

CAMDEN

A Westminster School Publication

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A Liberal Arts Magazine



RAFAEL LEON-VILLAPOLOS on the next US President
BEN HAYES surveys the changing Conservative Party
ALEXANDRA KOGAN on Florence's first woman painter

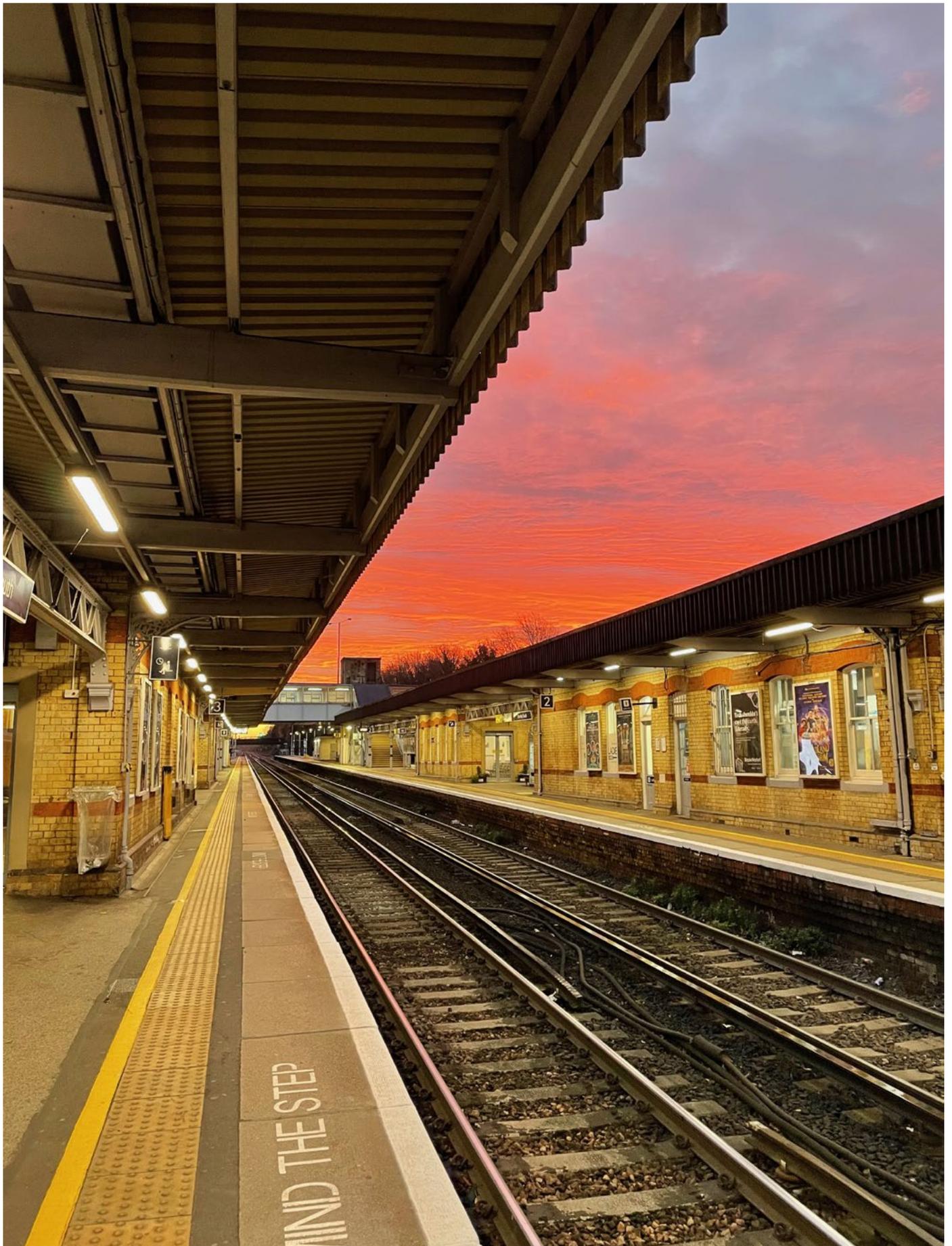


Photo by Gabrielle Ward-Smith

Telling Tales

Don't let the facts get in the way of a good story', is one of those irritating rejoinders heard from time to time, one which highlights the new primacy of narrative in a post-truth world.

For someone who remembers a time before narratology became in vogue, narrative related to the world of fiction, of storytelling, as distinct from reality. Indeed, literature was a way of understanding the world, and through the suspension of disbelief, it allowed man to impose a structure on the apparent chaos of reality.

The tradition of narrating a story goes back to the earliest times. The oral tradition ensured that key mindsets or experiences were transmitted from one generation to the next and from one culture to another. Myths arose from stories told in prehistoric times about natural or social phenomena. The myth of a great Flood, for example, is common to many cultures: In the Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, Utnapishtim is the forerunner of Noah in Genesis, of Manu in the Mahabharata and of the Aztec Nota, to mention but a few. Myths represent the Champions' League of stories.

The vestiges of fiction which have survived over millennia owe their survival to the preserved writing on baked clay, papyrus or other material, a welcome reminder that the paperless office is no guarantee that today's records will survive for posterity. These works of fiction enable us to project ourselves into alien situations, to cultivate sympathy – or condemnation – for others; they let us see the world through different eyes, and may even serve as an antidote to egotism.

The narrative has extended its boundaries from framing fiction; it has moved into every domain: politics, corporate branding, psychology, law etc. One university website boasts: 'Narrative as your tool for policy change'. A political narrative, we are told, is a story that shapes public opinion and influences people's perceptions of political issues. One is exhorted to 'get in front of the narrative regarding social justice', a phrase which may well jar linguistic sensibilities. Presumably this means telling your story first, or at least telling a simplified and convincing version of a complex matter. The narrative, then, has become a means of argument, a conviction or even an ideology. Rather than allowing distance between the story and the listener, the listener must absorb the story, allowing the narrative to bed in to one's consciousness uncritically. The path to Winston Smith's world appears well paved.

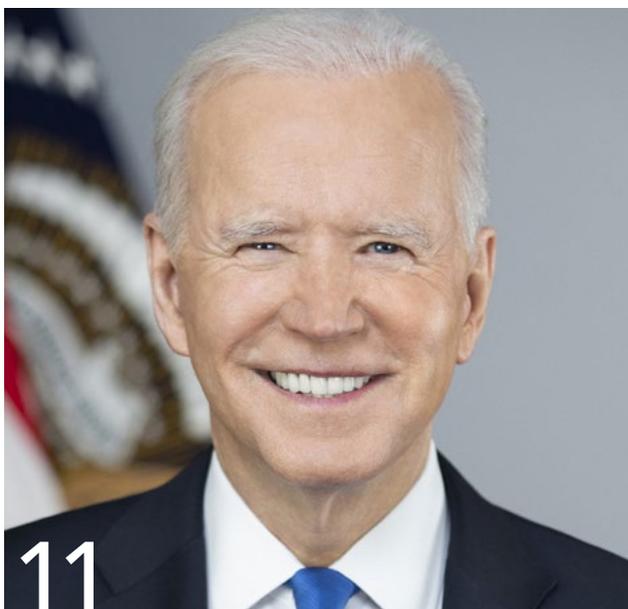
Whilst people used to have a story to tell, they now *are* the story. We set foot into a narrative continuum which is variously described as 'lived experience' or 'a journey',

even if the destination of the journey is a dead end. The world of the myth appears more distant, somehow far removed from its privileged place in the canon of cultural reference. Postmodern man has left a world of myths and tales; he requires to be the author of an individual story, his own. The events, fears and dreams of daily life are the material to be recounted, often on social media, where it shades into self-promotion, if not advertising.

Before the advent of the internet, libraries served as repositories of books; reading was instrumental in developing imagination (the cinema of the mind) and language. In an age where the screen has often replaced the book, Dickens, Dumas, Twain and others have given way to boxed sets and Netflix. The plot twists have been maintained, but one's powers of imagination have been impoverished. Those happy few who remain avid readers will be tomorrow's elite, with an ability to concentrate for extended periods and be sensitive to the rhythm of sentences and to rhetoric.

Generative language AI gives a new twist to the place of language in society. Language is the vector not only of communication, but also emotion, spirituality and culture. Whereas language used to represent the one area of complex communication which was the defining difference between man and machine, recent developments such as ChatGPT can give the illusion that a computer can master language and argument. (It can even write computer code, which ought to alarm our moral guardians.) Dishonest pupils and students may be willing to abrogate responsibility for their own learning and subcontract essays and presentations to the machine ape. However, for all the leisure time gained, this is not easily squared with courses which are fee-paying: it is hardly value for money. Moreover, in the field of science, computer generated papers run the risk of fooling publishers and researchers and laying false trails for peers. To prove how 'meta' the problem is getting, academics at Plymouth university prompted ChatGPT to write a research paper on academic integrity and AI. Clearly, the irony algorithm has yet to be coded.

The digital revolution is merely responding to the demands of society in the globalized economy. It is striking that AI is being developed for greater efficiency, yet this new version of capitalism has created *Homo Numericus*, not a critical and logical being, but one who is irrational and impulsive, one driven by the addictive nature of the very algorithms which record every detail of his life. Man wants to control everything, yet he is at the mercy of the machine. The one way out is to take back control – and read! Literature's cognitive dimension helps us cope with challenges by changing the way we think about ourselves and the world we live in.



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The editor warmly invites alumni and current pupils to submit articles for publication in the next edition of Camden.

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George Peabody Library
(Johns Hopkins University,
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Making a Killing: In Interview with James Ashcroft

In her interview with Captain Ashcroft, **Isabella Jain-Jones** explores the military and ethical considerations of employing private security contractors in conflict zones.

Since the 'War on Terror' began in 2001, the UK government has channelled millions of pounds into private security companies (PSCs), described by Peter Singer as 'the corporate evolution of the old-age profession of mercenaries'.¹ In the financial year 2018-19 alone, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) spent £60.4m on PSCs overseas,² being integral to the provision of military service, outsourcing what was once the responsibility of civic virtue to the free market.

Following the Iraq War, however, private security contractors secured an unfavourable reputation due to their association with civilian tragedies. Arguably, the most notorious was the 2007 Nisour Square Massacre in Baghdad, a mass shooting by *Blackwater*³ PSCs killing seventeen Iraqis.⁴ Ties to such events have often resulted in

the villainization of the industry, as cold-blooded killers, and belligerent cowboys. However, does public perception and media portrayal accurately represent the nature of private security contractors?

With the high stakes of war, national security moreover lives endangered, it is my personal belief that privatising an industry fuelling violence is a step in the wrong direction. Due to the lucrative gains of private security, it opens the risk that corporations' intentions misalign with the public good. Taking the example of the Iraq War, I am uncomfortable with the ethical complications arising from PSC's involvement attached to corporate profiteering and human rights abuses. Yet, I welcomed the opportunity to interview someone offering a personal perspective from the often-perceived elusive world of private security.

James Ashcroft is a former British Infantry Captain who worked as a private security contractor in Iraq for eighteen months from September 2003, describing his experience in his book, 'Making a Killing.' As for himself, insightful and quietly charming, he challenged some of my initial prejudices about private security contractors and was an individual who truly took pride in his work protecting and saving lives.

- 1 Singer, P., (2005). 'Outsourcing War', *Foreign Affairs*, volume 84 (2). p. 120.
- 2 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, (2019). *Freedom of Information Act 2000* Request Ref: 0728-19
- 3 An American private security company founded on 26 December 1996 by former Navy SEAL officer, Erik Prince. It was renamed Xe services in 2009 and known as Academi since 2011. In July 2004, Blackwater was hired by the U.S. Department of State.
- 4 Risen, J. and Thompson, G., (2008). 'Five Guards Face U.S. Charges in Iraq Deaths,' *New York Times*, 6 December.

A security contractor is vital in continuing to protect Government representatives in Baghdad



Isabella Jain-Jones: What initially motivated your involvement in the military?

James Ashcroft: At the time I joined, there were conflicts all around the world with an appalling number of civilian massacres and other atrocities, for example, in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Bosnia. I wanted to do something meaningful to help make a difference, and at the time, the United Nations and the British Army seemed to be everywhere doing something. Even today, the British Army is involved in over 22 countries just in Africa alone, assisting with multiple roles: anti-terrorism operations, preventing human rights violations, poaching and the trade in illegal wildlife, anti-drug trafficking operations, training teams, and peacekeeping operations.

IJJ: Often, the term private security contractor is substituted with mercenary, but are these two synonymous or distinct? Furthermore, do you agree that there is somewhat of a historical and social stigma attached to the latter, leading to a preference for the former?

JA: The entire spectrum of armed security contractors performing military tasks tends to be grouped together as one homogenous industry, especially in the eyes of the public. Yes, for public perception and legal reasons, the preferred term nowadays is private contractor, since there is now a legal definition of a mercenary, which makes work within those legal parameters illegal. As for public perception, it generally depends on how members are educated about mercenaries. Civilians in Sierra Leone,

for example, still regard the mercenaries of *Executive Outcomes*⁵ as heroes. Similarly, in Northern Nigeria and other regions where employed mercenaries have had a great effect against insurgents, these local populations, whom they terrorised, generally have an extremely positive impression of mercenary forces.

IJJ: Michael Sandel, the political philosopher, noted that ‘...turning military service into a commodity...corrupts the civic ideals that should govern it’.⁶ He suggests that the ideally adopted moral viewpoint would value military service as an obligation to the nature of citizenship, akin to jury duty, rather than a product of the free market.

Why do you think we view the privatisation of warfare as unethical, whereas we do not seem to criticise the ethicality of other industries, like private healthcare, as severely?

JA: I honestly do not know the answer to this question. All I can imagine is that the general demographic of those who debate these types of ethical dilemmas probably consists of those who have never been in a war or conflict zone. So, the pros and cons of armed men who fight for a cause or country are entirely hypothetical, and they base their judgements upon the values of their individual life experiences. To take your point about private healthcare, most people have

- 5 A private security company founded in South Africa in 1989 by Eben Barlow, a former lieutenant-colonel of the South African Defence Force. In 1996, they defeated rebel insurgents in Sierra Leone and effected a Peace Treaty, leading to democratic elections and a degree of stability.
- 6 Sandel, M. J., (2010). *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* London: Penguin Books Ltd, p. 86.

Corporations' intentions misalign with the public good



Private contractors are at the sharp end of executing government policy

experienced sickness and can understand the positive arguments for private healthcare. Conversely, most people have never suffered being in a warzone and are therefore clueless about the variables that really matter in arguments for and against the factors that affect security and ethics in those conflicts. For those who have directly benefited from the military service of foreign fighters, I guarantee they are very positive about the phenomenon of private security. Good examples of this would be the Foreign Legions of Spain, France, and Ukraine.

The major negative point about mercenaries is, obviously, that they can be employed to do bad things. I think that is why there is a negative viewpoint attached to them. Examples are the militias of any drug cartel, insurgent warlord, and government-sponsored organisations such as the Wagner Group,⁷ who blatantly carry out atrocities while working under the direction of the Russian Federation.

IJJ: In relation to the Wagner Group, as the market governs the allocation of PSCs, many are concerned that they are waiting to fall into the wrong hands. Do you believe the law should restrict which clientele PSCs can act on behalf of, for instance, oligarchs? Do you think the involvement of PSCs in the Russia-Ukraine crisis has been constructive or destructive?

JA: It is worth reminding your readers that state and government agencies employ most private contractors. Also, all private contractors and government-armed organisations are already governed by existing laws and statutes, many centuries old. Private armed bodies are not a new phenomenon. It is probably worth noting too that the worst excesses of violence have always been nation-states whether with regular or mercenary armed forces, so I believe that worrying about oligarchs or drug cartels having private armies is relatively meaningless. Please do remember, *it is already illegal* in every country to hire people to go and kill other people!

As for Ukraine, it is a good example of where the foreign legion is defending a country invaded by a powerful neighbour. And the powerful neighbour is also using mercenary forces, i.e., the Wagner Group. And we can see that foreigners fighting for Ukraine are motivated purely by vocational reasons (certainly not the pay!), and the Russian mercenaries fighting for Russia are committing many hundreds of war crimes. So, in this case, the ethical argument would seem to side with foreigners fighting as mercenaries for Ukraine and not with the Russian nationals fighting for Russia.

IJJ: It seems difficult to isolate civic virtue from military professions, whether part of national or private service, due to their active participation in protecting and saving lives. However, do you believe there is a moral difference, for example, with Ukraine, between working as a

contractor in the private sector and serving as a member of a country's armed forces? Provided, furthermore, soldiers perform their roles to a high standard, should we place weight on the moral aspects of decision-making persuading soldiers to act privately?

JA: I do believe that there is a moral difference, however, I see no practical difference between the two. As long as the job is done, does it matter who does it? You can apply this logic to any task which needs doing. If a road needs repair, a leaking pipe fixed, a life-saving surgery performed, or an embassy in a warzone guarded, does it matter whether it is a government agency or a private one that does any of these tasks? If one looks around, we already live in a world where private security is integral at every level of society. Supermarkets, car parks, fast food restaurants, hospitals, shopping malls, office blocks, warehouses, shipping yards, and national water and power infrastructure all employ private security. In countries where the threat is from the armed forces, those guards are also armed. And people accept this as the norm. In fact, if the army had to move into guard hospitals and schools instead of private agencies, many people would regard this as a severe breakdown in law and order. Most people would agree that private security is essential and the norm.

IJJ: Turning to the particularly unfavourable publicity circulating PSCs, for example, concerning the 2007 Nisour Square massacre.

How significant a role has the media played in portraying private security contractors as 'operating in the shadows and under the radar?' How do you think one could resurrect the tainted image of violence?

JA: There is no real solution to this - it is always very easy to see 'men with guns' as bad. And bearing in mind that we live in a fortunate moment in history, where the overwhelming majority of the world's population lives in relative peace, it is difficult to comprehend the nuances between good versus bad men with guns. Almost any instigation of armed violence worldwide is portrayed as bad, probably quite rightly so.

IJJ: What do you believe are the advantages and disadvantages of hiring contractors? A pertinent critique of hiring private contractors is that they provide governments and agencies with a dangerous means of plausible deniability. To what extent do you believe this to be true?

JA: The perception of contractors working outside the law or under the radar is another useful fiction used by scriptwriters, novelists, and bored journalists; all contractors are bound by the same laws as everyone else. Everyone knows whom a particular group is working for, but what it may do, in legal terms, is allow for military action on behalf of a country without a formal declaration of hostilities. There are more armed organisations officially employed by national governments that break far more laws and carry out illegal military operations.

The primary advantages of security contractors are that they are extremely cheap and have a much higher level of professionalism compared to conventional military forces.

Private armed bodies are not a new phenomenon

⁷ A Russian private security company thought to have been founded by former Russian army officer, Dmitri Utkin. The Wagner Group was first active during Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Ukrainian prosecutors have alleged their commitment of war crimes in Motyzyhn and Bucha.

By this, I mean that conventional armies must provide years of training, housing, education, resources, and years of salaries and medical coverage, even during the decades when those soldiers are out of combat operations. Many of those soldiers will be young, often teenagers, with little experience and training. In contrast, contractors tend to be much older, with many years of experience and training. The employers gain the benefits of those years without having to pay for them. And once the contract is over, the expense stops. There are no follow-on costs for career development, medical rehabilitation or compensation, and pensions.

IJJ: Finally, concerning the future, do you believe drone technology will remove the need for private military

contractors? And along the same lines, if there was substantial welfare support for demobilised soldiers, would there be less supply in the private market and fewer public military vacancies?

JA: No, drones, even in the military, are still just an adjunct to human troops on the ground and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

And I think that welfare support for former soldiers would technically result in less supply of those willing to perform private contractor work, but not in any meaningful numbers. I believe that private security contractors will always exist in some form as long as violence and war are still part of the human experience.



Military experience can save your life



Joe Biden's kickoff rally for his 2020 Presidential campaign, by Michael Stokes



Cruz speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in National Harbor, Maryland, by Gage Skidmore

Turning in the Widening Gyre

Rafael Leon-Villapalos considers the American zeitgeist and evaluates the likely contenders for the forthcoming marathon of the 2024 US Presidential election.

The dust from the 2022 midterms has scarcely begun to settle, and yet speculation is already swirling as to who will claim the ultimate prize on November 5th, 2024. The two bloodied behemoths of American politics stand at a crossroads: the Democratic Party wrestles with the

questions of both President Biden's policies and health, with cracks in the alliance between progressives and moderates beginning to show, and in the opposing Republican ranks, tension simmers between Donald Trump's court-in-exile at Mar-a-Lago and conservatives who wish to build an agenda beyond the former President's brooding. All this comes with the backdrop

of an America more polarised than ever by the legacy of the Capitol Riot, the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* in June 2022, the rising cost of living, and long-term societal change, with a July 2022 poll showing that 20% of American voters now believe political violence is justified. In light of this, W. B. Yeats' image of the destructive vortex seems grimly foresighted, and the bitterness that Biden was meant to banish seems stronger than ever, making us wonder how it came to this and if "things [will] fall apart."

20% of American voters
now believe political
violence is justified

President Biden took office promising to be "a President for all Americans" and to "build back better" from the pandemic, passing economic stimulus and infrastructure bills in his first year. However, the honeymoon began to end with the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban in summer 2021, and soaring inflation both soured the opinions of cash-strapped voters and exposed divided

between Progressive Democrats who demanded further spending and moderates, principally Senators Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who blocked this over rightful fears of increased inflation, leading to further intra-party tension. Combined with cyclical trends and the impact of Covid measures and war in Ukraine, Biden's approval

dwindled to the low thirties, and this seemed to foretell a swamping in the midterms by a resurgent, aggressive GOP. However, the Supreme Court (a third of which was picked by Trump) decision in *Dobbs v Jackson* to return abortion law to the states cratered suburban Republican support, and this, alongside economic recovery and dreadful Republican candidate quality helped the Democrats actually expand their Senate majority to 51 and narrowly miss out on control of the House of Representatives, temporarily quelling doubts about Biden

Harris has demonstrated strength among Black voters and mainstream Democrats in polls



Official portrait of Vice President Kamala Harris (March 2021), By Lawrence Jackson

and leading Republicans to soul-search about the party's future.

On the Republican side, the orange elephant in the room cannot be ignored in discussions about the 2024 nomination. Since leaving office, Trump has taken to his erroneously named platform TRUTH Social to vent his grievances against the Democrats he claims stole the election from him, but, egged on by courtiers like failed lawyer Rudy Giuliani, has also attacked other Republicans for insufficient loyalty, hitting figures like Senate Leader Mitch McConnell who have attempted to sideline him. While for much of 2022 it appeared Trump's fanatical base would grant him another tilt at the Oval Office, at one point reaching 72% in primary polls, his position as the right-wing King over the Water is insecure: the growing dullness of his "rigged election" schtick and his increasingly bizarre antics (whether meeting with crazed anti-Semite Kanye West or releasing a set of superhero cards) have certainly not helped his cause, but the real kicker has been the 2022 midterms. Trump jumped into many primaries for Senate and gubernatorial races, throwing his base behind controversial figures such as QAnon believer Doug Mastriano in Pennsylvania, and would-be Georgia Senator Herschel Walker, a domestic abuser who publicly mused about whether he would rather be a vampire or werewolf. With few exceptions, voters soundly rejected these candidates in otherwise winnable races, with Trump's extremism also listed as the main reason they voted against Republicans by 28% of midterm voters. This stands in contrast with Republicans who remained distant from Trump, with one in particular threatening him in 2024.

Few expected much from Ron DeSantis when elected Governor of Florida in 2018, barely surviving a recount. From 2020 onwards, though, DeSantis has built up, without ever publicly challenging Trump, his own brand of conservatism; economically, he promotes tax cuts while also being more supportive of conservation and social programs than the average Republican and has taken on large companies like Twitter and Disney for "wokeness", backing gun rights, abortion restrictions and the controversial "Don't Say Gay" bill about sex education in schools on the social front. This manifesto proved far more popular in November than Trumpism without actually moderating to a great degree, sweeping him to a 20-point victory margin in a supposed swing state and crucially netting him 55% of the fast-growing and traditionally Democratic Hispanic voting bloc. While others, notably Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin, have campaigned this way DeSantis appears the standard-bearer for non-Trump Republicans come 2024, opening up a 23 point primary lead in a December poll. While Trump still retains an aggregate lead, many see echoes of the Democrat primary in 2008, where Barack Obama gradually ate away at favourite Hillary Clinton's lead to ultimately clinch the nomination, and with influential figures such as news magnate Rupert Murdoch and mercurial billionaire Elon

Musk reportedly offering aid to DeSantis, Trump can no longer expect the easy victory he hoped for.

However, it would be foolish to underestimate Trump as in 2016. While DeSantis is neck-in-neck with Trump in one-on-one polls, more candidates entering the field could allow the former president to repeat his 2016 victory, where the non-Trump vote split between Senators Ted Cruz of Texas, Marco Rubio of Florida and Governor John Kasich of Ohio, allowing him to take two-thirds of primary delegates with only 44.9% of the popular vote. For example, Trump's former vice-president Mike Pence, the target of a lynch mob at the Capitol Riot for his refusal to overturn the election, published in November 2022 *So Help Me God*, where he sets out his political beliefs in a move typical of presidential hopefuls. Pence has attempted to leverage his prestige in the Evangelical and pro-life movements (the latter of whom Trump blamed for midterm failures) and pair his role in the Trump administration with his staunch defence of the Constitution to win over moderates and Trump loyalists; however, his lack of charisma and image as a "traitor" to many Trumpists have counted against him, leaving Pence languishing at 8% in a Christmas 2022 poll, with evangelicals ironically deserting a lifelong conservative for the libertine Trump.

Nikki Haley, the daughter of Sikh immigrants who has cultivated a moderate image as former Governor of South Carolina, where she removed Confederate flags from state buildings, and UN Ambassador under Trump, has officially thrown her hat into the ring, seeking to build a post-Trump GOP. Haley has repeatedly flip-flopped in her stance on Trump, blasting him after the Capitol

Riot before later pledging to support his re-election, a stance she rowed back on in November 2022, leaving her out of sorts with both hardcore loyalists and sceptics and stuck on 3% in polls. However, she campaigned across the South in the midterms and has visited Iowa, New Hampshire, and her home state, all of which are key in the primary calendar, indicating an attempt to build grassroots support, and there remains the possibility that she could use a bloc of delegates to act as springboard in a close race or kingmaker at a convention, either for the vice-presidential slot or to force a candidate towards her traditional Reaganite policies of fiscal conservatism and an assertive foreign policy, at odds with trends towards economic populism and isolationism in the Republican Party. Similar to her is Ted Cruz, Trump's 2016 foe turned arch-election denier, who has picked fights with both the Biden administration and Senate Republican leadership over aid to Ukraine, vaccine mandates, and immigration enforcement and positioned himself as a man of unbending conservative principles, leading opposition to the bipartisan infrastructure bill negotiated between McConnell and Biden. However, his personal unpopularity with many Republicans and a feeling that his moment has passed will count against him, meaning the best he can likely hope for is a Supreme Court place when Clarence Thomas retires.

