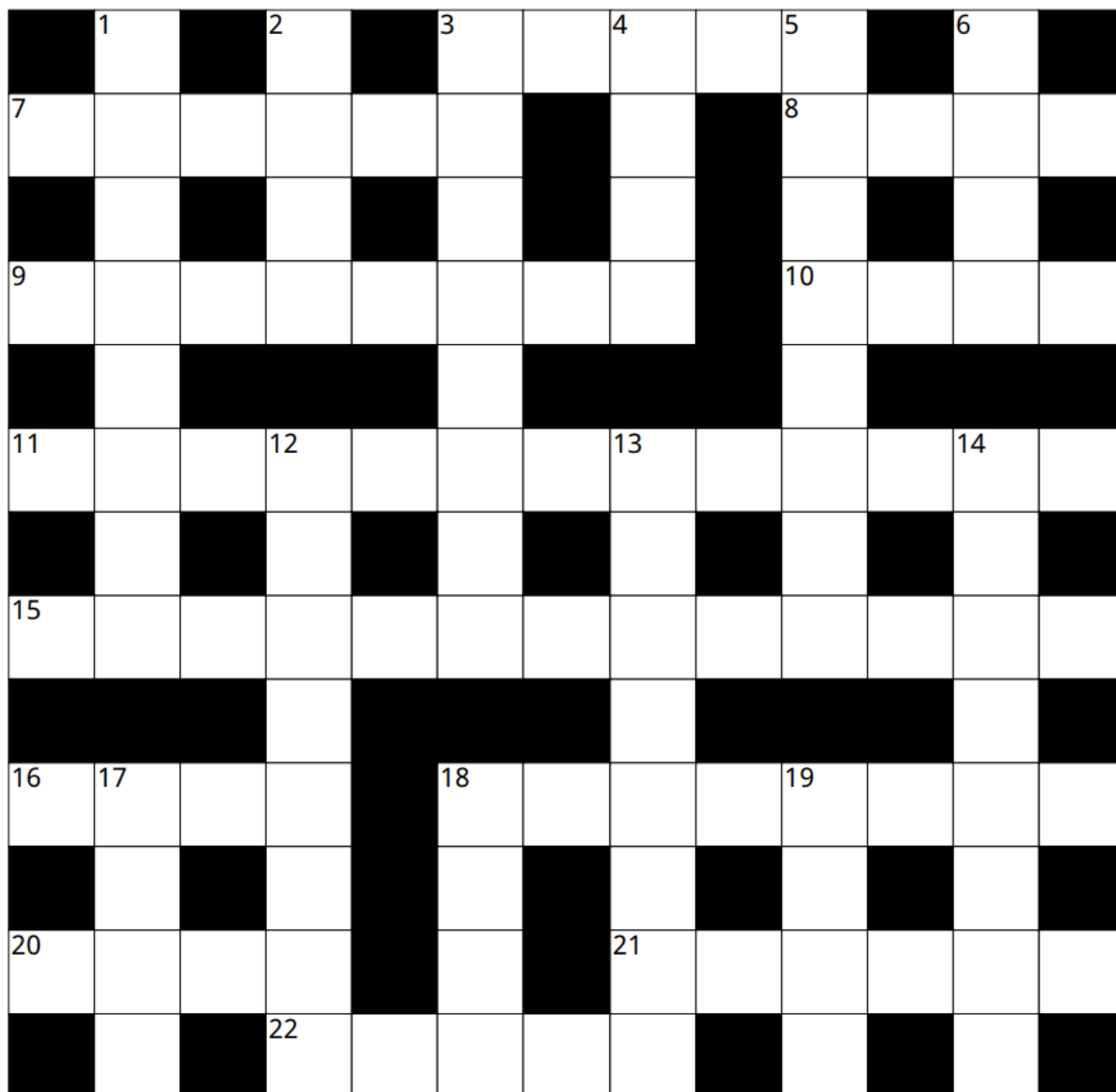
the worst of Oxford's reputation. Take, for example, the Keble student who in 1997 was arrested for indecent exposure after 'revealing what was underneath his kilt'. Clearly the delirium of staying up all night is too much for some. Despite these dodgy characters, the day is undoubtedly one of the traditions that connects the city and the University to its past.

Possibly one of the more interesting traditions that seems to have fizzled out in relation to Mayday is the one of going for a big cooked breakfast in the morning following Magdalen choir's singing. One piece of coverage references Balliol's "all you can eat for £1 extravaganza", and the Union providing 117 full English breakfasts to hungry students.