The orange elephant in the room cannot be ignored

America is approaching perhaps the most uncertain primary season in over fifty years

While Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin, a campaigner against wasteful spending and supporter of parental rights in education, has been touted by some as a hidden contender for the nomination, his political and personal closeness to DeSantis, as well as his relative inexperience, means that he would be unlikely to find a primary constituency, and is expected to build up his political profile and wait for 2028 or 2032, currently lacking the national name recognition of DeSantis or Trump. However, although neither would expect to take

the nomination, wildcat runs have been rumoured from Tulsi Gabbard, a former Progressive turned isolationist right-populist, and Liz Cheney, daughter of Dick and a “Never Trumper” hounded out of Congress for her role on the January 6th Committee that recommended charges against Trump, both of whom would simply seek to make a statement or hope for a brokered convention. Overall, however, the nominee is likely to be either a Trump borne up by a raging, fanatical base above a split field of candidates, or a DeSantis uniting the Trump-sceptical vote

Ambassador Nikki Haley endorses Glenn Youngkin’s gubernatorial campaign. Official Photos by Rachel Leppert, Youngkin for Governor.



behind him and forging a new Republican political credo.

On the Democrat side, President Joe Biden has been buoyed by his successful support of Ukraine, with Kherson retaken shortly after the midterms, and by better-than-expected results in the midterms, which increased his party's Senate majority and left the Republicans with a chaotic caucus in the House that required 15 ballots to elect Kevin McCarthy Speaker, seeing this as a vindication of his achievements in office, from increased climate spending to bipartisan bills developing infrastructure, protecting gay marriage, and establishing further gun controls. Biden also reportedly believes he is the candidate best placed to prevent a return of Donald Trump, fearing that successors lack the national appeal to overcome the former President. However, while a Marquette poll showed Biden with a nearly 10 point lead against Trump, the President was two points behind Governor DeSantis



in a hypothetical matchup, linking to fears about his age: Biden would be 82 on Election Day and has sometimes suffered gaffes and public memory lapses, such as looking for a dead congresswoman, and many Democrats fear that he could not take the punishing campaign schedule and would contrast unfavourably with a younger Republican like DeSantis or Haley on the debate stage, leading to potential fearmongering about his capacity for access to nuclear weapons. Some have also downplayed his role in midterm success, citing his non-appearance in battleground states and voter fears of Republican extremism, and have pointed to the likelihood of recession in 2023 as a millstone round Democrat necks should Biden seek re-election, seeing the retirement of Nancy Pelosi in the House as beginning a generational changing of the guard. Nevertheless, Biden will retain the natural incumbency advantage against any primary challenger and would have most congressional Democrats behind him, benefiting from the lack of any clear successor in the party ranks, and indicated in December that it was his "intention" to run again, although he said he would "respect fate" and give a final decision in spring 2023. His recent State of the Union address, where he touted legislative accomplishments and blasted Republican plans to cut Social Security and Medicare in what resembled a campaign trail address, indicated that Biden is likely to seek re-election and wishes to unite the party behind broad policy goals, a notion further suggested by his hour-long schmoozing of congressional Democrats after the speech. However, the spectre of age and approval problems, with only 37% of Democrats polled by Associated Press supporting another run, could lead to a primary clash not seen since Lyndon Johnson's fall in 1968.

Vice-President Kamala Harris, who has reportedly been in touch with wealthy donors and political magnates from her days as California senator, would be the theoretical frontrunner if Biden retires and would benefit from a degree of incumbency advantage and establishment support; furthermore, in contrast to her ill-fated 2020 campaign, Harris has demonstrated strength among Black voters and mainstream Democrats in polls, and as such will benefit from the replacement of Iowa as the opening primary state by South Carolina, the state which revived Biden's flagging campaign in 2020. However, her support is shakier on closer inspection; her oratory and public appearances have been plagued by gaffes and inability to define a message, and her high-profile position has made her a target for Republican attacks about her competence and alleged mistreatment of staffers, dragging down an approval rating already tied to the fluctuating one of President Biden. Moreover, her attempts to combat illegal immigration and promote voting rights have met with little success, with the record-breaking rise of the former to 2.76 million crossing in 2022 especially damaging to her support in a matchup with Trump or DeSantis, and her frustration at a perceived lack of support from the White House on these issues could lead to a rift like that between Johnson and Hubert Humphrey in 1968, which led to a bloody primary that split the Democrats. While Harris' perseverance and appeal to the Democratic base as potentially the first female President should not be

Joe Biden has been buoyed by his successful support of Ukraine

underestimated, she would face far more opposition than Al Gore, the last incumbent vice-president to clinch a nomination, did.

With Progressive doyens Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren both having missed the presidential boat in 2020, any challenge from the Democratic left wing would likely be led by New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Known for her Twitter warfare against Republicans and leadership of the quasi-socialist “Squad” in Congress, Ocasio-Cortez is wildly popular among the Democrats’ activist base and is a charismatic communicator, having brought fringe ideas like the Green New Deal into the internal debate of the party and pushed President Biden towards grand bills like the Build Back Better Act (later watered down to the Inflation Reduction Act), and could count on vast support from young Democrats. However, there remains the question as to whether she could break the primary ceiling that Sanders was stuck at, with Progressive candidates particularly struggling with white

working-class and Black voters in 2016 and 2020, and her controversial stances on defunding the police and cutting aid to Israel could be albatrosses around her neck in both primary and general election, meaning familiar fears about electability could sink her. While she has indicated her opposition to a second Biden term, saying “we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it” and refusing to endorse the President when asked about a primary run, and her youth as the first millennial Representative would contrast powerfully with Biden, defeating a more moderate incumbent would likely prove beyond her, and it is possible she may wish to keep her powder dry for 2028 if Biden runs again. Should he not, however, Ocasio-Cortez could be joined in a primary fight by California Governor Gavin Newsom, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg.

Newsom, a tech billionaire turned Governor of the largest state, possesses both a formidable war chest and power to shape policy, which he has used to promote

Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders debating environmental challenges (December 2018), by Senate Democrats



liberal policies and spar with DeSantis, responding to the latter's attacks on "wokeness" with bills allowing victims of shootings to sue gun manufacturers and expanding access to abortion in what many view as an attempt to boost his national profile ahead of seeking the big prize. However, his gubernatorial tenure, under which crime and homelessness have soared in major Californian cities, could also provide easy routes of attack, and party strategists fear putting up a rich coastal liberal as their candidate would play into Republican attacks on Democrat elitism, with Newsom having already been hit for breaking his own Covid-19 restrictions to dine at a ritzy restaurant, meaning he could struggle to break into the "mainstream liberal" lane currently occupied by Biden and Harris. Pete Buttigieg arguably faces similar problem, being plagued by questions about his competence (his only elected office was to Mayor of South Bend, Indiana) and allegations of corruption and racial profiling in the South Bend police force during his mayoralty, and consistently polls low with minority voters whom the Democrats can no longer take for granted come 2024. However, Buttigieg, victor of the Iowa primary in 2020, should not be written off yet: polls have shown his appeal to the working-class Midwesterners who granted Biden victory, and his Cabinet

role has made him instrumental to the implementation of the 2021 Infrastructure bill, demonstrating his growing political nous and boosting his profile. Additionally, he has reportedly been discussed as a possibility to replace Kamala Harris as the "continuity candidate" of 2024 by White House strategists, and, with the advantages that his youth and compelling backstory as a gay, working-class veteran lend him, could be considered a dark horse. If come primary season Biden's health and approval are declining, however, eyes may turn to someone less tied to the administration. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan and Roy Cooper of North Carolina, both moderate governors experienced in winning swing states and working with Republicans, are two names often touted as common-sense candidates with the charisma and policies to hold together or even expand the "Biden coalition". Although they have successfully brought swing voters behind traditional Democratic policy like ensuring abortion access and expanding Medicare, both, especially Cooper, lack name recognition and have yet to be tested on the gruelling national stage, meaning that both winning a primary against federal figures and winning over a polarised, disillusioned national electorate would pose challenges. Furthermore, Democrats may not want to risk swing gubernatorial seats falling into Republican hands and may fear political skeletons could be brutally unearthed by the investigation that a national campaign entails, meaning the best they can likely hope for is a vice-presidential slot.

Overall, America is approaching perhaps the most uncertain primary season in over fifty years with a backdrop of stubborn inflation, simmering partisan hatred and a fraught geopolitical scene. The Republican Party, bruised by electoral defeat and racked by internal divisions, must decide whether to hitch themselves to the flagging Trumpist bandwagon again or pivot to a new vision, whether Pence's revamped Reaganism or DeSantis's aggressive post-liberal conservatism, while Democrats must consider whether to back a man who would be 86 at the end of a second term, but who seems the only candidate able to prevent a party civil war and prevent Trump's return to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. In this author's opinion, Biden's going on the offensive to hit Republican policies and highlight his accomplishments in recent speeches indicate a desire for renomination, which, while a challenge from his left is plausible, he would likely clinch, if only due to inertia and the incentive of politicians like Buttigieg to wait for 2028: however, clear health issues or major political failings could yet throw the arena open with no clear frontrunner, perhaps even leading to a brokered convention, although on present trends this is unlikely. On the GOP side, sane conservatism appears unlikely to triumph: either a plethora of hopefuls will allow Trump to divide and conquer with a core base that displays near-messianic devotion, or a DeSantis triumph will prompt Trump to run third party, breaking his toy instead of letting another have it. Despite these threats, however, I remain hopeful that, while there can be no easy healing of America's structural and societal wounds, the American people will tire of extremist partisans and will, at least electorally, defy Yeats' prophecy.



Why should we care about a faraway land

Laetitia Sanai wonders whether the current protests by women and schoolgirls in Iran will have any effect on the brutal regime which denies women basic human rights.

In September last year, Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi made a speech to the United Nations in defence of human rights. A confident, sustained and at times zealous declamation scorned the so-called “double standards of governments” regarding human rights. His words were spoken with such conviction. But they were entirely subverted by the millions of people simultaneously taking to the streets of the country he rules to burn their hijabs. They chanted “Death to the Dictator” in an active confrontation with the pervasive, deep-rooted oppression of human rights under his Islamic regime.

The death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of Iran’s ‘Morality Police’ on September 16th sparked a worldwide rebellion – one targeting the essence of ideological misogyny which upholds the very framework of the Islamic Republic. Women’s oppression in Iran has become a fundamental tenet of the Islamic regime, which uses religious theocracy as the basis for its political power threshold.

On September 13th, Iran’s morality police arrested 22 year old Mahsa Amini for allegedly mis-wearing the hijab. Three days later, she died of head injuries in custody. The enforcement of the hijab in Iran, following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, has become a symbol of the universal discrimination faced by women in every aspect of life, catalysed by an infrastructure of prejudiced constitutional law. On the one hand, Iranian women are often educated and successful professionals – there are female professors, parliamentarians and doctors. On the other hand they are deprived of much of their autonomy, dependent on their husbands in matters of marriage, divorce, travel and childcare.

Women have been second class citizens since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, forced to wear the veil and live in a strict patriarchy. Historically, Iranians have looked down on their Arab neighbours as being less educated, less liberal. Yet now it seems as though whilst Iran is going backwards, Saudi Arabia is progressing in terms of women’s rights, where since 2019 women are no longer required to wear a hijab in public.

Despite previous President Hassan Rouhani’s centrist reform, improving international relations and freedom of access to information, as well as appointing women spokespeople in the foreign ministry, Iran remains a place where women are consistently prosecuted, constrained, and reminded of their total inferiority.

In 2009, approximately 80 people were massacred following uprisings after widely-claimed election

fraud following far-right Holocaust denier Mahmoud Ahmadinejad being declared President for a second term, despite widespread reports that he had lost the election. Ahmadinejad’s previous term involved the funding of anti-Israeli terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah, and the development of a nuclear weapons program, both of which intensified US sanctions on Iran, fuelling the weakening of the Iranian economy.

We saw headlines recently showing government forces had killed at least 500 unarmed protesters. Hundreds more have been arrested and thrown into brutal prisons by the authorities over what Raisi claims to be “acts of chaos”.

Six months on, protestors are still dying. Yet, global news outlets have gone relatively silent. Headlines are no longer dominated with figures of deaths at the hands of the regime, nor emblazoned with the images of Iranian citizens clambering up the sides of government buildings armed with nothing more than paint canisters and posters of the universally recognisable face of Mahsa Amini.

It should not be left to the Iranian people to bring about change, let alone make the world aware of its atrocities. Responsibility now lies with governments in the Global North. This problem should not go unnoticed in the lens of Western media. Unlike typical cycles of “trendy” news, this is a topic which fundamentally must remain in the limelight. It is not “just” about these human rights violations specifically, but the broader institutionalised misogyny seen on an individual, societal, and global level. From passive sexism to femicide, misogyny is not endemic only to Iran or other countries ruled by brutal dictatorships. Worldwide, 56% of women and children murdered in 2021 died at the hands of an intimate partner or family member. Iran’s outright persecution of girls and women draws attention to a far wider issue: how institutionalized misogyny is so deeply embedded in our societies that it has become almost impossible to eliminate.

Western nations are currently doing little more than sit by and watch as human rights violations continue under the declining watch of the Western media. However, the only ethical proposition is one of worldwide action. It is time for individuals, news outlets and governments to put pressure on the Iranian regime, and in this way all others, for substantial reform. Otherwise, we will continue to consume news about such horrors from afar, comfortable in our privilege and distance, feeling brief empathy, reassuring ourselves due to distance from the event, before moving on to the next. And misogyny will continue to govern the so-called progressive society we live in.

It should not be left to the Iranian people to bring about change





Tip Culture in North American Restaurants

Mattias Shuper reveals the history and shortcomings of gratuities.

After sitting down for an enjoyable meal, you call for the bill and are presented with a cheque recounting the items ordered that day. Beyond the total lays a blank tip section, readily awaiting to be filled. In North America, while it is technically legal not to tip, over the years it has become a part of local culture to leave a gratuity after a meal in a sit-down restaurant, to the point where if you walk out without leaving a tip, a waiter is likely to chase you down, demanding why you did not do so.

Understanding why tipping culture has become so prominent goes back to early 20th century America, when, under Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, the Fair Labour Standards Act was passed. The act was vital in positively reshaping wage policies in the US, mainly by introducing the right to a minimum wage, allowing workers to have a set minimum amount they would earn per hour. The act also prohibited the employment of minors, which encouraged more students to remain in school instead of seeking work at a young age and prevented firms from exploiting them and their naivety. On top of this, overtime pay rules were also introduced to allow labourers to be paid more for additional hours worked.

However, in the minimum wage legislation laid out, even though it was stated that an employer had to pay each employee at least the minimum wage, firms would also have the option of paying workers in part through tips. In a practice known as using tip credits, if a worker customarily and regularly receives gratuities, the base cash wage that the employee is paid can be legally dropped to a lower amount (the tipped minimum wage). Although some states like California and Alaska have state-specific minimum wage legislations, which have increased the minimum wage and tipping wage rates to the same or similar levels, most states still abide by the federal rates. These rates have the minimum wage set at \$7.25, and the minimum cash wage for an employee who is eligible for tips at a mere \$2.13, less than 30% of the standard rate, with the rest of the minimum wage being covered by collected gratuities. Due to this exceedingly low value, many service workers are forced to rely on tips from customers to sustain themselves financially.

Viewing this system from afar, one could argue that although it may be a slightly inequitable law (in the employer's favour), it is merely how the US government has decided to give employers different options when it comes to paying their employees. I believe, however, that this policy is fundamentally broken in the way that firms



Photo courtesy of Pixabay

The power dynamic created between tipper and employee engenders more problems

can push a good proportion of their production costs onto the consumer, essentially using them to subsidise the employment of tip-earning workers. The two-tiered nature of the wage system and the fact that tips are added on after the

final charge also means that a firm is theoretically able to retain the same level of revenue while reducing costs by putting more employees into tip-earning positions. This results in increased profits at the expense of both consumer welfare and the employees. Such a method of lower costs may also lead to employers subconsciously or even consciously beginning to view waiters less as employees, and instead as easily adjustable variable costs, furthering the divide between employer and employee and even possibly dehumanising the workers from the employer's perspective. This can then spiral into worsening working conditions and contracts which are coherent in concept but not in reality when it comes to actual people working to produce real output.

That is not to say that tipping culture is entirely detrimental. It is true that in high-end restaurants, tips can provide those receiving them with huge boosts in overall income. However, in the case of an employee being paid the tipping wage or very close to it, the existence of tips leaves them much more exposed economically. Although these workers should earn the same pay as those on the regular minimum wage, just mostly through tips, in a situation such as covid where demand for meals from restaurants as well as more specifically waiters' services has fallen, even if these waiters remain in work, it is highly unlikely that they will earn enough tips to meet the minimum wage. The law states employers must make up any difference between the tipping wage and the

minimum wage not covered by collected tips, however, the US department of labour has also reported an 84 percent violation rate regarding employers actually following this policy. As a result, workers in these situations are left unfairly reliant on the tip system in a way where they not only have to successfully satisfy every customer they serve just to get by, but may also have to find new work in the case of a fall in traffic into their restaurant. In other words, the contractual conditions of those earning tips are greatly worsened due to the tipping wage.

Another overarching issue is the amount of power being given to the consumer, who essentially controls how much a waiter earns. A study by Michael Lynn and Glenn Withiam investigating tipping and its alternatives found that non-white service providers tended to earn lower tips than their white counterparts. As such, while not in all cases, but in cases where a firm distributes tips through tip pooling (collecting all the tips together then distributing them according to position), employers may tend to favour white servers more than those of other races. This is likely not the case for most restaurants, but statistics will also tell you that more often than not it is white men serving esteemed guests in fancy steakhouses rather than waiters of other races and genders.

The power dynamic created between tipper and employee engenders more problems when considering how waiters and more specifically female waiters are treated. The majority of tippers tend to be male, while 70% of servers are female. One can then see where issues may arise in the dining industry which generates 5 times the average number of sexual harassment claims per worker. Since tippers contribute significantly to one's income prospects, waiters may also begin to adopt an attitude that they are no longer working just for their employer, but also for each and every customer they serve. Unfortunately, this may then result in servers either being encouraged by management or deciding it is the best method to focus on appeasing their customers no matter how they may be treated to maximise tip earnings. This can include anything from being patient even if the customer is actively insulting them and even to the objectification of

oneself. Workers can face terrible working conditions, but at the same time if they are working in a restaurant like an IHOP or Applebees, which are glorified fast food joints that pay their workers the bare minimum, focusing on making the customer happy regardless of treatment may be the only option.

The act of tipping in itself is not completely harmful. It allows satisfied customers to reward service providers who they believe have done well, and it gives waiters the prospect of making far more than their fixed-wage counterparts. However, at the bottom line, where one is earning the tipping wage and relies on gratuities from customers to support their daily lives, the whole system is too flawed to justify having the tipping wage at any rate lower than the national minimum wage of \$7.25. Without this rise, workers are left at the mercy of their customers, meaning that factors such as race and gender may negatively affect their prospects of earning higher tips due to the biases of the customer. With tippers in the position of power, they may also begin to mistreat waiters attempting to satisfy them, in turn leading to both a negative workplace environment, but also one in which waiters must resort to appeasing customers no matter what, even if it does involve turning a blind eye or self-objectification, as there is no other way to financially survive otherwise.

But on top of it all, I believe this law is flawed as it means that those in the higher echelons of firms are only making even greater profits by paying their employees close to nothing for their work and using customers to cover the majority of their wages instead. The owners of massive chains do not need to depend on this minor discrepancy to sustain themselves, yet this culture cultivated around tipping actively and disproportionately helps the rich while leaving the poor in a more exposed economic and working situation. The tipping system can help those on low incomes make significantly more than they would otherwise expect, however, this benefit can only truly come into fruition if workers are guaranteed the minimum wage as a baseline. If not, then the negative attributes of the gratuity system quickly reveal themselves.



Photo by paolodepascale, Pixabay

Chat GPT: A new way to get prep done?

As generative language AI continues to make inroads into daily life, **Jijith Thukuram** investigates the background, uses and shortcomings of a recent arrival on the scene.

As I sit on a Tuesday afternoon with my Geography essay in one hand, and my device in the other, the temptation to get a bot to do my prep, while I put my feet up, is ever-present. I sit there for what feels like hours, deciding between a good conscience and a good evening.

Chat GPT, a platform owned by OpenAI, has taken over the tech world as a possible replacement for large search engines such as Google, Bing and others, having already secured 13 million daily users. But with this comes the question, apart from: Who really uses Bing?... How exactly does Chat GPT work and what will become of it?

Chat GPT is a type of AI model known as a generative language model. This model is designed to predict the likelihood of the next word in a sentence or phrase. For example, given the input: "The cat sat on the..", a generative language model may predict that the next word is "mat", "chair", or any number of other possibilities. It is this model that gives it the human feel and why it so perfectly passes the Turing Test (a test to see whether a human can distinguish a conversation with a computer or another human).

At its core, Chat GPT is a deep neural network that uses a variant of the Transformer Architecture, a type of neural network introduced by Google in 2017. This technique enables Chat GPT to sift through several terabytes of data, picking out keywords and phrases, and combining them with the previously discussed generative language model, to form a human-like response.

For many, including my mother, asking the question how is Chat GPT different from Google, the difference lies in the type of questions you want to be answered. If the question is a generic one: "How many people live in the UK?", both search engines will display a figure for the user to ingest and realise how small we actually are, however, if one were to input, "Which battles did Napoleon fight in?", the answer would be very different. Here, it is important to understand Chat GPT's role as a chatbot and not as a search engine. For this reason, Chat GPT would come up with four or five paragraphs stating the battles and talking briefly about each one. Google, most likely, would provide a link to 'Wikipedia' at the top of the page, and below it, budding resource pages such as 'Encyclopaedia Britannica', and lesser-known pages like 'History Hit'. Google is simply a platform that provides links to websites that may or may not display the information the user wants, Chat GPT, however, bypasses the links and gives an answer specific to the question posed. In some ways, this can be seen as more convenient, but for those wanting to



Image by Tumisu from Pixabay

At its core, Chat GPT is a deep neural network

know more, Google is the better option, providing more sources, with differing opinions, and giving a more well-rounded answer.

However, the uses of Chat GPT extend far beyond the general sphere of questions that could be asked to a search engine like Google. For instance, writer's block does not only affect the likes of JK Rowling and Stephen King, and Chat GPT can be used to give suggestions or hints, omitting the 'fear of the blank page' and making it a field of opportunity and ideas.

Open AI has developed another platform similar to Chat GPT - this time for generating art called DALL-E. Artists can use DALL-E, to see whether they like their idea on the canvas before spending hours creating it only to decide it was a waste of time. This enables artists to better express their opinions and have time on their side, ensuring their valuable messages get out to the public. DALL-E also opens the doors to those who may not have the skills to create art, but have the inspiration and ideas. DALL-E can make our world more open to sharing our thoughts on society using the universal language that is art.

Chat GPT can even help with securing new jobs. The

Chat GPT, already, is able to write medium-difficulty code

platform can generate interview questions, and even act as an interviewer to help candidates practice ahead of the real thing. This can help to improve their confidence and style of delivery in the boardroom. Having said that, while it can help with securing jobs, can it take some away?

With Chat GPT becoming more mainstream, customer support services will be the first to go: fewer people on the payroll and less human error makes this an easy option for businesses looking to cut costs. Chat GPT works a lot with analysing patterns of users' data usage and the kind of inputs to give a personalised answer. For this reason, data analysts who create financial targets and pathways for a living will soon be out of jobs - as- for the reasons stated before, Chat GPT is the new GOAT of market predictions and viable financial targets. In fact, most admin roles and data entry jobs can wave goodbye to their paychecks. Earlier I mentioned that Chat GPT works off Transformer Architecture, and it is this that will enable it to be more efficient and leave less room for error in these jobs. In 5-10 years, if Chat GPT and OpenAI follow the same trajectory of development, there will be no need for computer programmers as Chat GPT, already, is able to write medium-difficulty code that will challenge the existence of jobs or those coding menial tasks in, for example, website creation. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs report in 2020 estimated that by 2025, 85 million jobs will be replaced with AI, and now with the introduction of Chat GPT, this number is only set to rise. Elon Musk recently came out saying that in a few years, "there will be one humanoid robot for every human on planet Earth". It is not possible at this current stage to justify the ruler of the tech world's claims, however, all said, Chat GPT has a long way to go, so don't worry... yet.

The good news is that if you were toying with the idea of a profession in the technology world, reports have suggested that as many as 97 million jobs will be created in the tech world as Chat GPT continues its systematic conquest of the world. Though Chat GPT comes with the stock fears that any new technology brings with it (loss of jobs, taking over the world, etc.), humans have one thing Chat GPT or any other AI doesn't: our creative mind. For those wishing to pursue careers in the arts or product design, the human brain will always shine through as the epitome of creativity and possibility.

In all the articles I've read on this topic, most fail to mention the impact this radical AI movement has on us: students. Most of our days are filled with either school or homework, and if there is no upcoming test, a rare occurrence, it just means more prep. All this prep and schooling, though not necessarily bad, limits the time we get to pursue our passions, whether sports, meeting up with friends, or taking time for ourselves. Chat GPT seems the perfect solution to minimise time spent on "prep" and do more of all the above. Adults in the real world, have already drawn parallels to this: many employees of BuzzFeed, a digital media company that provides news and entertainment content, used Chat GPT to write the articles assigned to them. Now, though they did enjoy more free

time... they eventually got caught and were reprimanded. But in all this drama, one thing stood out: most of the articles were not only biased but some were even factually incorrect. So, if you're reading this, regretting that History essay you gave in, that Chat GPT had a little hand in writing, and hoping all of it is true... I can only pray for you. The education system has also found numerous ways of battling this most heinous of crimes. There are now companies like Coalition Technologies that have dedicated much of their budget to checking for AI plagiarism, and there is a Chrome extension, Copyleaks, that can check for use of Chat GPT with 99% accuracy.

Now, that's one side of the coin - getting Chat GPT to basically do all of your prep, but this platform can be used in a better, less conscience-destroying way. Writing a long prep or finding out the answer to a question sometimes needs evidence or information to make your response far more colourful. But using Google needs effort and time: having to look for one specific point in a random 50-page PDF file you found on the molecular chemistry of a hotdog is tiresome. Chat GPT eliminates this issue by giving specific information on the input. It also words the answer in such a way that the information can be understood in an effective way, which means transposing the information into your essay is a lot easier.

All in all, Chat GPT can make our world a better and more efficient place to live, making menial tasks non-existent and instead inspire creativity in the current and future generations. We have learnt that though it may take away jobs, it can provide far more, and help shift perspective, enabling the development of the human species in the technology segment by forcing those affected to adapt and prosper. But on the topic of Chat GPT helping with prep, it's a question of how much risk you want to take and also how you want to prepare for living in the real world as an adult. Though we may reap the profits of extra time to gallivant with friends in Westfield, we lose out on true learning and understanding information that may prove useful in the coming years. Personally, I believe that there is great power in those who can learn how to make Chat GPT work for them and truly prosper in a day and age where it is harder to do so.

And for those wondering, just as I was about to click the enter key to the URL: <https://chat.openai.com/>, my dad just walked in, so I ended up doing the prep on my own.



Image by Jan Vařek from Pixabay

Laughter and Forgetting in Prague

Blake Morris retraces the major cultural and political events of the 20th century which helped shape Prague today.

Sitting in the Cafe Slavia with my Czech cousin, I ordered a cup of coffee and looked out over the Vltava, the river that runs through Prague. Locals and tourists alike walked down Národní Street outside. With wood-panelled walls, marble, mirrors, round tables and art deco styling, the establishment looked

like it hadn't left the 1930s. But of course it had, with Nazi occupation and then the brutal tastelessness of communist remodelling. After the 1989 revolution, the cafe required a great deal of refurbishment to become again in the 1990s what it had been in the 1930s. Today, the average tourist would not know any of this. The



Václav Havel 10 December 1989: Václav Havel waves from a balcony on Prague's Wenceslas Square, after the constitution of the new Czechoslovak government. Two weeks later, Havel was elected first president of Czechoslovakia.

At first glance, this may have seemed like the death of the Czech renaissance

history of the place was rich and absorbing, but like Prague itself, it seemed to dwell in many eras at once and not require hard and fast boundaries between fiction and fact. It was at ease with fairy tales and real life in equal measure.

Founded in 1886, Cafe Slavia has always been a meeting ground for Prague's artists. Located just opposite the National Theatre, this was the place to go after a show for cake and coffee, to discuss the latest and greatest



amongst intellectual circles. In the early 20th century, it counted Dvořák amongst its customers. Alluding to the cafe in one of his works, Rainer Maria Rilke was a regular, though Kafka frequented the Cafe Louvre down the street. Though both are known as writers in German, they were also natives of Prague, as it was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire in that era. On gaining its independence following the first world war, Czechoslovakia developed a thriving economy, ranked amongst the top ten in the world, and with it a burgeoning demand from its newly-moneyed classes for arts and entertainment. A film industry arose which produced social comedies in scale. It is no wonder that cafes like Slavia have been home to some of Prague's most famous writers. Karel Čapek, playwright and creator of the word "robot", frequented the establishment. So did the avant garde poets Jaroslav Seifert and Vítězslav Nezval.

As the communist era wore on following the second world war, the playwright, dissident and future president Václav Havel often sat at a table at the far end of the cafe, next to the window with a view of his house. Milan Kundera, arguably the finest Czech novelist of the 20th century, refers to a cafe presumed to be Slavia in his short story *Lost Letters*. The modern history of Prague is inextricably linked to the conversations had in this cafe between writers, politicians and leaders. However, Cafe Slavia resonates above with the memory of a specific moment in history, when freedom seemed within reach amidst totalitarianism.

On the 5th of January 1968, Alexander Dubček assumed the position of First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Seen by the Soviets as a safe pair of hands because of his training in Russia and his vehement support for socialism, Dubček was famously called "our Sasha" by Leonid Brezhnev, the Russian supreme leader at the time. But the minute Dubček took office reforms began to take place. A new program of "socialism with a human face" was adopted, proposing a mixed planned and market economy to encourage economic growth. Most importantly to the story of Slavia, Dubček allowed greater freedom in literature.

A Writers' Union, headed by Seifert, formed a committee to investigate the persecution of writers following the communist takeover in 1948. More and more books of previously shunned writers were being published. An explosion of culture was upon the city; artists, dissidents, students and intellectuals discussed new ideas, prospects and dreams, and every day these conversations bounced off the wooden walls of Slavia. And then on the 21st August 1968, it all went silent. Soviet tanks rolled down Wenceslas Square, and the Prague Spring was over. At first glance, this may have seemed like the death of the Czech renaissance, and indeed in some ways it was. Pleading for greater freedom and independence may have been banned, but the ideas still lived on. In this period of "normalisation", the return of Czechoslovakia to its 1950s winter of censorship, the Czech literary movement boomed. Kundera (in exile) published two of his best-

It is through Prague that the ideas of exile, identity and love that Kundera is trying to get across are portrayed

known works: *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Havel (still in Prague) wrote his famous “Vaněk Plays” and Siefert carried on with his avant-garde poetry, eventually winning a Nobel Prize for literature in 1984. A new movement, made up of writers who were born during the excesses of Stalinism, carried no false promises about utopias, and were focused

on just living in the world. Polemics about socialism were replaced by works exploring themes of personal and civic morality. The cafe had now become a meeting ground for dissidents, a location in the underground network for the intelligentsia to discuss their new work and its illegal printing: samizdat.

Although some saw this movement in the 1970s as



Prague Street scene, by user32212 from Pixabay

unprecedented, in fact the Prague writers were only reconsidering an age-old theme in Czech literature: the hypocrisy of totalitarianism and the stupidity of bureaucracy. More than fifty years earlier, Kafka had written extensively on the latter of these themes in his novel *The Trial*, and Jaroslav Hašek had savagely parodied the dual nature of empire in his epic saga *The Good Soldier Švejk*. However, whilst previously writers considered these conflicts as uniquely Czech (the eponymous Švejk becoming somewhat of a national, secular icon), this new generation presented these themes as universal. Kundera is perhaps the foremost example of

this universalisation of Czech themes. In his novel *Life is Elsewhere*, Kundera deliberately leaves out any names barring the main character's, Jaromil (literally translating to "the one who loves spring" - a possible reference to the Prague Spring). The rest of his characters are referred to in relation to their occupations, e.g. "the poet". This lack of any signifying presence pushes the themes he addresses in this novel, the naivety of youth, the simultaneously comic and tragic existence under totalitarianism and the hypocrisy of political supporters, as universal, not just Czech problems. In the 1970s, Kundera's works started to find an audience in the West, which could stem from his introduction of Czech themes to the outside world. He later became a literary celebrity in the US, appearing in *The New Yorker* and earning the admiration of luminaries such as the novelist Philip Roth.

In 1981, Kundera became a naturalised French citizen. He prefers to see himself as a French writer (despite mostly all of his work written exclusively in Czech), and asks for critics to consider his work as French literature. However, his true Czech identity still remains obvious, despite his best attempts to hide it. Whenever Kundera writes about Prague, he does not depict it as yet another city. It is not merely a setting, but another character in the story with a mind of its own. Many critics describe Kundera's style as magical-realism and this is hard to dispute. The city of Prague is the real focus in his stories, with the characters merely passing through it, just another few custodians in its long history. It is through Prague that the ideas of exile, identity and love that Kundera is trying to get across are portrayed. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, he famously writes "It is a book about laughter and about forgetting, about forgetting and about Prague, about Prague and about angels". Cafe Slavia is an example of a larger phenomenon in Prague. It is a city, as Kundera describes it as a "a city without memory" which "has even forgotten its name". He famously describes an event just after the communist coup of 1948. Klement Gottwald stepped out onto the balcony at Kinsky Palace to announce the formation of a new socialist republic. Standing beside him was his foreign minister, Vladimír "Vlado" Clementis, who lent Gottwald his fur hat to wear. A short while after this announcement, Clementis was purged, hanged for treason and airbrushed out of all public photos. All that remained of Clementis was the hat on Gottwald's head. The city forgot him, although his presence was still there. Likewise, many streets in Prague have taken several names over the space of the last century. First the Austrian-Hungarian names, then the German names under the Nazi occupation, then the Communist names and now finally their Czech names. Littered throughout the city are remnants of these eras. The road to Wenceslas Square, location of the statue of St Wenceslas, the great symbol of the Czechs, is often referred to as "Wenzelsplatz", a relic of the Austrian empire. The Nazis rebranded Cafe Slavia as Cafe Victoria during their occupation, trying to purge its association with an ethnic group they viewed as inferior, but then they were gone and the original name returned.

Kundera hints at his own relationship with the city through his characters as well, most visibly seen in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In this book, Tomas



Cafe Slavia has always been a meeting ground for Prague's artists



Cafe Slavia in Prague interior, by DIMSFIKAS

and Tereza, husband and wife, leave Prague to escape the retrogressive “normalisation” following the Soviet invasion and instead move to Switzerland, a seemingly idyllic new home. However, Tereza never settles into the new life and decides to return to Prague, despite its many problems. There are various other reasons in the story for Tereza’s change of heart about exile, but ultimately she simply cannot bear to be away from the city, and neither can Kundera, at least in his thoughts, with the city as his muse through his work.

After the Velvet Revolution, Cafe Slavia closed down in 1992 due to a legal dispute with its new owner, a Czech-American entrepreneur. None were particularly happy, least of all its most famous former patron and now Czech president, Václav Havel. He in fact submitted a petition to get it reopened stating, “We strongly protest against the fact... this important and traditional meeting place of Prague intellectuals... has been closed to the public without any justification or defence”. He suggested that failure to reopen the cafe would “seriously damage the good relations of the Prague intelligentsia with capitalism and with the United States”. Even then, as the first president of the new Czech Republic, Havel still retained his fondness for this place that for him was the centre of his world and his life. As a 17-year-old, he met mentors there who would help him find his way in the theatrical scene. There he also came across a young actress he would court and marry. With his colleagues and

friends, including a young Miloš Forman, it was a location for laughter, discussion and planning ways to change the world when it seemed impossible. It was at Cafe Slavia that he first met the members of what would become the “Circle of Independent Writers”, a group containing some of the finest minds in Czechoslovakia. It was at the Slavia that he got his first signatures for Charter 77, a document criticising the then communist government for its failure to implement promised human rights reforms. Throughout multiple arrests and interrogations, Havel always made his first steps back to the cafe and, in his mind at least, towards a better future.

“Blake, Blake?” I jerked my head from the window as I was awoken from my daydream. “Káva je tady”, as my cousin indicated to the two cups on our table. Sipping on our coffees, we leaped from topic to topic—what was the best Yes album of all time, whether Čapek could really be considered the best Czech writer, and whether the Czech/German humour in *The Good Soldier Švejk* could ever be adequately rendered in English. At this point, somehow it wouldn’t have surprised me to see Rudolf Hrušínský, the famous Czech actor who had starred in the 1954 film version of *Svejk*, sitting down at the table next to ours, though he had died in 1994. He had been another of Slavia’s regulars. I looked out over the Vltava again and wanted to remember this place and this time, at the magical-realist Cafe Slavia, in its time-bending embrace of all who came there.

Madison v. Alabama

Ingrid Berg examines the application of the death penalty in the USA and considers the ethical and practical problems of capital punishment.

Vernon Madison, a then 67 year old Black man who had been imprisoned on Alabama death row for 32 years, was scheduled to be executed on the 25th of January, 2018.¹ This was not the first time that Alabama had planned his execution; in fact, Madison had been on death row for 32 years for fatally shooting a police officer in 1985, and had already been scheduled for execution in 2016.² By this time, due to a series of serious strokes he had endured in 2015 after being held in solitary confinement, Madison suffered from severe vascular dementia that left him blind, unable to walk, incontinent, disoriented, and with no memory of his crime.

Madison had been convicted three times for his crime, after the first two convictions were rescinded for malpractice. The first ruling was overturned after reviewing courts found that there had been intentional racial discrimination in the selection of Madison's jury by excluding Black jurors. Madison was convicted again and sentenced to death, only for the ruling to be overturned once more after the prosecutors were found to have engaged in misconduct in order to illegally convict him. In his third trial, the jury convicted him and sentenced him to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole, but a trial judge overturned the jury's verdict and sentenced him to execution. The practice of overturning a jury verdict on life imprisonment was made illegal in Alabama in 2017, but the new law did not apply retroactively to Madison's case.³

Madison was first scheduled for execution in 2016, but the serious deterioration in his cognitive function due to his strokes caused concern for his competency. "Competency", defined as the ability of the accused to rationally comprehend the crime that was committed and the resulting punishment of death, is a necessary

characteristic of the defendant in capital punishment cases, established by the 2007 Supreme Court ruling in *Ford v. Wainwright*.^{4, 5} Madison's case went to the Federal Appeals Court to resolve this question, who found him incompetent; this ruling was held by the Eleventh Circuit Court, which argued further that executing a person with dementia, such as Madison, violated the protections of the Eighth Amendment against "cruel and unusual punishment".^{6, 7} However, the Supreme Court overruled the Circuit Court's judgement, stating that the Court did not have the jurisdiction to rule on whether or not a person with dementia qualified for immunity from the death penalty.

Madison once again faced execution, scheduled for January, 2018. However, when the expert who concluded him competent to face capital punishment was arrested on felony drug charges for

Further doubt was shed on the legitimacy of Madison's sentencing

illegally abusing narcotics and disqualified from medical practice, further doubt was shed on the legitimacy of Madison's sentencing. His plea for a stay of execution was granted, and the Supreme Court accepted his petition for review. The case was argued in October 2018, and in February 2019, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of Madison against the state of Alabama, announcing that the protections against "cruel and unusual" punishment under the Eighth Amendment applied to prisoners with dementia being considered for the death sentence. However, the court stipulated that this was not due to Madison's inability to remember the crime, but rather that his dementia impeded his ability to rationally understand his sentencing and punishment. The 5-3 decision written by Justice Kagan stated that "a person lacking memory of his crime may yet rationally understand why the State seeks to execute him; if so, the Eighth Amendment poses

1 Stevenson, B. A. (Ed.). (2017, October). *VERNON MADISON, Petitioner, v. STATE OF ALABAMA, Respondent*. SupremeCourt.gov.

2 Ibid.

3 Editor, E. J. I. (2020, March 3). *Madison v. Alabama*. Equal Justice Initiative. Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://eji.org/cases/madison-v-alabama/>

4 Adams, D. M. (2014, January). *Belief and death: Capital punishment and the competence ... - researchgate*. ResearchGate.

5 Ford v. Wainwright. (n.d.). Oyez. Retrieved February 26, 2023, from <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1985/85-5542>

6 Stevenson, B. A. (Ed.). (2017, October). *VERNON MADISON, Petitioner, v. STATE OF ALABAMA, Respondent*. SupremeCourt.gov.

7 U.S. Const., Amend. VIII.

no bar to his execution".⁸

This case is the most recent in a series of Supreme Court cases pertaining to a defendant's competence in applications of the death penalty. *Ford v. Wainwright* (1986) established the necessity that the accused have an awareness of the connection between crime and punishment, which was elaborated by *Panetti v. Quarterman* (2007) to require a rational understanding, rather than just an awareness, of the relationship between the two.^{9, 10} In addition, *Atkins v. Virginia* (2002) ruled that the application of capital punishment to individuals with mental disabilities was unconstitutional under the Eighth Amendment.¹¹ Each case has reinvigorated the fierce debate about the ethics and practicality of having the death penalty as a punishment in general, particularly within the global context of its very limited use. This is especially so for *Madison v. Alabama*, given the concerning frequency of judiciary malpractice in the case.

These cases pose just the most recent developments in a long history of capital punishment in the U.S. The death sentence has been practiced since the establishment of the country itself, brought to the New World by the colonists from a long judicial tradition in Europe and especially the UK. However, the regulations of the death penalty, both globally and in America have continuously become stricter. In 1847, Michigan was the first state to abolish the death penalty, and 22 other states have joined this position since.^{12, 13} Nonetheless, the number of prisoners executed annually remained high throughout the 20th century, peaking in the 1930s with an average of 167 individuals killed per year. The popularity of the death penalty dropped significantly in the 60s and 70s, leading to its abolition under *Furman v. Georgia* (1972). However, the suspension of the practice was short lived; this ruling was overturned by *Gregg v. Georgia* (1976), which adjudicated that the death penalty could be constitutionally applied, with care and rigor, in instances where the defendant was convicted of deliberately killing another.¹⁴ The ruling followed popular pro-death penalty arguments that the punishment acts as a useful deterrent to potential criminals and an appropriate means of social retribution.

However, in cases like *Madison's*, the justifications for having the death penalty at all become extremely blurred. The Supreme Court took the case to answer the

question of the competency to be executed of defendants suffering from dementia, and while their ruling was successful in protecting *Madison*, the specification that the defendant need not remember the crime in order to be legally executed demonstrates how far removed the court proceedings are from ensuring the application of a fair and just punishment. Removing the context of the sentencing levelled against *Madison*, many would argue that it is not intuitive or moral, by common standards, to put a man to death more than thirty years after committing a murder which he no longer recollects. Certainly, punishment is necessary, but to resort to execution is not only unnecessarily cruel, but also fails to serve any deterring or practical purposes.

First, one must consider the reasons in favour of exacting capital punishment on a defendant like *Madison*. The most common argument, as mentioned above, is that it serves a purpose as a deterrent to other potential criminals; however numerous studies and significant social science research have demonstrated the death penalty to have no effect on crime and murder rates.¹⁵ Murder, the primary crime for which the death penalty is used, is almost always a crime of passion, occurring in a moment of extreme emotional intensity or stress. Where it is premeditated, the psychological state of the killer often means that the criminal either believes that they will not be caught, or hopes to be caught to gain recognition for the crime; in either case the threat of capital punishment has no bearing on the choice to kill.

The alternative argument in support of the death penalty is that it provides social retribution for a crime so heinous that no other punishment would suffice. However, the use of the death penalty is unaffected by the community's sense of an appropriate punishment. Of 18 executions performed in 2022, two individuals were killed despite the objections of the victims' family members, and two further were killed even after the prosecution requested to withdraw their death warrants.¹⁶ By contrast, several high profile, horrific murder cases resulted in life sentences and not capital punishment, where perhaps the latter would be justified by reason of retribution. For example, the infamous mass school shooting in Parkland, Florida, in 2018, in which 17 children and staff were killed, resulted in a life sentence without the possibility of parole in a state where the death penalty is legal.¹⁷ This is not to advocate for the use of the death penalty in mass shooting cases, but rather demonstrates that the use of capital punishment is untailed to the public's sense of justice and thus fails to uphold the argument of retribution; instead it remains a procedure for procedure's sake, without any real benefit being gained.

The question of the competency to be executed of defendants suffering from dementia

8 Stevenson, B. (Ed.). (2018, February). *Slip Opinion: Madison v. Alabama*. SupremeCourt.gov.

9 Ford v. Wainwright. (n.d.). Oyez. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1985/85-5542>

10 Panetti v. Quarterman. (n.d.). Oyez. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2006/06-6407>

11 Atkins v. Virginia. (n.d.). Oyez. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2001/00-8452>

12 Editor, D. P. I. C. (2022, November 8). *The history of the death penalty: A timeline*. Death Penalty Information Center.

13 Murphy, J. (2021, October 28). *Map: These are the states that allow the death penalty*. NBCNews.com.

14 Gregg v. Georgia. (n.d.). Oyez. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1975/74-6257>

15 Editor, A. C. L. U. (n.d.). *The death penalty: Questions and answers*. American Civil Liberties Union.

16 Editor, D.P.I.C. (2022). *The death penalty in 2022: Year end report*. Death Penalty Information Center.

17 Associated Press. (2022, November 2). *Parkland School shooter sentenced to life without parole*. The Guardian.

In addition, there are significant practical disadvantages to performing the death penalty, the first being its cost. A review of 15 state studies of the costs of cases where the death penalty was pursued, in comparison to similar cases where it was not, found that on average, seeking the death penalty costs an additional \$700,000.¹⁸ This expense is due to the extensive litigations and appeal proceedings involved in capital punishment cases, which is often ultimately futile as the defendant is sentenced to life in prison rather than death. Additionally, even when such cases are successful, prisoners sentenced to the death penalty spend at least ten years on death row before the date of their execution, adding to the already extensive costs.¹⁹ Furthermore, the execution methods themselves have caused several problems, with pharmaceuticals being hesitant to supply drugs used for executions, and executioners being insufficiently qualified in performing the execution, as they cannot be medical professionals who have taken the Hippocratic oath.²⁰ For example, when Frank Atwood was put to death on June 8th, 2022, executioners struggled to find a vein in which to insert the IV, and eventually did so successfully only with Atwood's own advice to insert the needle into his hand.²¹ Atwood was 66 at the time of his death, convicted for the kidnapping and murder of 8 year old Vicki Lynne Hoskinson in 1987.²² A witnessing reporter to the execution described: "I have looked behind the curtain of capital punishment and seen it for what it truly is: a frail old man lifted from a wheelchair onto a handicap accessible lethal injection gurney; nervous hands and perspiring faces trying to find a vein; needles puncturing skin; liquid drugs flooding a man's existence and drowning it out."²³

Vernon Madison was very close to meeting the same fate: an elderly and declining man; there would have been no benefit to his death at the hands of the state. Yet the procedure still exists and is defended by high

Yet the canon of precedent maintains that the death penalty is constitutional

walls of precedent, and any threat to the practice brings hordes of aggravated defenders that believe the death penalty to be essential to maintaining a safe society and a not overly liberal justice system. According to one Pew Research Center study, 60% of Americans still favour the death penalty to some degree, despite 78% also holding concerns that there is some risk of an innocent person being executed.²⁴ Yet the canon of precedent maintains that the death penalty is constitutional, even when a defendant like Madison no longer even recalls the crime that was committed, and was only on death row because of an unlucky, and now illegal, turn in the trial judge's conclusion. In addition, the frightening frequency of malpractice that occurred in Madison's case demonstrates how malleable a sentencing is, and also poses an issue for hundreds of other cases annually. Malpractice pertaining to the death penalty also plays into the larger scene of racism in the American justice system: 87% of Black exonerees facing capital punishment were victims of judicial malpractice, by comparison to 68% of white exonerees.²⁵ The question of the death penalty, in addition to the question of its constitutionality, must also involve a risk assessment: however constitutionally justified capital

punishment may be, is the chance of executing an innocent person worth the meagre and controversial gain made through a criminal's death? And equally importantly, is there any veritable gain to executing the guilty, such as Madison, when so often they

are already deprived of every other freedom, decades after the crime, subject to the death sentence only by an unfortunate twisting of events, and feeble almost to the point of harmlessness? It becomes evident in cases such as Madison's that the American justice system has strayed from its intended purpose in serving just and appropriate punishments, but defends the death sentence for procedure's sake, and not for any reasoning behind the benefit of the procedure. It is past due that the American Supreme Court reconsider this question and join the growing majority of the world that sees capital punishment as a dated and uncivilised practice.

18 Editor, D. P. I. C. (2017). *State Studies on monetary costs*. Death Penalty Information Center.

19 Editor, D. P. I. C. (2022). *Time on Death Row*. Death Penalty Information Center.

20 Editor, D.P.I.C. (2022). *The death penalty in 2022: Year end report*. Death Penalty Information Center.

21 Editor, D. P. I. C. (2022, June 15). *Witness: In 'surreal' event, possibly innocent death-row prisoner helped Arizona executioners find a vein after they failed to set IV line*. Death Penalty Information Center.

22 Editor, C. B. S. (2022, June 8). *Frank Atwood executed in Arizona for 1984 murder of 8-year-old girl*. CBS News.

23 Editor, D. P. I. C. (2022, June 15). *Witness: In 'surreal' event, possibly innocent death-row prisoner helped Arizona executioners find a vein after they failed to set IV line*. Death Penalty Information Center.

24 Nadeem, R. (2021, July 13). *Most Americans favor the death penalty despite concerns about its administration*. Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy.

25 Gross, S. R. (Ed.). (2020, September 1). *Report: Government misconduct and convicting the innocent*. The Washington Post.



Prime Minister Rishi Sunak chairs his first Cabinet meeting, October 2022.

The Conservative Party today

Ben Heyes casts a critical eye over the more recent history of the Tories and dissects the differing interpretations of what it means to be a Conservative politician.



In the words of the American journalist, William F. Buckley, Jr., the role of the conservative is to 'stand athwart history, yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it.' By this criterion, at least, the Conservative Party has done a bad job of living up to its name since 2010. During this period, conservatism has been notable only in its absence; more prominent has been the chaotic, and unprecedented, succession of no fewer than five prime ministers. Even greater churn has been witnessed in the Cabinet, where transient ministers have become increasingly incapable of marshalling the civil service and executing coherent policy. For the second half of this period, so much energy has been consumed by single issues – first Brexit, then Covid – that the condition of healthcare, schools, the railways, the armed forces and the economy, has been neglected. But this propensity to change direction, even if deleterious for good government, has not been without its advantages: by the summer, Conservative rule will have lasted longer than that of New Labour between 1997 and 2010. The party's combination of exceptional longevity in government with a record of generally poor performance and frequent crisis is striking, and revealing of the current party's confused ideological foundations.

Most political organisations conduct a radical change in ideological direction after a serious defeat. It took the Labour Party eighteen years to do this after 1979. First under Neil Kinnock, then John Smith, and most completely under Tony Blair, the party set about renovating itself so that, by 1997, it could offer a coherent and optimistic vision of a 'New Life for Britain' under New Labour. By contrast, the Conservative Party has undergone such a transition three times whilst in power. First, there was the combination of social liberalism and fiscal rectitude championed by David Cameron, and broadly maintained by Theresa May. Following her deposition, Boris Johnson's populist clarion call of 'Get Brexit Done' revived the party (albeit alienating large portions of it), and delivered the election victory of 2019. After the disintegration of Johnson's government, amid intensifying criticism of his character, came Liz Truss's attempt to unchain Britannia through economic stimulus, in the form of unfunded tax

A long-awaited return to government was not without its problems



PM Liz Truss, outside Downing Street

cuts, during a period of high inflation. Each of these three phases represented a distinct and novel electoral offering from what came before. Nevertheless, certain aspects of political thought have remained consistent throughout, even if re clothed for new times and new voters.

David Cameron had assumed the leadership of his party in 2005, after its third consecutive election defeat, on a platform of modernisation. He saw this as a necessary step if the party wanted to seriously challenge New Labour; his critics, meanwhile, saw ‘compassionate conservatism’ as an abandonment of the party’s core principles. Whether it achieved its goal will never truly be known: after 2008, Cameron shifted his attention to the economic front, where the public’s attention was increasingly drawn, and the ‘Big Society’ took second place to austerity. His victory in the 2010 election (though equivocal) was a seminal moment for both parties. For Labour, it marked the death knell for the New Labour project, and the extraordinary run of electoral success that it had brought. It has taken thirteen years for a platform of comparable electoral appeal to be established. But for the Tories, a long-awaited return to government was not without its problems either. The relative ease with which the coalition government functioned revealed the lasting changes that had taken place under Cameron’s leadership: both economically and socially, a markedly liberal attitude had become dominant. Through the ‘A-List’, Cameron exercised particular influence on the 2010 intake, the result

of which was a large group of new MPs sharply different to their predecessors.