Unfortunately, even *Cherwell's* coverage of the event dwarfs in longevity when compared with the tradition itself, the singing aspect of which has allegedly been going on for over 500 years. One can't help but wonder exactly what it looked like then, and what it will look like 500 years from now.

Brought to you from the **Cherwell** archives by Adam Saxon

Cryptic Crossword by Miranda Devine



- ACROSS**
- 3. Surveys able to be held in Sunday School (5)
 - 7. Ancient weight of gold perhaps might be hidden? (6)
 - 8. Troubled cry from a girl having been cut short (4)
 - 9. Wield cereal bowl (8)
 - 10. Butter produced from German

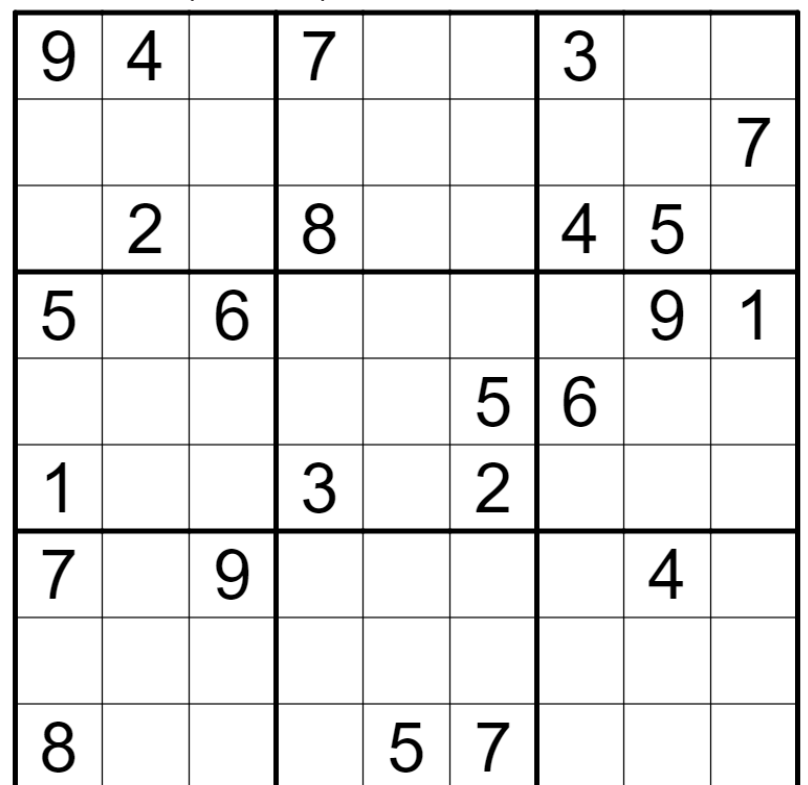
- milk alternative (4)
- 11. Say no to crushed ice – dead set (extremely) on increase! (6,7)
- 15. Cracked holes settles it – they're not a good option when walking on thin ice? (8,5)
- 16. Malaga laws provide for special occasion (4)
- 18. Arrangement of words sounds

- like English Society head's levies on cigarettes, for example (3,5)
- 20. Cook revealed in reverse Peekaboo (4)
- 21. Peers are included in good men (6)
- 22. Editor returns to Stephen King's writing pieces (5)

Week 0 Cryptic Crossword answers:

- Across:**
- 1) Afar 3) Cressida 9) Readers 10) Aloha 11) Seeds 12) System 14) Etched in stone 17) Armada 19) Abase 22) Amass 23) In exile 24) Scene one 25) Punt
- Down:**
- 1) Arrested 2) Abate 4) Resuscitation 5) Scabs 6) In one go 7) Adam 8) Nessie 13) Tenement 15) Carnage 16) States 18) Aisle 20) Adieu 21) Bags

Sudoku by Anonymous



- DOWN**
- 1. His initial manner, that is, way, was most alarming (8)
 - 2. Jelly, e.g., made by bad worker with direction (4)
 - 3. Screeching comes from Siren facing Neptune's weapon (8)
 - 4. A Red Cross hospital allows for a bridge to be formed (4)
 - 5. Optimistic as a result of having vocalised 'urine' without roll (8)
 - 6. A bit backwards, for your information? (4)
 - 12. Doomed, it failed violently (3,5)

- 13. One God aboard shows graciousness (8)
- 14. Joined senior (more mature) editor (8)
- 17. A language uncovered by Turing, for example (4)
- 18. Free pass for drains (4)
- 19. A German affirmation of the Right is partially open (4)