One of these, Louise Bagshawe, serves as an illuminating case study in Cameron conservatism. In the 1990s, she worked with the heavy metal band, Metallica, before making her name as a best-selling author of ‘chick lit’. She joined New Labour in 1996, on the basis that Tony Blair was ‘socially liberal but an economic Tory’. This would have seemed an inexcusable resumé for a Conservative MP before 2005, but in the wake of the ‘A-List’ became almost unexceptional. She briefly



Large swathes of the Conservative Party have nothing to do with conservatism

represented the Northamptonshire town of Corby, until, in 2012, she retired from politics to follow her husband, an American music manager, to New York City. There, working as a journalist, she has found a niche spreading outlandish conspiracy theories regarding Donald Trump and Russia, alongside defending Brexit to American television audiences. Her documented allegiance to conservative thought seems limited to a self-confessed

'worship' of Margaret Thatcher. For a social liberal, this embrace of Thatcherism may seem incongruous. But the contradictions of Bagshawe's politics, seemingly of both the left and the right, offer a window into the 2010 intake, and the Conservative Party under David Cameron.

Another prominent beneficiary of the 'A-List' had, like Bagshawe, joined the Conservatives after a dalliance with another party. As an undergraduate, Liz Truss was

Prime Minister Boris Johnson addresses his Cabinet ahead of the weekly Cabinet meeting, July 5, 2022. Photo by Ian Vogler



The leadership of the party has remained broadly dominated by the socially liberal side

president of the Oxford University Liberal Democrats. She gave a speech in 1994 to the national conference pouring scorn on the monarchy, and supported the legalisation of cannabis. Her politics tutor remembered her ‘capacity to shift, unblinkingly, from one fiercely held belief to another’, but her record since shows that this was only half true. Yes, she went from being an ardent Lib Dem as a student to Conservative Prime Minister thirty years later; from an enthusiastic Remainer to an evangelist for post-Brexit free trade. But throughout, she fundamentally remained what she had always been: a liberal. She has consistently and singularly advocated for the diminution of the state in favour of the individual. In itself, this may not be antithetical to conservatism. But alone, it does not make Liz Truss a conservative. And she is not alone: large swathes of the Conservative Party have nothing to do with conservatism beyond a shared aversion to a large, interventionist state. This unresolved confusion of liberalism and conservatism has dogged the party at least since the advent of Thatcherism in the 1970s.

Perhaps no other thinker had greater influence on the politics of Margaret Thatcher than Friedrich Hayek. But despite the association of his thought with American ‘neoconservatives’ in particular, Hayek wasn’t a conservative at all. As an appendix to his 1960 work, *The Constitution of Liberty*, he wrote an essay entitled, ‘Why I Am Not a Conservative’. In it, he distanced himself from conservatism’s ‘timid distrust of the new’, and criticised its ‘hostility to internationalism and its proneness to a strident nationalism’. He realised much better than many of his future disciples that conservatism and liberalism, although akin in their preference for individual liberty over collectivism, were not as complementary as often supposed. Since reading *The Road to Serfdom* as an undergraduate in 1944, Thatcher became convinced of the need to confront socialism head on. Until 1975, this put her

at odds with the leadership of her own party, which had, since Stanley Baldwin, sought to accommodate Labour and the trade unions, and thereby diminish the threat they posed to conservative interests. Thatcher’s instincts were altogether more confrontational, and more liberal. But Thatcher’s politics were more complicated than a wholesale adoption of Hayek: even at the beginning of her premiership, Thatcher was a reluctant internationalist, and by the Bruges speech of 1988, her growing hostility to the European Union could easily be taken for ‘strident nationalism’. Moreover, within the context of the Cold War, her hostility to socialism was as much rooted in the perceived threat it posed to the ancient political traditions of her country as it was the result of an abstract belief in individualism. Certainly, she was more liberal and less conservative than her predecessors, but was some way from the individualist firebrand of caricature.

The nuances of Thatcher and her times seem to have been lost on Liz Truss. For all her attempts at sartorial pastiche, Truss failed to take the far more important lesson from her predecessor that the health of the economy fundamentally rests on the restriction of inflation through control of the money supply. The promise of a flood of inflationary stimulus in the mini-budget of September 2022 stoked fears of imminent rate rises by the Bank of England, and sparked a sharp rise in mortgage rates. The cost of the measures triggered alarm bells in the bond markets, where borrowing costs soared and pension funds were sent into crisis. The chancellor, Kwasi Kwarteng, an erstwhile scholar of economic history, was first to fall victim to the market response. Herself rendered a lame duck by events, Truss followed him nine days later. Thatcher’s unbroken eleven-and-a-half-year time in office was the longest continuous tenure since that of Lord Liverpool in the early 19th century; Truss’s 49 days made her the shortest serving prime minister in the history of the office. The irony of Truss’s fall is that there has been no time since the early 1980s when a genuinely Thatcherite response has seemed more appropriate. In some respects, Britain’s condition today closely reflects that of Thatcher’s first term: inflation is high, the economy is stagnant and the state has become bloated. In 1981, the response of Thatcher, and her chancellor, Geoffrey Howe, was to raise taxes and keep down spending. Though deeply unpopular at the time, and receiving widespread condemnation from economists, the harsh monetarist medicine worked: by 1983, inflation was receding and the economy was growing strongly. The tax rises made by Rishi Sunak’s government indicate a move in this Thatcherite direction, but are for the moment unaccompanied by any particular effort to curb spending.

Truss’s catastrophic misinterpretation of Thatcherism seems fitting for a party so confused as to what it truly stands for. Truss, the arch-liberal, represented the culmination of the Cameron project to renew the party.



Prime Minister David Cameron (official photograph)



President Reagan meeting with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the Oval Office.

She was the 'A-List' prime minister, and found early favour in the coalition government as a minister from 2012. When she established the Free Enterprise Group in 2011, a Thatcherite grouping of mostly young MPs, it complimented rather than undermined Cameron's brand of conservatism. Its members (Javid, Raab, Zahawi, Hancock and Kwarteng among them) would go on to occupy the upper echelons of party by the late 2010s. They dominated the Brexit cabinet of Boris Johnson rather than the Maastricht veterans such as John Redwood and Bill Cash. Johnson himself is a self-described 'Brexit Hezza', and before 2016 had little to do with the right of the party at all. Beyond the superficial headline mantra of 'Get Brexit Done', Johnson's flagship domestic policy of 'levelling up' was little more than a rebranding of George Osborne's Northern Powerhouse. Meanwhile, in the libertine approach he has taken in his private life, there is ample evidence of social liberalism. As for Theresa May's government, the ethos and personnel of her predecessor was generally maintained; when not distracted by the increasingly troubling Brexit negotiations, a similar agenda of fiscal caution and progressive social and environmental prevailed.

In other words, the liberal character of Cameron's party runs through the governments of each of the three prime ministers who followed him. The leadership of the party has remained broadly dominated by the socially liberal side of the party that Cameron had cultivated with the 'A-List'. Of course, the headline political objectives of Johnson and Truss have been substantially divergent

from those of Cameron, most notably with respect to Brexit under Johnson, and the abandonment of fiscal discipline under Truss. But the intrinsic philosophical attitude of the party has remained broadly the same – the Conservative Party of 2010 lives on. If forecasts of a Conservative defeat at the next election are realised, perhaps a process of deeper reckoning will follow. But the accommodation (or confusion) of conservatism with liberalism is here to stay. For as long as the left continues to propose social, economic and constitutional reforms inimical to both the cautious instincts of conservatives, and the liberal desire for a pared-back state, these one-time enemies will remain in alliance. A truly successful Conservative leader – Thatcher being the most recent – is able most effectively to exploit the areas of common ground between conservatism and liberalism. Thus, the Conservative Party will never be able to advocate the sort of total conservatism suggested by Buckley, nor the radical liberalism proposed by Hayek. But the gap between the two is a rich seam for those who look hard enough. The failure of Conservative government over the past thirteen years by virtually any metric constitutes a failure both of theory and practice. No recent Conservative leader has had the intellectual capacity to present a coherent philosophical vision of a future Britain, and their cabinets have lacked the competence and experience to formulate long-term policy, and therefore good policy. But obituaries for the oldest political party in the democratic world are premature: reinvention, if not good government, is one thing for which the Conservative Party can be relied upon.

Is the mind physical?

Hannah Lee researches developments in understanding the nature of Mind.

The philosophical investigation into the mind has been explored for centuries, originating as the Mind-Body problem popularised by Descartes in the early 17th century (Qazi *et al.*, 2018). This problem addresses the interaction between our seemingly immaterial consciousness and our physical brains, and attempts to determine the nature of this connection. In response, philosophers have enquired into several different branches of thought: monism, dualism, and to a lesser extent, pluralism. Trends in philosophical discussion have favoured each across time, with a general defence of Platonic dualism in Ancient Greek schools of thought, much later followed by a rise in reductive physicalism – with the emergence of neuroscience in the late 1950s – to offer scientific theories (Maxwell Cowan *et al.*, 2000).

Most discussion of the mind, perhaps inevitably, includes some definition of the word itself. Here, it is necessary to establish that the interchangeability of “soul”, “consciousness” and “mind” is not considered a conflation in this essay, because there appears no convincing distinction, except for the context in which they are used in, describing different aspects of the same concept (Greenfield, 2002). Scientifically, consciousness has been defined as “any state of sentience or awareness” (Searle, 1998), or more broadly as “everything we experience” (Tononi, 2004). Whilst biological research is not the overarching means of discovering the mind, it provides a coherent definition that can lack from some philosophical methods. All in all, most discourse on the mind questions the same subjective experience of mental phenomena, and seeks to reconcile this idea with the objective nature of physical world.

The origins of monism, or the concept that either the mind or body exist as an inseparable substance, can be traced back to the Eleatic school of philosophy in pre-Socratic Ancient Greece, with variations of its radical doctrine of the One – or *monad*, within which everything indivisibly exists (Calogero *et al.*, 2019). Modern

developments of monism explore both the singularity of the mind – idealistic monism – and the body – material monism. The branch of material monism – or physicalism – is particularly relevant to understanding whether the mind is purely physical, as it delves into the possibilities surrounding a physical existence.

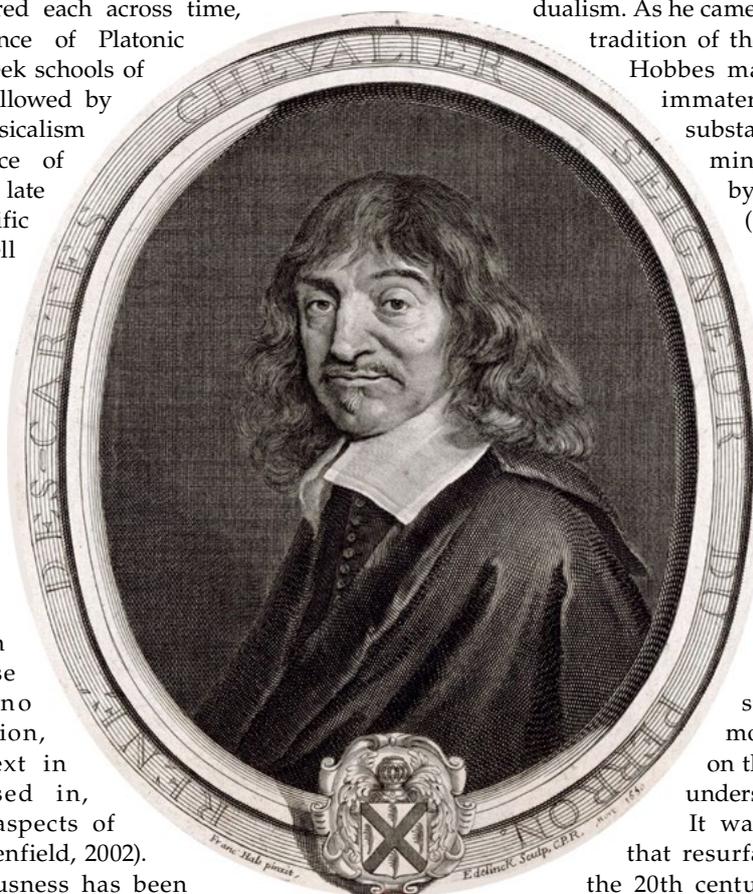
Thomas Hobbes was one of the first prominent philosophers to introduce materialism into the intellectual sphere of Western philosophy in the 17th century, contradicting the popular notion of Cartesian substance dualism. As he came from the Corpuscularian tradition of the Enlightenment period,

Hobbes maintained the view that immaterial – or “incorporeal” – substances do not exist, so the

mind is somehow explained by the “material resources” (Duncan, 2022). He later declared, even more controversially, that God must be material and exists as the “subtlest” material in the universe (Vance, n.d.) Despite the lack of clear reasoning to substantiate his blatant claim, and the inaccuracy of its scientific basis (as Corpuscularism has been disproven), Hobbes represented a strand of materialism in modern philosophy based on the principles of empirical understanding.

It was this seed of thought that resurfaced, and flourished, in the 20th century, to differentiate into several different key physicalist theories. Perhaps the most popular movement was behaviourism, which argued that mental states are simply behaviours of

the body caused by external stimuli, like any other bodily process. Hard behaviourism reduces mental states entirely to behaviours, whereas soft behaviourism introduces the nuance of behavioural dispositions – characterised by subjunctive conditionals and hypotheticals – to accurately represent mental states (Feest, n.d.). This soft behaviourism was defended by Gilbert Ryle’s argument that mental states consist of behaviours, so it cannot exist as a separate object. Ryle perceived Hobbes’ mechanistic formulation as “not very sophisticated” and he turned to the linguistics of philosophy as a way to address the “category mistakes” – or what Wittgenstein referred



Portrait of Descartes, Bibliothèque en ligne Gallica, Photo by Gérard Edelinck

Mental states are simply behaviours of the body caused by external stimuli

to as “conceptual confusions” – commonly found in philosophical works (Place, 1999). He directly criticised Descartes for making a category mistake, and called his theory “the ghost in the machine”, arguing that neither the mind nor the body can independently constitute a complete human identity. However, this crude summary vastly overlooks the success Descartes achieved in delineating the contradictory natures of the mind and body, through demonstrating the mind’s indivisibility in contrast to the body. Bartley (2018) similarly argued that subjective experience cannot be classified as physical, due to its inherent distinction from physical events, giving the example of how physical objects are not necessarily “fully revealed in experience”, whereas mental phenomena are, *by definition*, non-physical experiences, even if they are created by something physical (as Descartes also proposed, albeit incorrectly, about the pineal gland). Similar to behaviourism, the type identity theory draws similarities between mental states and brain states, observing that at least some are identical. By example, John Jamieson Carswell Smart, ontologically (as opposed to analytically) reduced pain to the biological mechanism of C-fibres firing, utilising Ockham’s razor – the principle of minimising entities – to reduce the mind *and* body to just the physical body (Feest, n.d.). Hilary Putnam criticised both behaviourism and type identity for neglecting to account for multiple realisability, meaning that any given mental state can have a variety of causes, meaning that behaviours and brain states are not equivalent to the mind’s mental state in itself.

Putnam’s own idea of functionalism, Dawkin’s naturalism and other biological forms of materialism propose the idea that the mind is functional to human survival. Edelman’s Neural Darwinism may present some relevant research under this idea of consciousness as a simple function of the body. The complexity of the neural system, and indeed every individual neuron cell in the brain, could be accounted for by pressures of natural selection throughout evolution, according to this theory, as the “behavioural trinity” of the brain, the body, and the world was essential to the evolution and development of the neural circuits in the brain to support consciousness (Edelman, 2003). This supports the modern scientific pursuit of a biological consciousness that can be physically observed and described. However, science may not automatically be incompatible with dualistic thought, as the hunt to identify the Neuronal Correlates of Consciousness (NCC), is built on the premise that neurones can create the subjective experience of consciousness (Koch, 2018).

Nietzsche (1896) famously wrote in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* that the body “does not say I” but “performs I”, and accredits the illusion of a distinct metaphysical mind to the body. Whether the mind is separate to the body or not, it can be established that the mind – by the meaning of its subjective sensations – exists to those who experience it. In a similar light, it can be concluded that the mind is not physical, but an intangible manifestation these experiences

– whether caused by the external force of a deity, as argued by occasionalism, or generated by the biology of the body, as believed by mainstream Western science. Whether the persistent mind-body debate continues in the centuries to come, or comes to a halt with a startling new hypothesis, its challenges cannot be diminished. The diversity of theories encompass every corner of possibility, from Berkley’s Idealism to Platonic dualism, and may never be unanimously resolved to a single conclusion.

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The case for the US system

Behind the blind fury of the partisan bipolarity lies the world's most comprehensive system of checks and balances, a profound democratic tradition, and plenty of opportunities for quiet consensus and good governance. Denis Goshchansky investigates.

Divided, dysfunctional, deafening: for many, these words come to mind when thinking about US politics. Only 6% of Republicans approve of President Joe Biden's performance; 65% of Americans believe the country is headed in the wrong direction; of a sample taken from 17 foreign countries, 74% of respondents said that partisan conflict in the US is "strong". Over the past decade, the US has seen a rise in the popularity of extremist politics, which is now increasingly filtering into the mainstream; animosity towards the opposing party grow; stubbornly inflexible political identities solidify; and, most significantly of all, a sharpening sense among the American people themselves of political polarisation, and a subsequent fall in confidence in their own political system.

Yet is all truly lost? For many following the elections for Speaker of the House of Representatives in January, more surprising even than the failure of the supposedly cult-like Republican party to contain its internal conflicts, which spilled out across the House floor for fifteen ballots, was the sight of Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Democrat of the Bronx, and Paul Gosar, Republican of the western Arizona desert, talking to each other; not just talking, laughing. Mr Gosar was one the leading election deniers in the winter of 2020-1; Ms Cortez's chief of staff once boasted of his disapproval for the existence of the American billionaire. The image of the two ultra-radicals bantering at the tips of the political horseshoe is a curious microcosm of the fascinating reality of American politics: appearances often diverge from reality. While it may look rudderless and fragile, the American system also has many oft-overlooked arguments in its favour. For the purposes of this discussion, these shall be outlined as being: legislative efficiency; perhaps most surprisingly, bipartisan cooperation; and diversity of policy.

America's government is established by the Constitution, a very brief (in PDF format it comes to a mere 27 pages) yet comprehensive document which outlines how the government is to be structured. At the heart of the arrangement lies the idea of the separation of powers of the President, the Congress, and the judiciary. It is this that is the system's greatest strength: the executive and legislative branches are independent of each other. In practice, this means that the US government is virtually never structurally paralysed, as the UK government was, for example, between 2017-19, when the Prime Minister couldn't pass legislation in a system where her authority derived solely from her ability to do so. By contrast, even if the Congress theoretically was unable to pass laws for whatever reason, such as, for example, if the House couldn't enter session due to failure to elect a Speaker, the Constitution provides, and, crucially, clearly delineates, executive powers to the President, who can interpret existing Acts of Congress but cannot contravene them or go beyond the scope provided by them.

Even in practice, however, Congress is almost always on the move, thanks to the much-reviled two party system, which means that there is never any need to build coalitions, since of the two parties one will always have an arithmetic majority. While arguably making the parties less representative, this offers the US, and especially its legislature, a significant

democratic advantage over European multi-party models, where coalition-building efforts can cause political paralysis, as, for example, in Belgium, where a government couldn't be formed for five hundred days starting from 26 May 2019 due to conflicting interests among coalition members, or in Italy, where Giorgia Meloni recently became the first elected Prime Minister in four years, after the presidentially appointed technocratic governments of Giuseppe Conte and Mario Draghi. In Germany, Angela



Photo of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, by Franmarie Metzler; U.S. House Office of Photography

Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) government consisted of a 'Grand Coalition' with the Social Democrats, historically the CDU's principal rivals, for twelve of her sixteen years in office, leading to disenchantment with both major parties and increasingly strong showings for smaller ones, including the far-right Alternative, in the 2017 and 2021 elections. In such circumstances, one would expect governance to be deeply majoritarian, deleterious radical legislation constantly being meted out by the government of the day. Yet the US system is also famed for its checks and balances, a key component of the separation of powers concept; the role of the US Senate as an equal partner in the legislative process, as opposed to the de facto one-House system in the UK and the pre-eminence of the Bundestag in Germany, is key to this. The Senate's cloture rule, which requires a supermajority of 60% to pass all non-budget related legislation, means that at least some consensus is regularly required. But do any moderate, bipartisan laws ever pass? The answer, vitally, is a clear yes: research done by The Economist shows that there are no significant differences in the total amount of major legislation passed by Congress irrespective of whether government control is divided or unified under a single party.

This is, perhaps, where the image of Cortez and Gosar is most helpful: throughout the course of the twentieth century, as mass politics expanded across the West, the concept of the career politician gradually emerged, characterised by increasing populism and a greater focus on victory in elections rather than the confrontations on principle between charismatic patriots, as had been the case in nineteenth century US politics, a long tradition which only finally ended for good with the Republican victory in the 1994 midterm elections. This has led to the emergence of a new, more rationalised, and admittedly less principled political elite, which uses extreme polarisation as a means of campaigning. Yet it is an elite nonetheless, a fact betrayed by behind-the-scenes exchanges such as that of the two congress members, and elites stick together, leading to a consistently productive legislature. This pattern of stubborn cooperation has been aptly named "Secret Congress" by the political analysts Simon Bazelon and Matt Yglesias, referring to the fact that US legislators get along just fine - as long as there are no cameras and no campaign trail. It should be noted here that an elitism of this sort is, of course, true of all democracies: the difference is the extent to which the American method of campaigning has incorporated polarising rhetoric.

The lingering criticism, however, is that this rhetoric itself is tearing the country's political fabric apart: while the American elites may well be disingenuous in their mutual recriminations, their voters believe them, and therefore grow to dislike each other more, leading to the breakdown of constructive inter-party dialogue and the ultimate emergence of two incompatible visions for America. This is where arguably the greatest check and balance of them all comes in: U.S. federalism. While not really a meaningful feature in European national politics,

federalism is integral to the workings of the US system. Having significant devolved powers, US states diverge on everything, from tax policy to drugs policy to freedom of speech and religion. State politics, however, is significantly less polarised than federal politics: for example, Ron DeSantis, the Republican governor of Florida, who was elected in 2018 by 0.4 per cent, or 33,000 votes, won re-election in November by 19.4 per cent, or 1,508,000 votes, showing that state-level political identities are much more fluid than national ones. Vermont, which has voted Democratic in every presidential election by margins of at least twenty percent since 2004, has a Republican governor; Kansas, which has voted Republican in thirty-three of the past forty presidential elections, has a Democratic governor, and Nebraska's state legislature, at least officially, is non-partisan. Not only does the dynamism of state politics do much to counter political polarisation at the national level, but it also gives America a very diverse set of policies, ranging from abortion bans to Oregon's decriminalisation of possession of hard substances including cocaine and heroin. Rather than moving to Canada, as is the trope, those disenchanted with politics usually move to another state. California, for example, is currently experiencing huge waves of emigration - to Texas and Florida.

The US system is also famed for its checks and balances

In its article analysing the accomplishments of the 117th Congress, The Economist concluded that, rather than actually being more productive than its predecessors (see graph above), the 117th departed from its predecessors in perceived productivity: "[President] Biden's distinctive success may not be persuading Republicans to vote for his bills, but getting them to admit their support". Indeed, the 117th Congress, for the first time since the post-9/11 107th Congress, passed landmark bipartisan legislation - and talked about it. Tellingly, the Congress began with the second impeachment trial of Donald Trump, which saw ten Republican Representatives and seven Republican senators cross the aisle and vote to impeach and convict the former President of high crimes and misdemeanours - easily the most bipartisan impeachment in US history. It was in light of personal distaste for what Trump's extreme interpretation of polarisation politics had wrought upon them, combined with Democratic threats to eliminate the filibuster rule, that Republicans, especially in the Senate, found it increasingly in their interest to look as though they were working together with the governing Democrats. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the Chips and Science Act, and, most surprisingly of all, the bipartisan fashion in which the 2023 budget passed the Senate, gaining support from 36% of the Republican conference even though Senate Republicans could have waited for the Republican House majority to be inaugurated before considering it, all suggest a newfound willingness, at least among the Republican old guard, to appear less divisive. As we have seen, this is more a cosmetic change than a truly new approach; yet in America, it might just be the window-dressing that counts.

Democracy's 'Janus' moment

Raaghav Das takes a hard look at the health of democracy and examines the forces which undermine democracy at the regional and global levels.



Statue of Alexis de Tocqueville by artist Zenos Frudakis.

Whilst democracy as a form of government has been around for nearly three thousand years, representative democracy is only two hundred years old and liberal democracy is even more recent, taking shape only in the last 70 years. Janus, from the Roman archaic pantheon, perhaps accurately depicts democracy's position at this juncture in history. Janus is the god of doorways and transitions, and of beginnings and endings. Traditionally depicted as having two faces, one looking to the past and the other the future, he also represented the middle ground between barbarism and civilization, youth and adulthood. Being the presiding god of beginnings, Janus had an intrinsic association with omens and auspices. Directionally, liberal democracy that had been spreading far and wide in the second half of the 20th century appears to have reached a crossroads, pointing in two starkly different directions – very much like Janus' two faces. On the one hand, progress in technology, education and electronic media are making wider and deeper democratic participation easier. On the other hand, some of the same factors are potentially turning democracies such as the USA and India into a 'tyranny of the majority' as feared by Tocqueville in his 1830 treatise, *Democracy in America*.

State of Democracy: The report card

In its latest study, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) reported that 173 nations faced a decline in democracy towards the end of 2021. Even in Europe, nearly 50% of democracies experienced erosion within the past five years, indicating a clear trend of democratic decline. The Economist's latest Democracy Index (2022) makes grim reading too – with only 8% of the world population living in countries considered 'full democracies', with others being 'flawed', 'hybrid' democracies or authoritarian regimes. It is remarkable that Chile, ruled by military dictator Pinochet until just over three decades ago, is now considered a 'full democracy'. It is equally remarkable that the USA, Italy, and India are considered 'flawed democracies' by this index. Anecdotally, glimmers of hope can be found in certain regions where democracy appears to be thriving despite recent challenges, exemplified by the defeat of demagogue Bolsonaro by President Lula in Brazil, and the surprising success of the Democrats during the US 2022 midterms. Nonetheless, beyond the labels and statistics, the overall picture is more nuanced and it is necessary to explore some of the underlying factors that have influenced the state of global democracy over the last few years.

Looking back: 'It's the Economy, stupid'

It is well known that the global economy has suffered great dislocation in the last fifteen years- the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, followed by a decade of fiscal austerity, then supply chain disruption caused by the pandemic and finally the war in Ukraine. Such economic instability often provides a convenient backdrop for governments, democratic or otherwise, to adopt protectionist and/or discriminatory policies to pander to majoritarian opinion. This pattern has been observed many times before, perhaps in an extreme form in 1930s Europe after the Great Depression with the rise of fascist governments. In modern times, the National Front in France, the Freedom Party of Austria, Jobbik in Hungary, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, and Golden Dawn in Greece are among the most striking examples of far-right success in elections following the 2008 financial crisis. Even in stable democracies such as USA and in Western Europe, the crises brought economic insecurity to the large middle-income sections of the electorate who felt 'left behind' and 'not in control' against an unstoppable tide of globalisation and immigration. Such disillusionment with the status quo provides the perfect platform for political parties' populist manifestos, eventually resulting in some form of 'tyranny of the majority' at the expense of established democratic values and institutions.

**Factors are potentially
turning democracies such
as the USA and India into a
'tyranny of the majority'**

Looking back: The rise of the Right

Another noticeable trends that has emerged in the last 20 years is the extreme polarisation of politics and the general trend of dominant political discourse shifting from a consensual centre to a belligerent right. In Europe, it was a great setback for the European Union's democratic credentials when the Italian people elected Giorgia Meloni, the country's first far-right leader since Benito Mussolini in 2022. Meloni is an ideologue with strong views on LGBTQ+ rights and illegal immigrants that go against the democratic principle of fundamental rights. In Asia, India has been a beacon of a thriving, inclusive democracy in the developing world since its independence in 1947. Whereas elections continue to be a prominent feature of the national civic fabric, the last few years have seen noticeable democratic backsliding in this diverse nation. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), currently led by Modi and fired by its vision of India as a 'Hindu Rashtra' (Hindu nation), has little appetite for diversity, particularly when it comes to Muslims. His new citizenship law lays bare his discriminatory position on Muslims. Migrants from neighbouring countries, most of whom are Muslims and have been residents for decades, are barred from seeking citizenship in a clear violation of India's long-standing democratic principles, particularly freedom of religion. There are other policies too blatantly marginalising the 200 million-strong Indian-Muslim population who now see prudence in remaining invisible rather than raising their voice.

Looking back: Internet and the Tyranny of the majority

It is no coincidence that the palpable rise of populism and the 'tyranny of the majority' have gone hand in hand with the growth of the world wide web and social media platforms. These new media have acted as unmediated town squares, allowing coalescing of majoritarian views, often around demagogic strongmen like Trump, Modi, Erdogan, and Bolsonaro. Social and electronic media platforms have fostered political polarisation by enclosing users in 'bubbles' or echo-chambers, giving them a narrowed worldview and distorting political views, exposing people only to opinions that they already have, instead of encouraging an all-rounded view. These platforms have also acted as a medium to spread disinformation, commonly about opposition groups. A good example of this is Georgia, which has used widespread propaganda campaigns and disinformation, including false media pages. In fact, it was found by the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) that the Georgian Dream Party posted, or at least sponsored, 360 fake media posts during the 2018 presidential election period. In India, some political parties, including BJP, regularly use social media to spread disinformation and digital interference, including 'bots' and 'trolls' to discredit political opponents. Unmediated, by enabling extreme polarisation of political opinions, social

media poses a clear danger to the careful balance that is democracy. However, it is also beyond doubt that social media has facilitated greater interaction and involvement between young people (particularly) and politics. It has encouraged increased political engagement, with 38% of American adults using social networking sites to promote material related to politics or social issues. In fact, younger people are often 10-20% more likely to use social media for so-called 'civic activities'. This, in turn, has led to increased voter participation, encouraging younger people to have a say and reminding them of the importance of voting. Widespread use of social media has led to increased transparency and accountability too, as it becomes more difficult for politicians to conceal their actions and decisions. This is a key cornerstone of democracy, and social media upholds this value. However, as has been documented well in the case of United States and transition of power from Trump to Biden in 2021, social media has provided a new avenue for extreme or fringe views to become mainstream, threatening the integrity of a democracy by manipulating people of all ages who have an online presence.

Looking ahead: hope for the future

Janus provides the perfect metaphor as we understand the trends of the recent past in terms of global democracy but also look ahead to the future. Economic uncertainty, the rise of populism and the prominence of social media



Giorgia Meloni, leader of the Fratelli d'Italia populist party, which garnered a large share of the vote in the 2022 election. She became Prime Minister of Italy in October 2022

platforms are unfortunately here to stay. Our world is more unstable and prone to 'dislocations' than it was fifty years ago – the threats of the future may come from completely different quarters than those of the past.

Instead of Russia, it may come from China; instead of Crimea, it may be in the South China Sea; instead of the scramble for oil, it may be over the impacts of Climate Change. This juncture in history is not the right one to talk ourselves into the inevitability of the downfall of democracy. Despite

the numerous trials and tribulations facing democracy in the modern era, there is more than just liberal optimism that suggests that democracy will ultimately prevail. The ability of democratic institutions to adapt and recover has already been seen in Brazil with the election of Lula. More importantly, there is room for plenty of optimism for at least some form of gradual representative democratisation even in authoritarian places such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China. Such steep progress up the

democratic spectrum may seem outlandish now, but Chile is a perfect reason why one must remain hopeful. We cannot deny the unstoppable and rising power of active citizen participation and advocacy, intensified through social media, and the potential it holds for the advancements in enhancing democratic rights and freedoms. There will undoubtedly be obstacles along the way but the enduring belief in the essential power of democracy to bring progress and freedoms represents an influential impetus for positive

transformation. It should be remembered that 'full democracy' is not an overnight transformation, rather it is a journey – one that may seem particularly arduous for those living in an authoritarian or hybrid regime. Such a perilous voyage is worthwhile, albeit it needs the tutelage of Janus, as the god of motion, looking over passages, causing actions to start and presiding over beginnings!

Janus provides the perfect metaphor as we understand the trends of the recent past in terms of global democracy

Tigray War: roots to resolution

Sharon Segaye brings an oft overlooked civil war to timely prominence.



Villagers walk past the site of military destruction by Somali troops

Claude Sumner said that Ethiopia consists ‘mainly of states...trying to become nation states.’ The majority of Ethiopian history has been occupied with the task of creating a single centralised entity that can survive multifarious threats from its neighbours and within. In the last century this has become increasingly difficult due to the growing violence between many of Ethiopia’s ninety distinct ethnic groups. The recent Tigray war is the latest example of a conflict that has emerged between these ethnic groups, and it is not likely to be the last.

Due to other conflicts in greater proximity to the West dominating headlines, the two year Tigray War has largely been overlooked by the international community. Furthermore, low-level insurgencies are common in East Africa. These disputes are often violent and uncontrollable due to lack of government control and services in rural communities. However, the Tigray War is on a scale much larger than the typical local insurgency. The war is

Extreme violence is often seen as positive

marked by its violence, claiming approximately 600,000 lives, the New York Times describing it as ‘one of the world’s bloodiest contemporary conflicts’. Human rights groups have also noted the impunity of both federal and rebel soldiers. A recent UN report has stated that there is reasonable cause to believe that extrajudicial killings,

rape, sexual violence and starvation of the civilian population has been used as a method of warfare during the conflict, though what is to become of these allegations is not yet known. It is difficult to simply label participants of the conflict as good or bad because

both sides have acted from a position that they think is correct and morally justifiable.

Extreme violence is often seen as positive; soldiers truly believe (or are made to believe) that what they are doing is valid in the sense that they are part of an oppressed people and are simply fighting back against their oppressors. This extreme violence stems from conflicts which do not originate from border disputes. (This is because newly



Thousands of Ethiopian men are recruited for the war with Tigray, by Tiksa Negari

formed nation-states in the mid-twentieth century adopted the pre-existing colonial borders.) The effect of this is that most of Africa is free from border disputes that risk political destabilisation. This is not true of East Africa, by contrast: border disputes are commonplace and range from petty squabbles to international conflict. This has its roots in the former Ethiopian empire's resistance to colonial powers. One consequence of this is that countries sharing a border with Ethiopia are very reliant on it retaining a stable and peaceful political landscape to maintain that shared border.

The fissured nature of Ethiopia was highlighted in 2016 when protests broke out between the two largest ethnic groups, Oromo (45%) and Amhara (26.9%) (Central Statistical Authority, 2007). Protestors were tired of the minority rule of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) which had led the ethnic federalist coalition the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that had ruled since 1991. Tigrayan people only make up 6.1% of the population but whilst the EPRDF was in power, most positions of importance were held by Tigrayans. Calls ensued for a change in leadership and the Prime Minister at the time Hailemariam Desalegn was forced to resign due to the joint efforts of the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) and the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) who were both minority representatives in the TPLF led coalition. Abiy Ahmed Ali, a young Oromo politician was supported by the ADP and ODP and went on to win the position of Prime Minister at the next election. Abiy was soon rewarded with the 2019 Nobel prize for his work

ending the 20 year-long stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea. However, in the background relations between the new Prime Minister and the Tigray People's Liberation Front began to sour.

Upon becoming Prime Minister Abiy dismantled the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition and formed the Prosperity Party. The TPLF refused any accommodation with this party. The Prosperity Party is not organised on ethnic lines and it was clear that Abiy wanted to abolish federalism and adopt a nationalist system. Parties like the TPLF which relied on the votes of certain ethnic groups to remain in power would cease to exist. The TPLF's discontent grew and when Ethiopia's national election board postponed the elections set to be held that year due to Covid, Tigrayan representatives vacated Parliament. In September 2020, Tigray held its own regional elections without the consent of the federal government. The TPLF won 98.5% of Tigray's 190 regional seats with a turnout of 97% (Aljazeera report, 2022), then the TPLF declared the federal government illegitimate. In response the federal government refused to acknowledge the outcome of the illegal election. The federal government then took this one step further and decided to bypass the TPLF by providing resources directly to local governments. The TPLF interpreted this as a declaration of war.

The reason why it is important to keep the regional parties happy is that modern Ethiopia's foundation was built on the ethnic federal republic structure. This was introduced by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front which incorporated ethnic federalism



into the 1995 constitution at the beginning of their rule. The structure is characterised by the subdivision of Ethiopia into eleven ethno-linguistically based regional states and two chartered cities otherwise known as kilil. This resulted in Ethiopia's political stability being entirely dependent on the support of a select group of kilil leaders. Legally each kilil has the right to withdraw from the republic. Politically this is overwhelmingly positive for the regional leaders: the threat of seceding means they hold great power over the Prime Minister, this weakens his power as the highest authority in the country. Furthermore, the boundaries of the kilils were not designed with the end goal of seceding in mind. It is likely that if one kilil does choose to leave the republic, both the country and newly independent kilil will no longer be able to function and as a consequence will collapse. Debretsion Gebremichael was elected chairman of the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) in November 2017. Initially he was not a member of the Tigray Regional Parliament which meant he could not become President of Tigray. Nevertheless, when the post became vacant, he assumed it in an acting capacity. He was seen as a young and charismatic leader in comparison to those before him. This was part of a growing trend in Ethiopian politics at the time. New leaders such as Abiy and Gebremichael were brought in who could revitalise their parties and attract younger voters. Gebremichael was not seen as a potential threat when he first came to power.

November the 4th 2020 marked the official beginning of the Tigray War, just before midnight Tigray special forces and various local militias attacked the Ethiopian National Defence Force's northern command headquarters in Mekele (the Tigrayan capital). In retaliation, the Ethiopian government launched an offensive, and this was accompanied by a shutdown of all Tigrayan government services provided by the federal government.

Mekele's population is small at around 310,436 but nearly all of Tigray's political and economic power is concentrated there. Not to mention the fact that federal control of the capital means that Tigrayan forces will have to fight guerilla warfare. One thing that observers of the war find difficult to understand is why the war went on as long as it did. The answer lies in the support of foreign actors. The New York Times has reported that armed drones have been supplied to the federal government by the UAE, Turkey and Iran. Eritrea was confirmed to be involved in the conflict in April 2021, supporting federal troops.

The intransigence of warring parties in the region is longstanding. Since 1950, there have been at least eight wars – and this does not include countless armed conflicts and low-level insurgencies. These clashes are commonly between two or more ethno-religious groups. Abiy Ahmed knows about ethnic discontent - he rose to power on its coat-tails. He is aware of the precarious position that he is in. Concentrating all of his troops in Tigray would leave other areas in Ethiopia vulnerable to uprisings that could

potentially destabilise him at his most unaware. He would rather keep federal troops stationed across Ethiopia and consequently lengthen the conflict in Tigray rather than risk losing power to a coalition of militants.

But aggression is not just attributable to traditional smouldering conflicts. The introduction and popularity of social media websites such as Facebook and twitter have drastically increased inter-ethnic tensions. In a country with low general literacy rates, many people cannot differentiate between real and fake news. This low media literacy rate can have fatal results, especially in a country that has a long history of rural violence without any government repercussions. Recently, a court case has been brought against Facebook's parent company Meta for posts inciting violence in the Tigray war. The case cites the murder of an Ethiopian academic who was targeted with racist messages before his murder in

November 2021. Facebook had refused to take down the posts. To combat the repetition of such cases, the Prime Minister ordered an internet, telecommunications and banking blackout. Each day of an internet shutdown in Ethiopia costs \$4.5 million and though extremely controversial, the blackouts were essential to the war effort. Without access to money, information and Internet, the Tigrayan forces were severely disadvantaged, yet it was the already struggling Tigrayan population who felt the impacts of these blackouts the most.

One aspect of the Tigray War that differentiates it from the

other similar conflicts is its ceasefire, signed in November 2022. The ceasefire was the result of a joint effort between the African Union, Tigrayan and federal forces. It is an example of a truly African ceasefire, free from the influence of Western powers. One of the most notable people working on the ceasefire was Olusegun Obasanjo the former Nigerian president. He said "this moment is not the end of the peace process. Implementation of the peace agreement signed today is critical for its success".

There is still concern that one side will violate the ceasefire, yet so far, we have seen total cooperation. On the surface, it seems like the two sides are willing to put aside their differences for the greater good of the ordinary people who have suffered most as a result of this war. Secession has also been ruled out by senior TPLF officials, but the idea is still popular among the youth of Tigray. Some have pointed out the weaknesses written in to the ceasefire. Alex de Wall suggested that the main weakness of the treaty is its omission of any mention of Eritrea. He states that 'the military offensive that broke Tigrayan defense lines was a joint Eritrean-Ethiopian operation' (Wall, 2022). There is a provision for ending "collusion with any external force hostile to either party". But the leader of Eritrea Isaias Afwerki could still initiate conflict with Tigray. Recent reports suggest that he has been withdrawing his troops from Tigray, but the negotiated peace remains fragile. Nevertheless, a shaky peace has prevailed thus far and I hope it will continue into the future.

Modern Ethiopia's foundation was built on the ethnic federal republic structure



Judith and Holofernes, Donatello

It depicts the assassination of the Assyrian general Holofernes by Judith. The subject depicts the climax of the story in the Book of Judith; it was a common subject in art and is associated with the Power of Women topos.

The Art and Practice of Plautilla Nelli

Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Have There Been No Great Woman Artists?" led Alexandra Kogan to question the relative importance of convents as opposed to monasteries in the Renaissance Church. Plautilla Nelli's work stood out as exceptional and moved Alexandra to explore the gender dynamics permeating all levels of Florentine Renaissance society in the Cinquecento.

Plautilla Nelli (1524-88) was the first successful Italian woman artist, and was thrice prioress of her Savonarolan convent Santa Caterina di Cafaggio. Her art sold so well that its proceeds completely funded the convent's activity, giving it a level of financial independence from San Marco monastery. Her work has re-emerged as a point of scholarly interest as a reflection of the lively painting culture of convents before Tridentine reforms forced nuns to give up this venture and return to their previous economic activities of lacework, sewing and manuscript illumination, which were deemed suitable for women.

Nunship

Through nunship, Plautilla Nelli circumvented a number of restrictions potential laywomen artists faced. One of these obstacles was the necessity of conforming to the standards of the art world, correlated directly with a male-exclusive education in the arts. Lack of access to education both limited women's ability to engage in the erudite art world and inhibited their ability to express any artistic sensibility unique to them. Furthermore, Florence had steadily been increasing its control over women's public lives years before Nelli's birth. Suor Nelli was in

a uniquely free position as a nun at the Convent of Santa Caterina di Cafaggio, as the religious complex enabled her to obtain invaluable materials to teach herself painting, which were justified as an endeavour productive to the convent. Painting was a popular activity in convents and monasteries, as both a meditative and repetitive process which would encourage contemplation of the religious subject matter. The convent enabled her to navigate social networks necessary to the sale of art. Thus, Plautilla Nelli's ability to produce art lay directly in her nunship.

A judgement on whether Plautilla Nelli's nunship is an issue only of religion or of gender as well may be derived as such: at the time, half of 'educated girls' in Florence were confined to monasteries to escape payment of a dowry. Women were forced to conform to the notion of *aut mas aut murus*: 'either man or a [convent wall]', and the latter happened to be conducive to art. Ulrike Strasser notes, "women religious dedicated most of their energy to spiritual work"; the meditative repetition of painting workshops counting towards this. The patriarchal confinement of women to private spheres – domestic or devotional – is therefore the indirect facilitator for Suor Nelli's artistic practice.

Another question raised is the impact of nunship and womanhood alike on Suor Nelli's relationship with public and secular art. Ascertaining the extent of contact



Caterina de' Ricci as St Catherine of Siena

The changes made to the inscriptions bearing the name of St Catherine from Siena that can be distinguished in the series of four paintings are named after "another Catherine" – Sister Caterina de' Ricci, Plautilla's peer and also a fervent Savonarolian, suggesting the possibility that in these portraits Nelli wished to represent the "holy nun" of Prato, equalling her with the saint from Siena.

The offence taken at this painting reflects a historical double-standard



Saint Catherine, XVI century, Monastery of San Marco, Plautilla Nelli.

Saint Catherine was a money-maker for Nelli and her sisters. Nelli's small scale works, like the San Marco Saint Catherine restored for Nelli's 2017 exhibition at the Uffizi Galleries, were in high demand during her time.



The Last Supper, Plautilla Nelli c1568. The first and perhaps the unique representation of the Last Supper made by a woman artist who lived in the Renaissance period.

with the outside world Suor Nelli had after joining her convent, cloistered some years after she joined, is difficult without speculating. However, its proximity to Piazza della Signoria makes it highly likely that Suor Nelli's upbringing and early nunhood were inseparable from Florence's artistic culture. Moreover, many powerful Florentine families sent their daughters to take up the veil at the prestigious convent, so Suor Nelli was surrounded by educated women whose family links would have, to a degree, connected them with public Florence, despite their physical separation from it. Therefore, a comparison of Suor Nelli's work with contemporary artworks by laymen may note that differences in Suor Nelli's presentation of women occurred alongside an extensive knowledge of those works, as being cloistered did not render her ignorant of contemporary artists.

The Piazza della Signoria was a site of public propaganda in the 16th century. Florence was reasserting its power after a turbulent period. Scholars such as Geraldine Johnson have identified that this was achieved through the masculinisation of public art.¹ In 1504, for example, Michelangelo's *David* replaced Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* in the square. Effectively, Florence's public spaces saw the demotion of the Power of Women topos in lieu of the overtly masculine allegory of power as male violence against women.

Standing in direct contrast to the public promotion of masculinity, however, is Suor Nelli's art, exemplified by her series of paintings *St Catherine of Siena with a Lily*, closely cropped images focusing on the titular saint mourning Christ. The stillness of the image, bar the bleeding wounds and single tear rolling down Catherine's cheek, and its muted colour palette favours an introspective form of worship over a display of erudition through participation in the drama and writhing gesture of the contemporary Mannerist style. The stillness conveys an eternally steady worship, the wounds never healing as Catherine perpetually mourns Christ. There is, however,

an implicit violence in the image: Catherine's fingers pull at her habit, exposing a bloody wound that mirrors Christ's. Its goriness, most extreme in the Siena version, reflects Catherine's deep engagement with her faith, as the emotional intensity with which she mourns Christ is akin to the physical suffering of his hours on the Cross. Yet, the notion that women can partake in such an elevated form of worship as to provoke a violent corporeal response may have been deemed inappropriate in the Assisi version, as the wound has been hastily painted over alongside Catherine's stigmata, at an unknown point in history. The offence taken at this painting reflects a historical double-standard, whereby the image of women's bodies as a site of suffering is only appropriate when the violence has been committed by men, as in Cellini's *Perseus*.² The censorship of this painting reinforces the importance of the private nature of all of Suor Nelli's commissions in enabling their existence at all. The paintings' veneration of a female saint, and defiance of the masculine supremacy valued in her male contemporaries' art indicates that Suor Nelli's style was influenced by gender even within the confines of its devotional nature.

Suor Nelli's practice was structured in line with ideals espoused by convents that followed Savonarola; namely, it took a workshop form, and valued community over the individual. The result of working with a workshop of nuns is that the paintings commissioned for the convent

1 France had invaded Italy in 1494, and Savonarola had caused a period of great unrest and upheaval. In 1529 Spain launched the 10-month Siege of Florence. As well as this, the Protestant Reformation was rocking Europe, and the Council of Trent sat between 1545 and 1563.

2 The offence that could have been taken with the wound and stigmata is twofold, but both options reflect the same double-standard. First, the image of a woman experiencing religion in an intense and violent manner is indecent; second, the image may be viewed as sensual: a nun draws back her habit to expose an arguably yonic flesh wound in an exhibition of mortification of the flesh. In both cases, the issue is not the concept itself, but the concept when portrayed by a woman artist: neither is indecent when the artist is a man. Accepted male depictions of the former include the violent scenes of male domination over women in the main square of Florence, whilst for the latter not only is there the rich tradition of the female nude, but sexual themes were even permitted in religious scenes, such as in Bernini's *The Ecstasy of St Teresa* (1647-52). Indeed, Neo-Platonists such as Marcilio Ficino (1433-99) argued that spiritual betterment could be attained through intellectual contemplation of physical beauty, for example in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* – a notion Suor Nelli would have undoubtedly rejected, as a stark supporter of Savonarola, who thought this genre of art was lascivious and sinful.

The convent enabled her to navigate social networks necessary to the sale of art

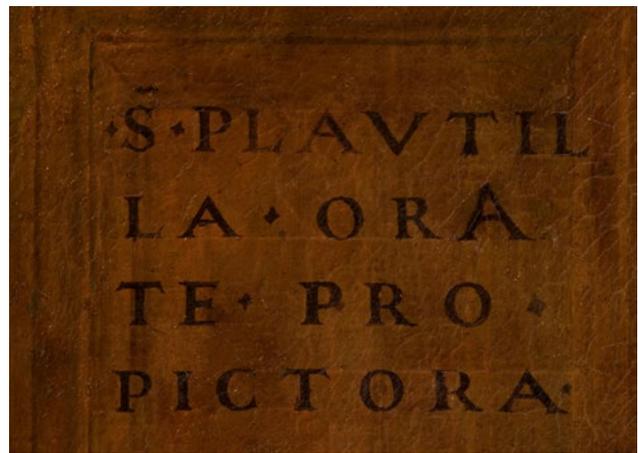
itself were not only highly tailored to the specificities of the convent's culture, but were also a collaborative creative project, enabling women to learn a craft. Whilst this is a result of Suor Nelli's religious context, the fact that her practice exclusively comprised women introduces an inherently gendered aspect. Furthermore, Savonarola's popularity with women invites a connection of Suor Nelli's Savonarolan views to her gender. Thus, the influence of gender on her work remains heavily intertwined with religion, but is by no means negligible.

To some extent, Suor Nelli's practice is only *ipso facto* affiliated with gender, whilst being explicitly more concerned with espousing Dominican and Savonarolan ideas. However, by following the community emphasis suggested by Savonarola, it becomes to feminist historiography a valuable example of interaction and collaboration between women at a time when women's lives were heavily controlled and insufficiently documented. The congruence of the nuns' artistic input as components of a unified whole is testament to the successful collaboration that must have occurred under Suor Nelli's leadership, and as such the social function of her practice should not be understated. Furthermore, Suor Nelli's all-women workshop produced some disciples who became successful enough to be mentioned in Serafino Razzi's *History of Famous Men*. Thus, in the absence of schools of art for women, Plautilla Nelli's workshop practice provided a substitute. Additionally, many of Suor Nelli's patrons were women, including two of the three mentioned by Vasari, and it is almost certain that the Siena version of *St Catherine with a Lily* was commissioned by Caterina de Ricci.³ Consequently, some of Suor Nelli's art was not only produced but also sold in an all-women context, with men serving only to transport the artworks.

Whilst Savonarola placed a general emphasis on the importance of religious images to educate the illiterate, more topical is his attitude towards women. He proposed that women should play as significant a role in church reform as men – an unprecedented assertion, and one retracted after provoking backlash. This can inform our interpretation of his popularity with women. The additional context of women's resistance to the introduction of stricter and more oppressive rules around convent life in an attempt to reduce women's spiritual authority further suggests that his sustained popularity amongst women was inextricably linked with his initial support of their spiritual, if not terrestrial, autonomy. Plautilla Nelli's religious environment, therefore, was not absent of gender politics.

Overall, however, within the context of practice, gender

does not overshadow religion in its importance. The nuns working together in the workshop were principally united by their Savonarolan beliefs, shared living space, and Florentine identity, rather than their gender. This is observable in Suor Nelli's *Last Supper*, painted for the convent refectory, where there are details relating the painting to its women viewers as Tuscan followers of Savonarola.⁴ For example, the dinner table contains symbolism and reference to Tuscany, including food that appears in the surviving account books of Santa Caterina, such as fava beans, lettuce heads, lamb, and wine. The meal thus reflects the food the nuns would have eaten, whilst the elaborate china and crisp starching of the tablecloth may be indications of the convent refectory's real tableware. The absence of forks and presence of only one cooked dish are also drawn from the rules of Santa Caterina's refectory. The lamb in front of Christ foreshadows the events following the Last Supper, whereby Christ becomes the sacrificial lamb of God, whilst its peculiar depiction in its entirety references Savonarola's 1496 sermon, where he dictated that lamb should be "cooked on the cross" whole.⁵



Plautilla Nelli's signature on *The Last Supper*, in the painting's upper left corner, along with her appeal: "Pray for the paintress."

Gender: subject matter and style

Some aspects of Suor Nelli's subject matter and style have already been addressed, such as the influence of Savonarola and convent life. Although these aspects are predominantly informed by religion, it has also been established that her connection with both the convent and Savonarola were outcomes of the treatment of women in Renaissance Florentine society, granting gender great significance. Also important to consider are the limitations

³ The three patrons mentioned by Vasari are the wife of the Spaniard Signor Mondragone; Madonna Mariette de Fedini (both of which, he says, owned an Annunciation), and Filippo Salviati, and Suor Nelli's Portrait of Caterina de Ricci as St Catherine of Siena may safely be deemed another example of a woman patron.

⁴ The work is painted in oil on canvas rather than the traditional fresco, because despite the advantages of being a nun artist, Suor Nelli still did not, as a woman, have access to fresco training.

⁵ Savonarola's sermon, Holy Tuesday, March 29, 1496



Lamentation with Saints, Plautilla Nelli

Taking as her models the work of Fra Bartolomeo, Bronzino and del Sarto, Nelli elaborated a classical Renaissance style.

Anatomical naturalism is more present in the women than the men

on style she faced due to her gender (despite the advantages of nunship) and an analysis of her reception by contemporaries.

A practical consideration regarding gender and Plautilla Nelli's style is her depiction of men: for male modelling, she had only a wooden mannequin acquired from Fra Bartolomeo, as well as his drawings.⁶ This explains the schematically rendered beards and somewhat rigid poses of the apostles in her *Last Supper*, and the awkward depiction of the near-nude Christ in her *Lamentation with Saints*. However, what she may lack in anatomical realism is made up for in behavioural naturalism, psychological realism, and demonstrable command over those aspects of painting not withheld from her gender. A particularly notable example of the latter are the still-life features of her paintings: on the table of *Last Supper* is an intricately patterned dish, and the lilies Catherine holds in the St Catherine series are detailed and naturalistic – note the varying stages of growth. Whilst the men in her paintings usually seem either apathetic, or express emotion through standard gestures, Suor Nelli's paintings are exceptional for their moving portrayal of women attaining spiritual connection with Christ through unconcealed, raw expressions of their empathy with his suffering. In her *Lamentation with Saints* (Figure 10), she includes additional women not present in Fra Bartolomeo's version (Figure 11), and though the men's eyes are reddened (albeit to a lesser extent than the women), none of them are compositionally close to Christ. Indeed, the two farthest men are excluded from the pyramidal composition within which all the women and Christ are encompassed. Anatomical naturalism is more present in the women than the men, as Mary Magdalene's hair greys with age (Detail 2 of Figure 10). This depiction of ageing in women has significance not only because it contrasts the idealised form of Mary Magdalene in Fra Bartolomeo's version (Detail 1 of Figure 12), but also because it reflects the strict hierarchy of maturity followed by Suor Nelli's convent. As prioress, Suor Nelli was the most senior, after which rank was determined by the length of time as a nun. Suor Nelli relates this painting to its viewers not only through surrounding Christ with women mourners and possibly referencing the convent's rules of hierarchy, but also by

⁶ Whilst it is unclear exactly how Suor Nelli acquired the model from Fra Bartolomeo, as it is unlikely he directly gave it to her, Vasari mentions in his chapter on Fra Bartolomeo that his preparatory drawings were in the possession of "Una monaca che dipigne", or "a nun who paints", and a great number of his drawings were found in Suor Nelli's convent a few hundred years later. Notably, Fra Bartolomeo is thought to be the first artist to draw using mannequins, because he too could not draw from life once he became a follower of Savonarola and entered Santa Caterina's brother monastery, San Marco.

painting three figures in nun's habits.

Vasari said of Plautilla Nelli that her best works are 'those she copied from others', and that 'these are painted so well that no one could ask for more'. He recognises the limitations women faced, lamenting that 'in these [copied works] we see that she would have done marvellous things had she had the opportunity, as men do, to study and devote herself to drawing and portraying living and natural things'. This sentiment comes unexpectedly close to recognising, as Linda Nochlin does, the requirement of an adapted way of seeing women's art. However, by praising her copied works above all else, he fails to appreciate her ability as an autonomous artist, and her distinctive bold, physically expressive style (for example, the bloodshot, teary eyes occurring in a version of her *St Catherine of Siena* series and *Lamentation*. Suor Nelli recognised her own ability by signing her *Last Supper*. Following Vasari's logic, copying becomes a means to an end for men, but the end itself for women. The notion that women's art is at best a successful imitation of men's echoes the then-common religious view that Eve's closeness to God was filtered through Adam's direct connection, particularly for those who considered painting a holy medium (Savonarolan Dominicans, and Renaissance humanists with Neo-Platonic views).⁷ Suor Nelli disproves this view of women's art, evidently possessing a "self-consistent language of form" raising her far above the realm of copying at which Vasari concludes his praise.

Although the search for great women artists akin to the Old Masters is, as Nochlin observes, ultimately reductive of the fundamental issue of access to the education which nurtures "Greatness", it is nevertheless an epithet that Suor Nelli's prevailing individual artistic sensibility warrants. The quality that makes Plautilla Nelli's paintings timelessly moving is their rooting in the spiritual, above any concern with contemporary fashions. This trait was nurtured in Suor Nelli by the fact that she stood no chance in a competitive world of art built for and by men, and therefore she was motivated by her own convictions as a Savonarolan nun, a woman, and an artist. Whilst there are times when religion overshadows gender in its influence, the main differences between Suor Nelli's art and that of her equally pious contemporaries are to be found in their respective presentations of women, as her art is conclusively transformed by her womanhood.

⁷ This idea stems from the Bible, where Eve is created for Adam, and as Adam is in God's image but Eve is in Adam's, it is Adam who has a more direct connection with God. This idea is repeatedly drawn on, such as in 1 Corinthians 11:4-10.

The Importance, Controversies and Resilience of Mount Athos

Julian Herbst investigates some disputes concerning monasteries on Mount Athos. He is surprised by the rift between the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church and Esphigmenou monastery, which has been embroiled in legal and ecclesiastical disputes for some fifty years. And the land swap between Vatopaidi monastery and the state remains controversial.



Katholikon in the monastery of Esphigmenou "Holy Ascension" in Mount Athos, by Kochev.

Surely, you may say, monks who kidnap policemen, throw Molotov cocktails and are placed under siege by Greek riot police are slightly off their rocker. Most monks on the Esphigmenou monastery, one of 20 monasteries on the centre of Orthodox faith, Mount Athos, have been declared in schism from the Orthodox Church by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople since 2002. They refuse to respect or commemorate him, and declare him a traitor for praying with heretics, and even making overtures to the Pope. They allege that the EU seeks to create a global government, and that each barcode somehow contains the letter "6" three times (which is false), and from these two random suspicions, draw the conclusion that the Last Judgement is near. "The coincidences are so many that you cannot turn a blind eye," Father Savvas, a senior monk, told the Economist. When the Patriarch Bartholomew officially evicted the monks from the monastery, they resisted, leading to a police blockade

which still lasts.

In 2008, a monk who attempted to get past the police was arrested, leading to a 4x4 filled with Esphigmenou's toughest monks setting out on a rescue mission. They found only a lone policeman, and no monk, and decided to take him hostage: Father Savvas recalled the negotiating monks in the truck saying, "Give us our monk, we will give you your policeman". The famous prisoner exchange is only one example of the violent struggles of Esphigmenou's monks. Two monks have been sentenced to seventeen years in prison for other incidents.

Although this may be an entertaining story and although, yes, these monks may be slightly mad, the main thing this divide shows are the parallel existences and worldviews (in this case, a coming Judgement) that many monks on Athos live and hold, even in relation to their main Patriarchs. An environment where a form of Ancient Greek is heard just as much as modern, no female creatures (other than cats) are allowed, and modernity

Athos, or the *Áyion Óros* (holy mountain), is the last real remnant of Byzantium

has not yet touched an agrarian theocracy, Athos, or the *Áyion Óros* (holy mountain), is the last real remnant of Byzantium. Quite literally, there is a different sense of time in Athos: monks use the Julian calendar rather than our Gregorian. The story of Esphigmenou only reiterates the special nature of Athos, and the parallel world the monks live in, where society has remained almost unchanged since 963 AD, when St. Athanasius the Athonite founded the first monastery with the help of his imperial Byzantine patron Nicephorus II Phocas. Although its history as a peninsula jutting into the Aegean goes deeper (Xerxes famously cut a canal through it for his Persian fleet in the 5th century BC), before Athanasius, Athos was a mere refuge for lone hermits.

The monastic community of Athos has been extremely resilient throughout its existence. The sponsorship of the Byzantine emperors waned in light of an Ottoman onslaught, and in 1424 the monks came to terms with the reality of their position and submitted to the Sultan, averting a potential occupation of Athos. The monasteries were under fairly relaxed administrative dependence on Ottoman authority, however their submission to the spiritual guidance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople remained unchanged. While land was often seized by authorities, the monks somehow always succeeded in buying it back. The loans that were used to finance this though, combined with heavy taxation, led to frequent financial crises. It is a testament to the political savvy and dedication to upholding Christianity of the monks that Athos emerged relatively unscathed from Ottoman occupation to the 19th century. With diminishing Ottoman influence, and a still fledgling Greek state, Russia then stepped in as the main benefactor for Athos.

By the late 19th century Russian monks outnumbered Greeks, although the monastery of St. Panteleimon was the only one fully under Russian control. A dispute over the importance and legitimacy of a book by a monk named Ilarion, which argued for the praising of God's name, resulted in the "name-glorifiers" led by ex-hussar Alexander Bulatovich physically ousting the abbot of St. Panteleimon, who was a "name-fighter". Tsarist Russia

aimed to assert dominance both on Athos and in the rapidly evolving Balkan theatre. In the same year of 1913, the Ottomans had been fully expelled from Europe and tensions were mounting with Austro-Hungary. Russia was also fearful that the Greeks would use the violent dispute to justify the expulsion of Russian monks from Athos. Russia sent its fleet and opened up a water-cannon on the cells of the name-glorifiers, who were then dragged onto Russian ships. Eight-hundred of these monks were

transported to Odessa where most were stripped of their robes. The Tsarist attempts to gain influence over Athos were however annulled after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. However, while the Soviets attempted to stamp out religion, Athos and St. Panteleimon still continued to lure Russians and Ukrainians through the Iron Curtain, and once more displayed the extraordinary resilience rooted in the monks' deep dedication to religion. Ultimately though, Athos became part of Greece after the Ottomans

were pushed out, with the Mount's autonomy officially being granted by the Greek state in 1926.

Athos remains independent (even if under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople) and the monks lead a lifestyle of hard work, with only two hours of free time a day and no holidays. The monasteries nonetheless

need money from the outside world to support themselves. While in the past benefactors were empires such as Byzantium or Russia, the lack of funding and dilapidation of buildings in the mid 20th century has led monasteries to look for more inventive ways to raise money, one of which is a slightly morally dubious method of cashing in ancient Byzantine deeds.

In 2008 it was reported in Greek media that a land-swap had occurred between the state and Vatopaidi monastery of Athos, where an influential young Archimandrite (equivalent of an abbot of several or one important monastery) called Ephraim was leading a revival. He had been elected as Archimandrite in the 1990s, when a new group of Cypriot monks decided to bring back to life the dilapidated monastery which was nominally 2nd in the Athonite hierarchy of monasteries. One method was to pore through the library and ancient scrolls, and create an



Bartholomew I is the 270th archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch.

Many claimed that the monks had used bribery



Fresco of the Last Judgement, Vatopaidi monastery

audit of all the deeds of land which Byzantine emperors had gifted Vatopaidi over the ages. While it turned out that the Greek government had taken back many of these deeds of land from Ephraim's less financially sharp predecessors, one large deed of a government nature reserve in Halkidiki (the neighbouring region to Athos) remained with the monastery. The designation of the plot as a government nature reserve seems to have oddly lapsed in 1998. Although it was still dubious whether the land belonged to the monastery, eventually after multiple meetings and phone calls with the monks Arsenios and Ephraim of Vatopaidi, Petros Doukas, an official in the finance ministry, signed two vital pieces of paper: one agreed to not challenge the monastery's ownership of the land, and the second allowed the Ministry of Agriculture to agree to a deal to swap valuable government real estate for the Halkidiki land.

This is part one of the scandal. In an investigation into the matter, Doukas maintained that he was pressured by his superiors and especially the prime minister's chief of staff, Giannis Angelou, over whom Ephraim had significant influence after facilitating a 'miraculous' recovery from a life-threatening ailment. The second part of the scandal is that in the land swap which ensued, various investigators found that the value of the land at Halkidiki (estimates vary greatly, but one independent assessor valued it 55 million euros) was greatly inflated by the monks, who received much more valuable properties which could be priced at over a billion euros. Not just that, but after the properties had been transferred, the government approved the commercialisation of these properties and even funded their development. Many claimed that the monks had used bribery, but also moral instigation to pressure the Greek government to support Vatopaidi.

The uncovering of this case, especially with the backdrop of a backlash against the government for corruption and the incurring of massive debts (in 2010 it was uncovered that Greece had vastly understated its budget deficit by around 12% and had built up debts of around \$1.2 trillion) led to massive public outrage. Greek insurance billionaire and TV channel owner Dimitris Contominas put it bluntly: “the Vatopaidi monks brought George Papandreou (elected as the new prime minister in 2009) to power.” Writer Michael Lewis described Vatopaidi as “the soul of corruption” in the public eye. The new government launched investigations into the matter, however, although Ephraim was jailed for several months in 2011 and released on a 300 000 euro bail, the monks were all acquitted in 2017. This most certainly showed the influence that the monastery had on politicians, politics and public opinion, but also its shrewd ability to find funding. Lewis wrote that most rich Greeks “put the monk’s real-estate and financial assets at less than \$2 billion but more than \$1 billion—up from zero since the new management took over. And the business had started with nothing to sell but forgiveness.”

Ephraim mingled with Greek and European celebrities and businesspeople to secure not only donations, but audiences with governments. He is said to have influenced many important men: Putin has visited Mount Athos twice, while our King Charles who started his frequent visits to Vathopaidi after the death of Diana has revisited his father’s family’s religion, and despite being head of the Church of

England is rumoured to be Greek Orthodox himself. He has a private Orthodox chapel in his royal Highgrove estate, where the walls are rumoured to be adorned with icons from Vathopaidi. Father Ephraim clearly has influences beyond Athos and Greece. A perfect example of his savvy sourcing of funding is when, after a famous Spanish singer facilitated a meeting, Ephraim met with Spanish officials and told them of a horrible injustice of the 14th century. A band of Catalan mercenaries had sacked Vatopaidi in a show of dissatisfaction with a Byzantine emperor. As a result, in the 21st century, the monastery received \$240 000 of reparations from the Spanish government. Another, perhaps the most, major source of funding for all the monasteries of Athos is from the EU, which has spent millions of euros on the restoration and upkeep of valuable pieces of cultural heritage.

The last noteworthy method of funding is deeply tied to Russia and geopolitics surrounding it. An estimated \$200 million has been donated by Russians to monasteries in Athos, especially the Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, an ally of Putin, and the Russian foreign ministry were one of the first to condemn the imprisonment of Father Ephraim. Ephraim had courted Russian funding for years, and just before he was arrested on arrival in Greece had been paid by Vladimir Yakunin, a close friend of Putin, to tour Russia

with the relic of the belt of the Virgin Mary. Other monks were however wary that Russia, like in the 19th century under the Tsar, was once more seeking greater influence on Athos. St. Panteleimon which had previously been majority Ukrainian was again populated with Russian monks and headed by a Russian abbot. More recently, the Patriarchate of Moscow has been in a battle with that of Constantinople. It is the biggest schism experienced by the Eastern Church in centuries. In 2018 Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople issued a “tomos” which granted the right of self-government to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The latter had previously been under the authority of Patriarch Kirill of “Moscow and all Rus”. The tomos affirmed Constantinople’s intention to support the unrecognised churches gaining popularity in Ukraine, by lifting the churches’ excommunications and revoking the right of the Patriarch of Moscow to (since 1686) ordain the Metropolitan of Kyiv. These acts ran against President Putin’s strategy of using Kirill and the Church, who was allegedly employed by the KGB to influence and infiltrate the World Council of Churches in Geneva in Soviet times, to wield and grow Russia’s sphere of influence. It provoked the current schism in which the Russian Church unilaterally severed full communion with Constantinople.

In Russia itself, Orthodoxy has flourished, with many of the elite, including Putin himself, having a personal confessor, and *dukhovnik*, or spiritual father. In 2018, approximately three churches were being built or restored in Russia a day, and the

percentage of Orthodox Christians has risen from 30% at the end of the Soviet era to 70% now. Orthodoxy has always been tied into Russia’s government. The deep infiltration of KGB agents in the Church also made it a safe haven for agents after the Soviet Union’s collapse, many of whom were colleagues of Putin, whose suspected *dukhovnik*’s monastery was just one street away from Lubyanka Square, the FSB (the Russian domestic intelligence service) headquarters where Putin was working at the time.

Putin’s de-facto dictatorship in Russia and quasi return to tsarism comes with three key ideologies. Firstly, Russian hardliners have been pushing for Moscow to be seen as a third Rome (a concept established in the 1547-1721 Tsardom of Muscovy), after Rome and Constantinople. This idea has been pushed in the media and in speeches by officials like Patriarch Kirill, but is also in accordance with the second ideology, the “*russiky mir*” or Russian world. Again, an imperial concept, it sees a common “Russian culture”, with Moscow as the political and Kyiv as the cultural capital; the Kyivan Rus having been the first Rus empire. It underlies both Russia’s expansion and attempts to grow spheres of influence in neighbouring countries, and its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Orthodox Christianity, which is followed by most people in those areas, is key in legitimising Russian influence. The last

More inventive ways to raise money, one of which is a slightly morally dubious method of cashing in ancient Byzantine deeds

The Patriarchate of Moscow has been in a battle with that of Constantinople



Interior of the Dome, Vatopaidi monastery

ideology is what had been perceived as the three pillars of the Russian empire: orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality. This triad sought to cement unity under the oversight of the Tsar, with the idea of one nationality and one religion to promote that unity, and is being replicated exactly with Putin promoting the Russian Orthodox Church (orthodoxy), himself as the sole leader (autocracy) and the 'reunification' of the split-off Ukraine (nationality). This has made the Church essential in Putin's ambitions domestically and internationally. A celebrated 18th century admiral, Fyodor Ushakov, was canonised in 2000, then made patron saint of the nuclear bomber fleet, illustrating the need for close integration of the state and Church.

One main battleground between Moscow and Constantinople is the Archdiocese of Paris, which represents Orthodox parishes in Western Europe, and has been split by the schism. The Archdiocese was founded in 1921 by White Russian intellectuals, priests and exiles fleeing from October Revolution and still sees itself as largely a form of Russian Orthodoxy. Bartholomew had however, in an effort to reassemble and streamline

his forces, revoked the tomos granting the Archdiocese "exarchate" status, meaning that parishes were once again absorbed into the relevant dioceses of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This alienated many in the Archdiocese who still felt they had closer ties to Russia, and its primate Archbishop John Rennetau proposed to switch to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow in return for more independence. While the resolution failed to gain the two third majority necessary, more than half of the parishes voted to join Russia. Many of these personally (including the Archbishop) joined Moscow's Patriarchate, and in September 2019, the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Moscow welcomed those "who expressed such a desire" to join, with open arms.

The growing schism means Russia has alienated most other Orthodox communities which include not only Eastern European countries like Romania and Greece, but also Ethiopia which boasts 50 million adherents. This threatens a bipolar Orthodox world. In this world, most communities will reside under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, but Russia and its allies will become ever more isolated, in accordance also with

Russia's current political and economic prospects. The war in Ukraine has only entrenched this isolation, with it justifying both sides. Ukraine can now argue that Russia is an aggressor not to be trusted, while Russia can argue that it is merely another assertion of the russiky mir. While shifts in alliances have been made, with the Patriarchate of Constantinople gaining ground by persuading the Serbian (Russian allied), and to an extent the Bulgarian, Church to accept the autocephaly of a Macedonian Orthodox Church-Archdiocese of Ohrid, the fundamental schism seems unlikely to heal in the next decades, unless there is a radical change of government in Russia.

The schism threatens to undermine Eastern Christianity, and with it the multicultural centre of its Church: Mount Athos. The monasteries are all under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which is the first among equals and has "primacy of honour" among the Patriarchates, but are made up of monks from across the world. Athos also includes monasteries which are not Greek, but also Serbian, Bulgarian, Romanian, and of course, Russian. Many monks are split, especially on the question of Ukrainian autocephaly, which few patriarchates have recognised. When Ukrainian monks were turned out from St. Panteleimon, many were taken in by Vatopaidi, causing seven Russian speaking monks to quit the monastery. Many agree that the Patriarchate of Moscow is more suited to leadership than Constantinople, since it already leads the largest faction of Orthodox believers in the world in Russia and has the most practical influence compared to Constantinople which is non-existent as a city. However, detractors argue that it is too close to Putin and merely a part of the Russian state apparatus, and that Constantinople, which has existed as a 2nd Rome since 330AD, has ideological superiority, experience, and is untainted by geopolitical wills. It could also be a better representative of the world of Orthodoxy precisely because of the lack of importance of its location, compared to other Patriarchates, since its seat is in a Muslim Istanbul and therefore prefers to hold events outside of Turkey. Essentially, the question is whether monks want to allow geopolitics to trump dogma in the hierarchy of the Eastern Church. Anyhow, the schism is sure to further inflame tensions between monasteries and monks on Athos, and if the peninsula continues to shift its alliance to Constantinople, more measures may be taken by the Russian Church (it has already barred Russian from taking communion on Athos) to decrease the popularity and funding of Athos, undermining its status as a melting-pot of Orthodoxy.

In conclusion, Mount Athos seems to be under a lot of pressure. Not only has its name been dirtied by the Vatopaidi scandal and is threatened by the current schism between Moscow and Constantinople, but it seems outdated. The EU and other critics have demanded Athos scrap its ban on women and alleged that it violates international conventions on gender-equality, non-discrimination and "the free movement of persons". The justification for the ban, namely that women detract from

the holiness and importance of the Virgin Mary, seems a flimsy excuse to some. The peninsula is also filled with contradictions. Previously a neutral zone, it is now home to geopolitical interests and conflicts. It is a Byzantine relic, but now some privileged monks drive SUVs and jet across the world. First grounded in the honest, simple and moral nature of monastic life, those same monasteries now accept dubious sources of funding. While these contradictions within it, of course, make Athos infinitely more interesting to me than the Vatican, to which it is often compared as the centre of one half of Christianity, they pose serious challenges to the peninsula's longevity.

To this there are several counterarguments. First of all, if women were suddenly allowed on Athos, monks believe it would take a heavy toll on the spiritual and historic integrity of the monasteries. Women have not been allowed on the peninsula for one thousand years, and little else has changed on Athos since then. The spiritual reasoning, rather than discrimination, behind the ban also seems to be confirmed by the fact that the monks have received women, including five Moldovan migrants in 2008 and young girls fleeing the Halkidiki uprising in 1854, in extreme circumstances. Even in

medieval times, a Serbian king supposedly brought his wife, but had her carried and carpets placed wherever she walked to ensure she never set foot on Athonite soil. Secondly, the Mount has always been

The schism threatens to undermine Eastern Christianity

split by geopolitical influences, from the Ottomans in the 16th century to the Tsar in the 19th, but this has not prevented pilgrims from visiting and joining Athos. In a more concrete example of Athos' popularity, the number of monks has rapidly risen in the past decade to around 2300, and the average age has dropped. Modernity and technology, such as social media, have not assigned Athos to the dustbin of history, but have rather made it more relevant to people seeking true meaning among the distractions of our age.

Ultimately, there are two main reasons for Athos' survival. The first is faith. The monks sacrifice their normal lives to join, and theirs is a hard life inside, with two meals a day, work, praying, and little sleep, showing their dedication. It is this dedication which will continue to attract other believers to Athos, and has sustained the monasteries, even in hard times like Ottoman occupation and the Cold War. The second is time. On Athos, monks do not think in years, or even decades, but in centuries. While some, such as Father Ephraim, are well versed in non-spiritual, current matters like politics and funding, these events are but a blip in the history of Byzantium which they are surrounded by and see themselves as a part of. Father Arsenios, also of Vatopaidi, said to journalist Michael Lewis: "*The Greek newspapers, they call us a corporation, but I ask you, Michael, what company has lasted for 1,000 years?*" The brevity of a human life is illustrated by skulls stacked over hundreds of years in sketes of Athos. The same reasons which have sustained Athos for centuries in the past, will continue to do so in the centuries to come.

An Absurdist Recreation of Stalinist Society

Alexandra Sullivan examines the background to one the Soviet Union's most famous and well-loved novels and sketches its reception under the Communist regime.



Michael Feast as Woland in the Minerva Theatre's production of *The Master and Margarita*. Photography by Tristram Kenton

A novel that defies the notion of a single genre, Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* is a tale of Satan's (Woland) visit to 1930s Moscow, at once a deconstruction of the distinction between good and evil and a searing probe at the political hypocrisy within the 'worker's paradise'. Though the Soviet Union was built around the communist ideology of equality for all, it rapidly morphed into a state of tyranny under Stalin's reign. Rather than achieving a classless society, repression festered throughout the Eurasian empire; mass imprisonment, state paranoia, and censorship characterised the period. Within this environment of despotism, Bulgakov constructed a Soviet Moscow, fused with magical realism, that runs parallel to a rendition

of the crucifixion of Jesus (under the name of Yeshua). Though it may be titled after the characters of the master and his lover, Margarita, the Moscow plot line revolves itself more so around the antics of Woland and his entourage. Absurdism is both intentionally ridiculous action or behaviour, and the philosophy that existence is absurd and purposeless, definitions that at first recall the nature of Woland's escapades. Despite this, only the former definition is truly applicable, for the same actions contrarily reveal themselves as targeted; alongside the ludicrousness of gun-wielding cats and flying pigs, Bulgakov interlaces the consequences of the unyielding conditions imposed by the USSR to create a darkly comical commentary on Stalinist society.



Scene from M. Bulgakov: *The Master and Margarita* (dir. Michal Dožekal, 2014)

The novel targets numerous features of the 1930s Soviet Union – for example, the state of paranoia that had ripened under Stalin. In the first chapter of the novel alone, Mikhail Alexandrovich Berlioz (‘editor of a highbrow literary magazine’) and a poet, Bezdomny, have a peculiar conversation with Woland, whom they immediately label a ‘foreigner’. The poet regards the foreigner as ‘repulsive’, and significantly soon into a mildly strange conversation with him arrives at the conclusion that “He’s not just a foreign tourist, he’s a spy. He’s a Russian émigré trying to catch us out.” The atmosphere of paranoia is rampant enough that Berlioz needs no cajoling to instantly agree, and the two plan to ‘arrest’ the stranger, an indication of the collective derangement towards anything vaguely unusual. The humour of the ‘foreigner’ being Satan sharply contrasts the genuine suspicion that permeated Soviet society. Moreover, the repetitive manner in which Berlioz and Bezdomny linger over Woland’s perceived status as a ‘foreigner’ encompasses the broader position of the USSR in an international frame. The Soviet Union and the USA ‘did not establish diplomatic relations until 1933. By that time, the totalitarian nature of Joseph Stalin’s regime presented an insurmountable obstacle to friendly

Bulgakov interlaces the consequences of the unyielding conditions imposed by the USSR to create a darkly comical commentary on Stalinist society

encounter with Woland.

He further depicts the culture of fear through seemingly random instances. Towards the end of the novel, Margarita asks Woland to return her and the master to their previous home: a basement flat. Woland extracts the current habitant, Aloisy Mogarych, who is described as ‘a nearly delirious citizen in nothing but his underwear, with a suitcase in his hand for some reason.’ Beyond the comedic imagery is a darker indication at the harsh reality of daily life under Stalin. The ‘some reason’ is the same reason nearly every Soviet citizen had their own suitcase constantly ready; under the terror installed by Stalin there lived a persistent fear of being taken away by the NKVD (the secret police) at random, and the suitcases were prepared with the necessities for such an event. This terror was sustained by the Purges, a ruthless campaign of terror which, over 1936-1938, arrested over

relations with the West’,¹ (no longer an alien concept to the modern perspective). Essentially, the isolation of the Soviet Union had developed a fear held by its citizens towards any manifestation of external forces (however minuscule), which Bulgakov portrays through the introductory

¹ The Soviet Union and the United States - Revelations from the Russian Archives | Exhibitions - Library of Congress, n.d.



Scene from M. Bulgakov: *The Master and Margarita* (dir. Michal Dožekal, 2014)

seven million and gained a death toll between 700,000 and 1.75 million people, ordinary citizens and Communist Party members alike². An atmosphere of distrust amidst Russian citizens stemmed from both the NKVD and the fount of informants who condemned those around them (either hoping to deflect accusation, prove their loyalty, or influenced to believe they were doing the right thing). Aloisy Mogarych is an example of this, having been the one who reported the master to the NKVD for possession of illicit literature.

Be that as it may, Mogarych informed on the master not for any of the aforementioned motivations, but for another self-serving reason: he hoped to be able to move into the master's apartment after his detainment. Though this

Beyond the comedic imagery is a darker indication at the harsh reality of daily life under Stalin

may appear excessive, it was contextually understandable, and one repercussion of Stalin's dictatorship that Bulgakov parodies was the housing crisis. So as to reduce the extent to which the Soviet

Union's economy was behind other capitalist states, Stalin began the process of industrialisation and urbanization so as to transform the nation into an industrial power. On investing heavily in industry, he failed to provide housing for the millions who had shifted from living in rural villages and working on farms to living in cities and working in factories³. A clear consequence of this was the dire housing crisis that left citizens desperate, a point of hypocrisy in the USSR (despite the principles of public ownership and social equality for all, basic necessities such as housing were not available for all) that is further

² Budanovic, N. 'Stalin's Great Purge: Over A Million Detained, More Than Half A Million Killed', War History Online, 2016

³ 'Housing in the USSR', *Communal Living in Russia*, n.d.

seen through the matter of Berlioz's apartment. 'Pleas of [people's] urgent need of vacant housing space' rush in, in a bid for the apartment, described comically as happening at a 'supernatural speed', underlining the absurdity of the situation; though many events that take place in the novel are supernatural, this is not one of them. Bulgakov further satirises the housing crisis through Berlioz's uncle, Maximilian Andreevich Poplavsky, who travels to Moscow, not to attend his nephew's funeral, but rather to attain his apartment. The inappropriateness is stressed through Koroviev's (part of Woland's entourage) mockery, who in the face of Poplavsky's 'practical' intentions, 'pulled a dirty handkerchief out of his pocket, blew his nose and burst into tears.' The extravagant display of grief is an exaggerated imitation of what would have been a more proper reaction to the loss of family, dragging attention to the uncle's skewed priorities. However, the purpose of this encounter is more to criticise the consequences of Stalin's housing and industrialisation policies. The desperation that developed as a result of limited housing in urban districts served as a means for greed to emerge and expand into mass populations. Bulgakov integrates this in his novel using the apartment, not only through Berlioz's uncle, but also through Nikanor Invanovich Bosoy. Being the chairman of the tenant's association of the apartment block, Bosoy has the responsibility of the apartment's vacancy, and is bribed by Koroviev's offer of four hundred roubles into allowing Woland to reside in the apartment for an excessive sum of five thousand roubles a week. The bribery is representative of the common underground corruption that evolved as a result of the housing crisis⁴.

However, the core criticism Bulgakov incorporates is perhaps the one that affected him most. 'I couldn't help feeling... that the people writing those articles were not saying what they had really wanted to say and that *this* was the cause of their fury': a reflection of the censorship that had plagued Bulgakov since Stalin took to power. Up until the 'Khrushchev Thaw'⁵, which began with Stalin's death in 1953, political repression stifled the literary scene in Russia, imposing a suffocating atmosphere that controlled any form of media – particularly literature. Bulgakov began writing the novel in 1928, completed his second draft in 1936, and wrote another four versions before his death in 1940, none of which were published in any format until 1966, when a heavily censored version was published in a Russian literary magazine. Only in 1967 was the full version published in book edition, having been smuggled out of the USSR to a publishing house in Paris. Breaching the enforced restrictions of socialist realism – a genre characterised by its depiction of communist principles – Bulgakov's works were

**The purpose of this encounter
is more to criticise the
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and industrialisation policies**

prohibited, as was the master's manuscript in *The Master and Margarita*. The master's novel was labelled 'redundant' from being published as it was considered 'an apologia for Jesus Christ'. For seven decades the Soviet Union administered state atheism. Bulgakov demonstrated how the secularisation of the regime was actively imposed regardless of a genuine adherence to the ideology through the numerous articles that attacked the master's novel – all in which 'one could detect a sense of falsity, of unease, in spite of their threatening and confident tone.' Furthermore, *The Master and Margarita* begins with a conversation between Berlioz and Bezdomny. Berlioz had 'commissioned the poet to write a long anti-religious poem' and was now outlining its 'fundamental error'; despite being written with a multitude of flaws contrary to the biblical image, the Jesus featuring in Bezdomny's poem had 'come out... completely alive.' Bulgakov the ban on religion by accomplishing exactly what Bezdomny's flaw is: he denies the sentiment that 'all the stories about [Jesus] were pure invention' and brings him to life through the second plotline of *The Master and Margarita*, which is at the same time the work of the master. Moreover, Bulgakov uses the master's 'masterpiece' as a commentary that extends beyond the specifics of religion. After writing

a first draft, Bulgakov had burned his manuscript for a lack of possibility of being published. Nevertheless, he later revived the story, a story which, post-mortem, would become a classic of Soviet literature. Towards the end of the novel, when confronted with the master's statement that

he, like Bulgakov, had burned his novel, Woland retrieves it with the simple response that 'manuscripts don't burn.' In the face of Stalin's rigid censorship of the arts, Bulgakov expresses the crucial idea that art of genuine value and meaning is eternal and resistant to society.

Aligning itself with Menippean satire⁶, Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* is a fantastical parody of the Soviet Union, a novel of magical realism, beneath which lies an imitation of Stalinist society's established conventions and policies. As a result of the censorship that contorted literature into a political tool, his novel masquerades itself as a light-hearted, nonsensical piece of fiction – but the value lies in the unravelling of the cultural and social order, and the denouncement of the hypocrisy of Stalinist practises and policies through exaggeration and comedic effect. Over the length of events increasing in ridiculousness, presented to readers is an indictment of Stalin's dictatorship that remains as immortal and indestructible as manuscripts.

4 Heinzen, J. 'The Art of the Bribe: Corruption and Everyday Practise in the Late Stalinist USSR', *Slavic Review*, vol. 66, no. 3, 2007, pp. 389.

5 Period from 1953-1964 in which censorship in the Soviet Union eased due to Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinisation.

6 Genre of satire that is characterised by criticising wider conventions and ideas in a humorous manner.



Yayoi Kusama: Obliterating the self to reaffirm it

Alice Gelsoni reflects on the work of Yayoi Kusama, whose polka dot inspired installations and artwork have brought an original slant to ways of perception and artistic meaning.



Yayoi Kusama

Distilling infinity. Reasoning with madness. Obliterating the self to reaffirm it. Yayoi Kusama, blossoming from deep personal trauma and mental health issues into one of the most successful women artists of our time, crafting an unforgettable personal image that revolutionised the contemporary art world, has become synonymous with these interrelated paradoxes. The quest to dissolve her personhood to transcend its limits and harness its suffering, gaining control, flows through her, her work, and interaction with institutions and brands as a life-giving blood that paradoxically reaffirms the self.

Kusama crafted her clamorous success out of the simplest shape: the dot. The symbolism of the shape itself is an attempt to self-obliteration: its completeness and loneliness has been a marker of the individual, the single unit, since the first humans. By expanding to symbolise the Earth, the planets, our universe and infinity, however, the dot simultaneously dissolves the self, engulfing it with these greater concepts. The dot is inherently paradoxical, being something so small and dismissible that, however, has the potential to contain everything and resists the surrounding void. Kusama's choice of dots as the central focus of her work is chiefly a means of expressing her childhood trauma of physical and psychological abuse by her mother, which manifested itself through powerful hallucinations. Dots would overwhelm her vision, multiplying, engulfing the space around her and her sense of self. Recounting her experiences, Kusama stated, 'One day I was looking at the red flower patterns of the tablecloth on a table, and when I looked up I saw the same pattern covering the ceiling, the windows, the walls, and finally all over the room, my body and the universe. I felt as if I had begun to self-obliterate, to revolve in the infinity of endless time and the absoluteness of space, and be reduced to nothing'. The reproduction of the shape into art in obsessive repetition is an attempt to free herself from her trauma, reaffirming her identity by regaining control of her experiences, overcoming her fears by facing and reclaiming them, reproducing them so many times they become insignificant, whilst the self is affirmed by the action of making a mark on the surroundings. Kusama's struggle with depersonalisation syndrome as a further result of her trauma, the feeling of being outside

The central focus of her work is chiefly a means of expressing her childhood trauma

the self and observing one's own actions from a distance, heightens the importance of enveloping herself and her surroundings into her actions to find grounding. Kusama's active, creative approach through healing, by directly confronting fears, fits with Nietzsche's thought in *Beyond Good and Evil* that 'Whoever fights monsters should see in the process that he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into the abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you'.



Inextricable from her dotted works is a quest for control, prized by Kusama as a means of reaffirming her ego instead of letting herself be overruled by her trauma. It pervades not only her artistic method, but also the act of viewing her works: Kusama's immersive art rejects the traditional format of the viewer in control of their experience, packaged and confined in a picture frame, as they are instead totally plunged into the complexities of her mind, lost beyond time, space and their sense of self. By reproducing her hallucinations inside the viewer's mind, Kusama breaks interpersonal barriers, disintegrating the self, yet simultaneously evoking a similar sense of self-obliteration in others that affirms her own experiences. Kusama engages with the obliterating chaos and madness which threatens her very existence rather than simply refusing it, to harness and own its strength. This is also manifested through her choice to make the Seiwa Hospital for the Mentally Ill in Tokyo her home, which she admitted herself into in 1977 and has not left since, except to work in her art studio. By consciously placing herself inside the symbol of her unreason, she resists obliteration by controlling the illness which threatened to kill her, having felt suicidal, reaffirming herself in the face of her suffering, creating rather than destroying.

Kusama creates links to affirm life: interpersonal, between the self and the surroundings, connecting paradoxes. The dot is never isolated in Kusama's work, being instead always part of a repeated pattern, shaping infinite nets. Not feeling valued in the male-dominated art world, her work being plagiarised by many of her male counterparts, including Andy Warhol, Kusama soon relapsed into depression after moving to America and leaving her home in Japan behind. "I became so depressed," she recalls, "And then I just jumped from the window. If I had landed on my head I would have died, but there was a bicycle, and I fell on it. Between the lightness and the darkness of people's shadows, a bridge to life has stopped me from suicide." Links are therefore life-affirming, not diminishing, antithetical to the death of the self after replication renders it insignificant, and paradox ripples through Kusama's story. The ego which Kusama seeks to obliterate and simultaneously reaffirm is in itself a link if seen through a Freudian psychoanalytic lens, synonymous with reality, mediating between the id and the superego. There is a balance, and therefore a grounding of the self, inextricable from the links Kusama pursues, even if through these nets time and space obliterate.

The philosophy behind Kusama's work is reminiscent

of the Buddhist idea of ego-death, losing and transcending the earthly and subjective, removing all attachments and surrendering to the self to expand into a greater being. Kusama strives to transcend her condition and not be confined by boundaries, both almost spiritually through the meditative quality of her work, and less so in her quest for increasing fame, as she has stated 'I want to become more and more famous'. She seeks not only a liberation but an expansion of herself, which has prompted her to always look outwards for opportunities of making her work known, such as the recent partnership with Louis Vuitton in January 2023, following a previous, smaller-scale one in 2012. Analysing this controversial partnership, that seems so unlikely at first glance, further explores the tension between self-obliteration and -affirmance that Kusama embodies. The artificiality of consumerism, heightened by the sheer scale of the collaboration which includes upwards of 450 pieces, seems to initially deeply

contrast the meditative qualities of Kusama's work striving to reconnect the self with something universal. The frenzied atmosphere as sales skyrocket and customers swarm reminds of a plunge

back into the plaguing hallucinations of Kusama's traumatic childhood, eating away at the self. On the other hand, the collaboration could be seen as an innocent continuation of Kusama's lifelong interest in fashion, as she has been covering herself in dots since her emergence into the art world, crafting a striking personal style that further communicates the philosophy behind her work. By reproducing the dots she employs to obliterate onto the brand, she seems to undermine the monopolising big industry names unawares, shifting the focus back towards the personal. Similar to her control of the viewer experience, the collaboration enables Kusama to clothe others in the dots that carry her experiences, suggesting that the commercialisation of her art amplifies her voice rather than subdues it. The artist continues to adapt to the times, metamorphosing, not confined by preconceived notions of identity. The collaboration is reminiscent of Kusama's self-hospitalisation, her ability to reshape her surroundings by immersing herself in them, paradoxically always retaining control.

Kusama's identity comprises of whirling madness alongside an unwavering willingness to reason, the transcendence achieved by dissolving boundaries alongside the staccato of polka dots. It is through the convergence and intertwining of all these ideas that Kusama is able to capture interest and retain her relevance, achieving defiant immortality in the very world that had so nearly succeeded in erasing her.

The dot is never isolated in Kusama's work

The Emotional Capability of the Sonnet

Amelia Ross was commended by Queens' College Cambridge for this submission to the Estelle Prize for English. Her essay explores the strictures of poetic form and the relationship between form and meaning.



Petrarch and Laura de Noves, Italian (Venetian) School c. 1510, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet retorts to Mr. Darcy's claim that poetry is "the food of love", with the observation that whilst poetry may enrich and complement true emotion that "is strong already", conversely "the efficacy of poetry" is more so capable of "driving away love" that is not mature; ultimately, "one good sonnet will starve it entirely away." Another of Austen's heroines, Anne Elliot of *Persuasion*, characterises sonnets by subject and mood: "the sweet scenes of autumn were for a while put by – unless some tender sonnet, fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year ... blessed her memory." In both cases here, Austen seems to mock the typical tropes of the sonnet, in highlighting its contrived nature and insincere intention. Whilst she acknowledges its effectiveness and artistry as an established form, this suggests that the sonnet expresses

an idealised form of emotion on account of its definitive restrictions, that instead of showcasing the artistry of the poet, can make the poem feel imbued with artifice and less genuine. The word 'sonnet' comes from the Italian 'sonetto' meaning little song. Holding its origins as a love poem, the sonnet is one of the most versatile and resilient verse forms, and despite its restrictive structure has allowed poets over the centuries to capture powerfully condensed expressions of ideas and emotions within only "Fourteen good measur'd verses" (Burns), laced together by intricate rhyme and rhythm. This essay argues that the form of the sonnet, calling for a greater technical skill at the poet's command, enhances the clarity and intensity of idea and emotion expressed within the poetry. Despite its brevity and rule-bound structure, the sonnet can illuminate lyrical qualities of musicality and intimacy, not



The Sonnet by Mulready, William (RA) , 1839.

This was one of Mulready's most popular works. The young man is courting the girl, and has written a poem for her as a token of his love. (V and A).

hindering poetic expression but showcasing its greater quality; denoted by Edith Wharton as “a pure form...like some chalice of old time” the sonnet remains a dynamic and vastly flexible form, even as poets allow for greater variation in its structure and experiment with its boundaries.

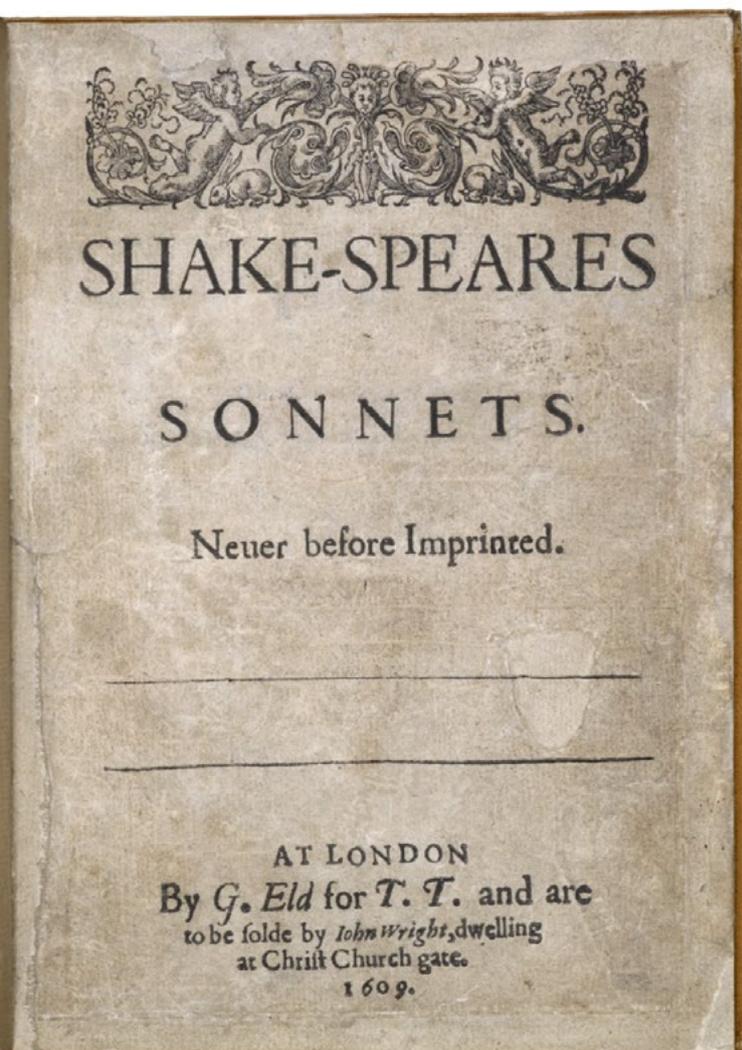
The original Petrarchan sonnet formed the basis from which poets would structure their emotional expression. This used the compact ‘argument’ format with an octave describing a problem, and a ‘volta’ signalling a sestet proposing a resolution. In this way the bipartite form of the sonnet allowed for greater potential in how the poem might progress and develop emotionally. However, the dramatized persona of the speaker, going through a carefully structured set of arguments, poses the eloquence of the lover not as truly emotional but representative of larger power relations in court society. This can be seen in sonnet sequences such as Sidney’s *Astrophel and Stella*, which were closely based on the patterns of Petrarch. This genre is extremely stylised as an attempt to showcase wit and an

**The sonnet is one of
the most versatile and
resilient verse forms**

appraisal of the mastery of the sonnet form, as opposed to genuine emotional expression. These sonnets are almost always unsuccessful in courtship but an exception to this would be Spenser’s *Amoretti*, ending with a marriage song *Epithalamion*: it is true that in some cases the norms of the Petrarchan sonnet perspective could be subverted, but for many of the sonnets of this period due to the political and cultural atmosphere they were received in, more attention was given to the artistry of creating a sonnet and ‘fitting’ words into form, than in allowing for more freedom and emotional capability.

The translation of sophisticated Petrarchan sonnets into the English language by Wyatt and Spenser was a revolutionary moment in the literary English renaissance, as this tested the boundaries of the ‘unsophisticated’ English language, and glorified and promoted it. In doing this, poets progressed the sonnet form, as to write in it became an exercise in language and style. For example, Wyatt’s *Whoso list to hunt* is an imitation of Petrarch’s Rime 190 *Una candida cerva*, yet instead of Petrarch’s fixation on

Shakespeare's ingenious wordplay and considered choice of vocabulary complements the sonnet's form



First edition cover of Shakespeare's Sonnets, 1609

an idealised image of his beloved Laura as a shining doe, Wyatt's sonnet is less tender. The uncertain metre of the poem captures the breathless intensity in quick pursuit of the deer, and the enjambment and caesura in "but as she fleeth afore/Fainting I follow" shows the exhaustion of the speaker as he acknowledges that his efforts to win this love may be "in vain." This can also be read autobiographically, with Wyatt's beloved at the court of Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, as the deer and the group of huntsmen as her potential lovers; Wyatt's beloved remains "wild for to hold", dangerous like the ruthless atmosphere of Henry VIII's court, unlike Petrarch's gentle deer. The sonnet form emphasises this at the volta, when Wyatt commences his sestet with a close reiteration of his opening words, "who list her hunt", assuring the reader that desire is hopeless, as it is to "hold the wind", an image from Erasmus. While Petrarch's sonnets expressed the torments of love as a display of poetic skill, here the function of the sonnet

form has evolved to propose a political message, also seen in Wyatt's other poems such as *My galley charged with forgetfulness*, expressing the perils of court life and duty to the king. The way that Wyatt radically alters the original of Petrarch, could seem to take away from the free expression of the sonnet and highlight its artifice, but nevertheless the sonnet's form and restrictions do seem to complement its new political purpose; the careful construction of the poem only makes the sonnet's message more significant.

Henry Howard Earl of Surrey's *Love that liveth and reigneth in my thought* and Wyatt's *The Long Love that in my Thought doth Harbor* are both translations of Petrarch's Rime 140, and these both convey central Petrarchan images but to varying extents. Surrey adheres more strictly to the sonnet form with fairly regular iambic pentameter and smooth predictable lines, putting a greater emphasis on Love as a conqueror, living and reigning in the speaker's thought and with militaristic imagery, controlling his "captive breast". On the other hand, Wyatt's love only "keep[s] his residence" in "myn heart" and "harbors" in his thought. These sonnets express emotion in different ways, as while the rigid adherence to the sonnet form in Surrey's translation could suggest more artifice than emotion, this conversely puts greater emphasis on both the pain and pleasure of the 'combat' of love; the Petrarchan ideal of a lover suffering at the fate of a 'cruel fair' beloved is much stronger, as demonstrated by the final line, "Sweet is his death that takes his end by love". In Wyatt's translation a more subtle passion is conveyed, with the more neutral conclusion referring to life and not death, "For good is the life ending faithfully". These distinctions show how the sonnet form does not have to be restrictive, but can be used liberatingly in different ways even when as a translation of the same poem; the degree to which the form of the sonnet is followed greatly impacts the message that is conveyed to the reader, implying that the sonnet form does not hinder expression but can add new meaning and reveal different interpretations.

Shakespeare developed the handling of the sonnet by intensifying all of its components, making every word and line rich with meaning. His sonnets were revolutionary as they used the form to create a greater distinction between the speaker and the voice of the poem, allowing for more flexibility in meaning, especially as they often described relationships that went against societal norms. Of Shakespeare's sonnets, Woolf writes in *Mrs Dalloway* that Richard Dalloway found reading these sonnets "like listening at keyholes", reflecting the capability of Shakespeare's sonnets to convey intimate moments of emotion.

The compositional integrity of Shakespeare's writing and his use of form enhances the effectiveness of Sonnet 18, opening with the direct, contemplative rhetorical address, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?". The grouped quatrain form provides the framework for Shakespeare's argument and images, contrasting physical

temporality and beauty with the unforgiving progression of time. The change in tone starting at the volta is mirrored in the imagery Shakespeare uses, as the persisting light imagery, previously of the sun as “the eye of heaven” has now “decline[d]” to “fade” and “shade”. In the same way, the concluding sestet asserts that poetry will also stand against the onset of approaching darkness; the strength of the sonnet form is what shapes this comparison. Shakespeare’s ingenious wordplay and considered choice of vocabulary complements the sonnet’s form, illuminating rhythmic, syntactic and phonetic patterns. Even its brevity, compressing sentences to fit pentameter constraints such as in, “and every fair from fair sometime declines”, offers more meaning: the fricative ‘f’ sound creates a sense of shortening and breathlessness, in the same way that ‘fairness’ is contracted to “fair” in line 10, as if the fair beauty of the beloved is undergoing its own shortening lexically. Furthermore, whilst the first twelve lines took us through from the bittersweet brevity of “a summer’s lease” and the temporal beauty of nature, to an “eternal summer” with permanence, the final couplet reveals that the pure nature of poetry and the strength of poetic form will endure over the transience of life. With the added impact of the caesura bringing “this” act of sonnet writing to the foreground, the sonnet form has a special simplicity here which Shakespeare uses to add to the fragile sentiment of this final couplet: completely monosyllabic, placed neatly in perfect pentameter and enclosed with the parallel phrase “So long” – a poetic farewell.

Even the Romantics as part of a movement that championed individuality away from traditional restrictions, were able to find new ways of developing the sonnet after it had lost favour in the previous literary era. Their new sonnets were a means of liberating them emotionally from the restraints of a form, and their ability to work inside the rules and still achieve artistic freedom, shows how the sonnet form was not restrictive and did not ‘force’ writers to confine themselves to structure at the expense of their emotional expression. This can be seen in Keats’s sonnet, *On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again*, which combines the Petrarchan and Shakespearian sonnet forms to appraise the works of Shakespeare whilst also rebelling against certain conventions such as the rhyming couplet.

For example, the rhyme and metric scheme in this poem is regular when the focus is on Romantic poetry and “olden pages”, but when the tragedy and realities of life are brought to light the poem doesn’t continue to flow as well. The final image of “new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire” represents Keats’s yearning to live on through his writing and to reinvigorate the old and traditional in new ways, self-consciously demonstrated in this poem. In Keats’s *When I have fears that I may cease to be*, the poem also breaks from convention in its final couplet, which is not self-contained but leads on from an emphatic caesura in line 12.

The greater use of enjambment and caesura in many of

Keats’s sonnets disrupts the typical musical form of the sonnet, but instead of this hindering emotional capability, it is used to show new ways in which experimentation could be achieved, within the walls of traditional sonnet form. This is seen especially in Keats’s meta mediation *On the Sonnet*. The opening, “If by dull rhymes our English must be chain’d” clearly articulates the freedom from the constraints of formal poetry that Keats is suggesting, as ironically, the rhyme scheme of this sonnet and rhythmic pattern is not ‘chaining’ and the rhymes are not ‘dull’. Keats here shows that he has managed to retain the form of the sonnet, but with his own originality, creating linking images through rhyme such as comparing English poetry to Andromeda throughout the sonnet (“chain’d”, “constrain’d”, “gain’d”). It is ambiguous as to whether the reader is restricting the English language in reading sonnets or is set to liberate it. This sonnet does not urge us to disregard form as a whole, but merely to find new ways of approaching and using it, to the will of the Muse – a nod to Classical literature and Ovid’s *Amores* 1.1.

When compared to the liberations of free verse that Carlos Williams liked to write in, it is evident that the sonnet form is quite restrictive. However in the words of

Wordsworth we must “Scorn not the sonnet”; modern poets since the Romantics have successfully managed to alter and sustain the sonnet form whilst finding illuminated new meaning. This ranges from revolutionary sonnets such as Auden’s *The Secret Agent* with no rhyme, to Owen’s war elegies, which manage to meet the sonnet’s demands and still capture the horrors and losses of the

battlefield. It was even said that his method was to start with the sonnet form and then use this as a framework on which to build emotional expression, writing lists of possible pairs of words and forming the poem around them. Even despite Carlos Williams’s dislike of the constraints of the sonnet, he also personally drew from the traditionally rhymed and metred verse of Keats with his ‘studied elegance’.

Seemingly restrictive forms such as the sonnet have no lesser emotional expressive potential than freer forms of verse, and do not ‘force’ words into structures. Is there truly any form of verse that is ‘free’? T.S. Eliot wrote that ‘No verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job’. Indeed, the restrictions of writing a sonnet seem to have attributed to the form a sense of artistry and accomplishment; in *A Portrait of a Lady* as Ralph Touchett pens a sonnet accounting his travels of Rome, James refers to this as a “piece of correct and ingenious verse...a tribute to the muse”. The formal strength of the sonnet makes it unique, as it allows something as slight as a lyric poem to be a work for the ages; its concise shape contains and focuses its author’s passions, and expresses a drive toward idealization. Akin to the emotional richness of life, the form of the sonnet has great emotional capability, as in the words of Oscar Wilde, “Your days are your sonnets”: sonnets can enliven our language.

Instead of this hindering
emotional capability, it is
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could be achieved

Trauma in Literature

Clara Hartley explores social and civilisational fragmentation and contrasts the presentation of trauma in W.H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*.



Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) was painted as an immediate reaction to the Nazi's devastating bombing of the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War.

Individual lives and collective experiences play out under the shadow of trauma in *The Age of Anxiety* and *Slaughterhouse Five*, texts written in the aftermath of the twentieth century's most significant wars. Accordingly, this trauma emerged from the two World Wars and the Vietnam War, shaking America from wider society to the individual citizen. More profoundly, however, it also springs from the increasingly materialistic, fractured society which predated these wars; the central question concerns how these traumas are resolved. The protagonists do so via ideologies which are exposed as mere quietism, the texts conflicting only in their superficial assessment of what this false resolution is. The true antidote to trauma, rather, requires individuals to face reality as it is, recognise our humanity, and accept our fallibility. While *Slaughterhouse Five* would see this achieved through humanism, and *The Age of Anxiety* through Christian faith, at heart these texts reach the same conclusion, and their divergent solutions can be understood as a result of the respective authors'

An increasingly fragmented society, gripped by anomie, pre-dates the war as the most deep-rooted cause of trauma

worldviews and the contexts in which they were writing. At their most fundamental, the experiences and resolutions of trauma in these works are universal, found within texts as varied as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. Despite any differences, they concur and conclude that we must discard our illusions in order to face the reality of trauma, knowing that our experiences must worsen before they improve. Thus, it takes courage, which none of these characters possess, to recognise that this temporary pain will ultimately free them from the trauma which clouds their lives.

Trauma operates on two levels within these texts – war's direct trauma impacts the individual, while pre-existing trauma, exacerbated by war, is societal. Individual war-trauma in *Slaughterhouse Five* is explored through Billy, who 'has become unstuck in time.' He experiences uncontrollable flashbacks during which he repeats, rather than remembers, past memories, predominantly of the War; or undergoes a flash-forward, pre-living his future. Billy's symptoms point to PTSD. Individually, the

characters of *The Age of Anxiety* are similarly affected by a war permanently on their minds – Malin is ‘glad to forget [the war] for his few days of leave,’ suggesting that the burden of war is so heavy that any time away from it, be it a mere ‘few days,’ is precious. Nevertheless, the four are confronted by unsolicited reminders of the war, particularly by the radio, which, ‘suddenly breaking in,’ compels them to hear about ‘Night raids / On five cities. Fires started...’ This is the real-world equivalent of Billy’s internal, psychological experiences, for an external stimulus dredges up unwelcome memories of wartime experience, rendering war and its trauma all-pervasive. Auden further emphasises the effect of war on the individual mind by dividing the poem between four characters, each representing one of the Jungian ‘binary categories’ of the psyche. Jung asserts that some individuals ‘perceive the world primarily through sensation, others through intuition; and that some of us make our ethical judgements primarily through thinking, others through feeling.’¹ Whilst Malin, representing thought, drives the narrative, it is the voices of sensation, intuition, and feeling which convey most profoundly the internal tumult and anxiety of war. This tangential exploration of trauma is similar to Vonnegut’s prose, whose digressions create a similar incoherence in his recollection of war. He cannot convey war through the chronological sequencing of the traditional novel because war is fundamentally illogical, and therefore resistant to the order this imposes. Thus these textual digressions demonstrate the extent of trauma’s psychological impact than can be expressed through a linear narrative.

An increasingly fragmented society, gripped by *anomie*, pre-dates the war as the most deep-rooted cause of trauma. Exacerbated, but not directly caused by war, *anomie*, developed by Émile Durkheim, colours the social conditions of these texts. It denotes the breakdown of the shared moral norms which bind a community, effectively destroying ‘the lively and continuous sentiment of mutual dependence’². Individuals therefore replace personal relationships, and fill the void of ‘mutual dependence’, with consumerism. The result is an automated, homogenous society in which individuals are further alienated from one another, generating a dangerous feedback-loop between them. Billy’s mother in *Slaughterhouse Five*, for example, spent her years ‘trying to construct a life that made sense from things she found in gift shops.’ The vague tone of ‘things’ evokes the hollowness of these material goods, more impersonal and uninspiring than genuine relationships. The artificiality of a life of consumerism is conveyed through ‘construct’, challenging the belief that this could be a natural way of

life. Additionally, the present participle ‘trying’ evokes an ongoing struggle, as though Billy’s mother fought for, but never attained, the life she wanted, proving the dangers of an *anomic* society.

This same detachment runs throughout *The Waste Land*, whose voices unite in polyphonic chorus, but fail to harmonise effectively. In *The Game of Chess*, the multiple voices talk *at*, not *with*, one another, responding with non-sequiturs or semi-relevant tangents. The speaker demands, ‘Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak,’ to no response, followed by an order to ‘think’ and the reply, ‘I think we are in rats’ alley.’ Worse still, when the speaker asks, ‘is there nothing in your head?’ they receive only the exclamation, ‘But / O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag’ The dialogue hardly develops, evoking the disconnect which stunts human relationships in Eliot’s post-war social wasteland. It is a microcosm of the social fragmentation which, exacerbating this feedback loop, splinters the individual bonds that bind society. It is this breakdown which leads to the materialist, anomic wasteland of Eliot, Vonnegut, and indeed Auden.

Society in *The Age of Anxiety*, therefore, appears impersonal, sterile and consumerist: Malin drinks not only to forget the war, but ‘the life it represented, at once disjointed and mechanical, alternately exhausting and idle.’ Auden addresses his mechanistic society, acknowledging the ambivalences which ensue: the individual is at once fatigued from a relentless, repetitive life, and bored by a world

The characters seek a state of innocence, even oblivion, found through a return to the womb, or a hastening of death

devoid of passion and emotion. Society itself is ambivalent about its identity, pulled in two irreconcilable directions. Holistically, the poem reflects this uncertainty, its genre trapped between apparently incompatible styles. The subtitle, *A Baroque Eclogue*, is a crisis of identity akin to Malin’s, or society’s – the ‘elaborate ornamentation’ of the Baroque era ‘offers anything but the simplicity and cleanliness of line’ found in the Classical tradition of pastoral Eclogues, thus drawing on different eras of the poetic tradition – Ancient Greece to the Early Modern to Neo-Classicism – in one phrase. *Slaughterhouse Five* has a complex identity, its full subtitle pointing to the influences distilled into the novel: *The Children’s Crusade: A Duty-dance with Death. ... This is a novel somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore....* There are evidently as many disparate influences within Vonnegut’s novel as in Auden’s poem. Through their genre and content, both texts share the unstable identity of a society and individual suffering from the trauma exposed in these texts.

Concerning the resolution of trauma, however, both texts are clear that the characters’ own solutions are inadequate: too ideological at best, and despairing quietism at worst. For Vonnegut, this ideology is the pessimistic determinism encountered in modern society, which argues that we need neither fear, resolve, nor take responsibility for suffering, because we lack the autonomy to prevent it. This perspective is satirised through the

¹ Alan Jacobs, *Introduction to The Age of Anxiety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) p. xix

² Émile Durkheim, quoted in Kevin Brown, *The Psychiatrists Were Right: Anomic Alienation in Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse Five* Vol 28 No 2 (Summer 2011) pp.101-109



Emil Nolde, *Tanz um das goldene Kalb* (1909) belongs to one of the typical Expressionist subject areas, a vision of Dionysian frenzy. Nolde noted: 'Colour is strength, Strength is Life. Only strong harmonies are important.'

philosophy of Tralfamadore, an escapist dream-world conjured by Billy in order to ignore the trauma of his reality – *ignore* rather than *resolve*. Peter Freese argues that ‘the Martian perspective is a highly effective instrument for creating an alienation effect, because it defamiliarizes events and attitudes... and makes [the readers] perceive these events in a new light.’³ Yet this perspective is surely mistaken upon examining the language which the Tralfamadoreans use to describe the nature of existence. Their doctrine is to ‘ignore the bad times and focus on the good ones,’ which initially appears to shed ‘new light’ by encouraging us out of our tendency to fixate on the ‘bad times.’ Implicitly, however, it endorses quietism for the individual and society by suggesting that, rather than tackle the struggles which engender ‘bad times,’ we ought to choose discriminately the aspects of our lives that we focus on. To ‘ignore’ the harshness of reality is to hope it will not worsen while our backs are turned, hardly an effective solution to the trauma of war and societal *anomie*.

For Auden, this false resolution to trauma is humanism, which refuses to accept the weaknesses of humanity, and unrealistically insists that humans alone can resolve this trauma. ‘Singular then / Is the human way,’ explains Malin, ‘for the ego is a dream / Till a neighbour’s need by name create it,’ (p.7) in which the suggestion that the human self is no more than ‘a dream’ proves that it is an intangible, and therefore weak, foundation upon which to heal an entire society’s trauma. Malin describes the self as ‘a dream,’ mirroring Billy’s own disassociated experience of a self which is more at ease in his Tralfamadorean dreamworld than in reality. Our sense of self, therefore, is an idealised construction of our minds, and therefore intangible until brought into being by ‘a neighbour’s need.’ Only when forced to look beyond our personal troubles do we abandon our narrow-minded ‘singular’ way, because it is through forging a bond with another human being that we finally ‘name’ and ‘create’ the self. Thus we should not be so quick to see life as ‘singular’ and lonely, because the true self cannot exist without other individuals. Unfortunately, this singularity is exactly what Auden’s humanism promotes, rendering it an inadequate solution for a trauma which affects an interconnected society.

The final failed solution to trauma, shared by both texts, is psychological and personal. The characters seek a state of innocence, even oblivion, found through a return to the womb, or a hastening of death – a desire identified by Sigmund Freud as the death-drive, *Thanatos*⁴. Malin voices this when he explains that everybody ‘pines for some / Nameless Eden where he never was,’ idealising his own past as a state of childhood bliss, the epitome of innocence. Malin’s real childhood, however, is described

as a bruise, ‘horrid and hurting,’ and thus he ‘never was’ in this Eden because it never existed in reality – only in his imagination. The paradox of referencing Eden explicitly, but describing it as ‘nameless,’ compounds this, for the lack of name brings a lack of fixed identity and location, characteristic of imaginary worlds – like Tralfamadore – or an idealised but in-existent past. Billy’s urge is equally strong, jumping through space-time to an idealised moment when he ‘was a baby who had just been bathed by his mother.’ His desire for safety and security is obvious from the environment, the ‘rosy,’ light quality of a ‘room filled with sunshine’ creating a warm and peaceful atmosphere. It is, however, an insubstantial atmosphere for it consists merely of archetypal images of contentment, and thus appears contrived, a perfected memory. Watching his past through a rose-tinted lens, Billy cannot see this time of his life as anything but perfect. Yet this desire for blissful ignorance is no solution to trauma. As long as he pines for his personal ‘nameless Eden,’ Billy will never resolve his trauma because he is chasing a place which never existed at all.

Rejecting these mistaken solutions to trauma, both texts reveal that the true antidote is simply the willingness to face reality, tackling it as it is rather than ignoring it for an imaginary or idealised world. Their differences on this solution are only superficial, for whether it be achieved through Christian faith, as in *The Age of Anxiety*, or through humanism, as in *Slaughterhouse Five*, we must acknowledge, as part of

true human experience, our own mortality, fallibility, and helplessness. Vonnegut’s own humanism is evident when, after reading about the destruction of Sodom, Vonnegut as meta-narrator and character considers Lot’s Wife. She ‘was told not to look back... but she *did* look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human.’ Vonnegut enjoys the way that for once, our weakness, which uniquely renders us ‘so human,’ is not concealed in this narrative. Instead, it plays a pivotal role, just as our human mistakes often create humanity’s defining moments. Acknowledging this fact is key to resolving to trauma: the human experience *requires* mistakes; glancing back; fixating on memory; and fearing change. To overcome the fear of looking back to see suffering, rather than imagining a ‘nameless Eden,’ takes courage – a courage which humanism believes will resolve humanity’s trauma. Lot’s Wife embodies this rare courage by defiance. Vonnegut, contemporary analogue to Lot’s wife, gazes back on the Dresden firebombing, despite America’s twenty-year silence on the matter. By distilling his experiences into a novel, Vonnegut can move on, because, as Donald Greiner suggests, it is through writing that Vonnegut ‘regained his sympathy with humanity which was threatened by the number experience of a double-edged guilt.’⁵ ‘Sympathy’ is itself essential to the humanist project, for it entails an understanding of others’

Both texts reveal that the true antidote is simply the willingness to face reality

³ Peter Freese, quoted in Alexandra Berlina, ‘Religion and War Made Strange: ‘Ostranenie’ in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*’ in *American Studies* Vol 62 No 1 (2017) pp.19-34

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1920)

⁵ Donald J. Greiner, quoted in Kevin Brown, *The Psychiatrists Were Right: Anomic Alienation in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five** Vol 28 No 2 (Summer 2011) pp.101-109



Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, *Pomeranian Farmers* (1924). Schmidt-Rottluff was one of the four founders of the artist group Die Brücke. His works were exhibited as part of the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* by the Nazis in 1937, and he was subsequently forbidden to paint.

emotions in a way which combats Vonnegut's increasingly *anomic* post-war society. While Billy's 'double-edged guilt' haunts him because he cannot acknowledge the horrors of reality, Vonnegut's 'regained' sympathy gives him the courage to believe in the ultimate ability of humanity, and himself, to overcome these horrors. O'Brien also deals with 'double-edged guilt', using writing as a tool to 'regain his sympathy with humanity' and break his own twenty-year silence on Vietnam. In *On the Rainy River*, he explains that 'for more than twenty years I've had to live with it, feeling the shame, trying to push it away, and so by this act of remembrance, by putting the facts down on paper, I'm hoping to relieve at least some of the pressure on my dreams.' O'Brien's initial 'shame', and attempts to 'push' unwanted emotion away, are not dissimilar to Billy's philosophy of denial, but ultimately, O'Brien, like Vonnegut, relieves 'the pressure' by writing the truth of his past experiences, while Billy, forced to undergo the same experiences, remains trapped in his Tralfamadorian dream-world because it does not force him to confront his real past.

Also trapped in their pasts, the characters of *The Age of Anxiety* lack the courage embodied by Lot's Wife because they have not embraced what is for Auden, the source of this courage and true antidote to trauma: Christianity. 'The Seven Stages', a spiritual journey through a symbolic dreamscape, embodies the struggle against trauma and search for God when all four 'stop astonished, / Interdicted by desert,' (p.75) and Malin acknowledges that 'it takes will to cross this waste' – a will that these travellers neither possess, nor develop. Too 'astonished' and afraid to confront this unknown landscape, they take it for 'waste', never realising that 'hidden arrant streams / Chuckle through this chapped land' or that 'this desert is dotted with oases / Where acrobats dwell / Who make unbelievable leaps.' The 'chapped land,' devoid of joy and life, symbolises their own lives, in which materialism fills spiritual and familial voids, and the sterilisation of society numbs pain. Post-war society in *The Waste Land* is equally infertile, an 'arid plain' plagued by this same materialism and apathy. The physical landscape parallels society, for in

response the question 'what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?', only the tedium of 'the hot water at ten. / And if it rains, a closed car at four,' can survive from the 'stony rubbish' of post-war nihilism. If it can 'cross this waste,' society will shake off its utter sterility, leaving behind a place of 'no water but only rock' to find water, rivers, 'a damp gust / Bringing rain.' Society, therefore, is only redeemed by journeying away from the 'arid' wasteland, finding 'oases' and 'arrant streams' it was not aware existed. Water is deliberately chosen for its biblical connotations of purity and rebirth, offering redemption for individuals and society, if only the quartet are courageous enough to search. Although desert 'acrobats' seem incongruous, John Boly glosses their 'unbelievable leaps' as a 'pun on Kierkegaard's metaphor of faith'⁶ – the Leap of Faith, an unsubstantiated decision to trust God as the guide through modern society's 'chopped' wasteland. Too afraid to believe the 'unbelievable,' the travellers stop 'at the edge' of the desert, and of redemption.

Conversely, Barbara Patrick argues that this journey is 'a representation of death, [given that] it is dry, incoherent, and infamous, a land beyond love, a symbol of the destruction of life.'⁷ This analysis of Auden's symbolism, however, ignores self-evident signs of life – 'oases,' 'streams,' and 'acrobats' – in favour of the 'dry, incoherent' desert, which, taken alone, could easily represent any number of concepts. The desert, therefore, must be understood within its context as a *quest* landscape, a daunting environment which offers hope through its living features – if the desert symbolised death, salvation would not come *within*, but *beyond*, this landscape. Her analysis also ignores the centrality of the quest itself, which plays a more pivotal role than the desert, influencing not only the content, but the structure, of 'The Seven Stages'. In an essay on Dream-Quests written while working on *The Age of Anxiety*, Auden explained that 'the purpose of the journey is no object but spiritual knowledge,'⁸ conveying this through the form, which connects physical, spiritual, and intellectual journeys, of 'The Seven Stages'. Auden layers elements of pilgrimage narratives, from Holy Grail quests to fairy tales, to prove that the physical quest across a traumatised social wasteland is synonymous with the spiritual quest for God. The moral landscape Auden paints falls into the *paysage moralisé* tradition, for the desert is undeniably the amoral wasteland of a materialistic,

Truths which lead back to
God, suggesting that trauma
is resolved by Christian faith

fragmented society, with 'oases' and 'streams' of hope and morality 'dotted' throughout. The physical journey is thereby intellectualised by the search for ethical truths, truths which lead back to God, suggesting that trauma is resolved by Christian faith.

Ultimately, the characters never find sufficient courage to transcend their misplaced beliefs – for Auden, God's redemption goes unheeded because humanism convinces us that humankind will resolve its own trauma, while for Vonnegut, humanist belief in our ability is concealed by determinist philosophy. This contrast should be understood, however, as the influence of their respective worldviews emerging in their work. Reverting to Catholicism around 1940, Auden believed that the greatest problems of the preceding 'low, dishonest decade'⁹ required a resolution beyond politics. He therefore used religion to process the World Wars, seeing faith and god as the solution that his age did not know it needed. Vonnegut,

on the other hand, took the opposite worldview, explaining in 1999, 'that I am a humanist or freethinker as were my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents and ancestors—and so not a Christian.'¹⁰ Vonnegut's perspective could hardly be articulated more clearly. Thus the authors arrive

at superficially contradictory solutions, but produce texts which share more deep-rooted similarities than these surface-level discrepancies would suggest – each wrote during eras in which the shadow of war loomed large, eras forced to navigate the ensuing difficulties. Eliot and O'Brien, despite writing sixty-eight years apart, also share these deep-rooted conclusions, suggesting an experience of war which is in fact universal. Speaking about *Slaughterhouse Five*, O'Brien encapsulated this sentiment when he explained that war-writing entails, 'the moral quandaries and struggles and uncertainties that go on, not just during the war, but for years and years afterwards'¹¹. In their experience and solutions to trauma, each of these texts draws on a universal facet of human nature: our eager propensity to ignore rather than challenge the trauma of reality, walking the path of least resistance. The authors propose, instead, that we tackle our human fallibility. Ultimately, we must fight against our tendency to make often hideous mistakes with a basic will to overcome this individual and social trauma; how this is achieved is simply a matter of perspective.

6 John R. Boly, 'Auden and the Romantic Tradition', Vol 111, No 3, *Representations and Realities* (Summer, 1982) pp.149-171

7 Barbara Patrick, 'Faith, Fantasy and Art: The Detective-Deliverer in Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*', *South Atlantic Review*, Vol 53, No 4 (Nov 1988) pp.87-101

8 W.H. Auden, quoted in Alan Jacobs, *Introduction to The Age of Anxiety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) p. xxix

9 W.H. Auden, '1st September 1939' in *Another Time* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007)

10 Kurt Vonnegut and Dan Wakefield, *If This isn't Nice What is?: Advice to the Young* (New York City: Seven Stories Press, 2013)

11 James Hanna, 'A Conversation with Tim O'Brien' in *Booth* (18th Sep 2015)

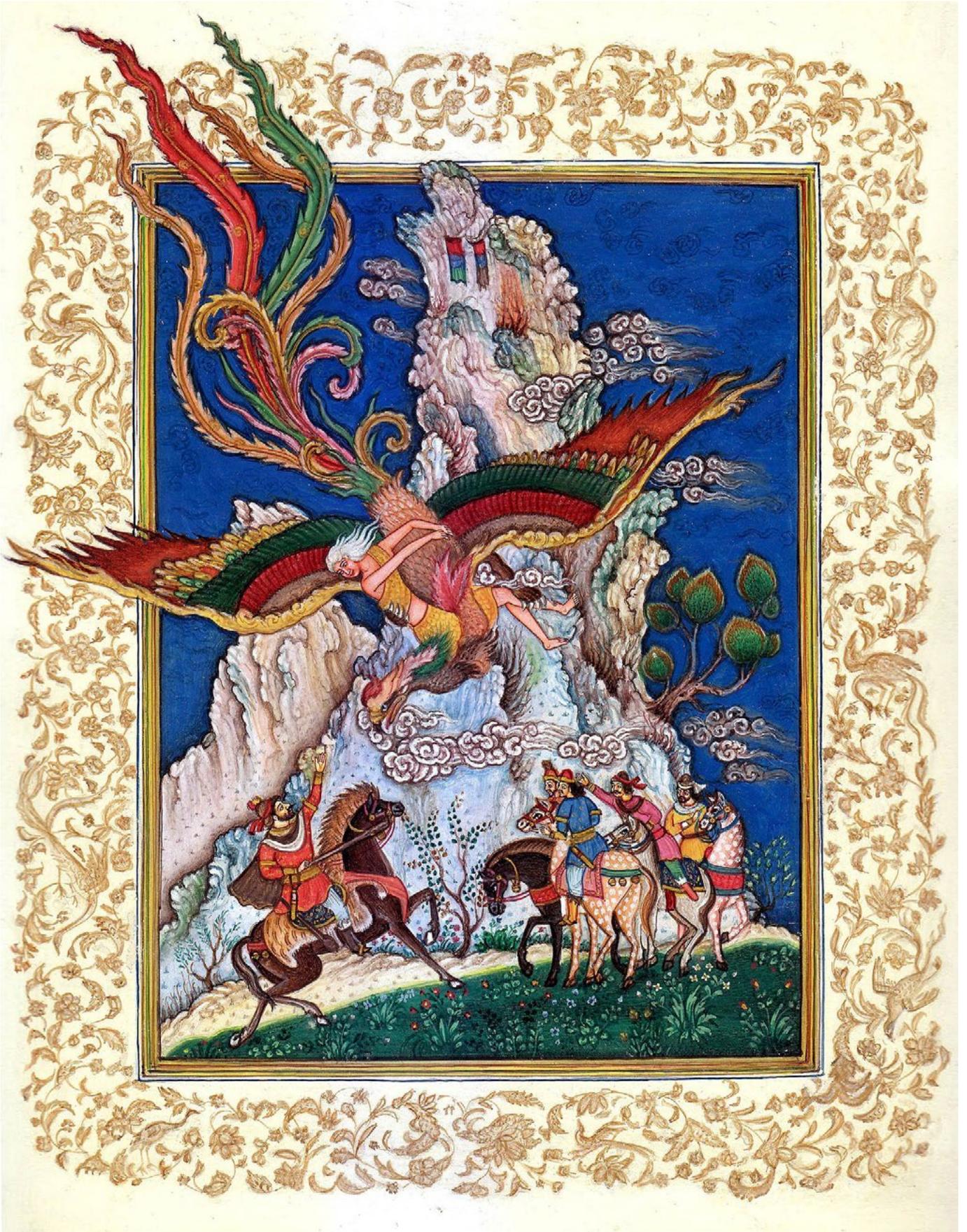


Illustration of the Simurgh in the Shahnameh epic. The simurgh is a benevolent, mythical bird in Persian mythology and literature.

How deeply ingrained is cultural identity?

The Simurgh {My Persian Bird}

By Tara Mottahedan

The ebb and flow of her rocking torso
Ever so slight as the unsteady heart trembles
Eternally perched on her mahogany chair
The benevolence of the Simurgh is tangible
Though never again can she take to the air

Having lived the destruction of the world thrice
The majestic peacock has a face I recognise
Sewing stories of our great lineage into her wings,
Those arthritic fingers, fumble clumsy stitches into mine

Ten feet, five feet, then three. Can I be seen?
Chin melts into the place where neck meets chest
Though part of one tree- the bend feels unnatural.
My mantra of love becomes a desperate plea: "Asheghetam"
I repeat- knowing words can not communicate how I feel

Head falling to knees. She mirrors my silent prayer
Showing me the silver thread bundled on her head
Through which Kronos taunts, undoing the knots
And seams of ancient tales alive in her embroidery

Craning my neck, angling to kiss
Her wrinkled cheek, our eyes connect
Although we migrated across different seas
Although we speak in different tongues
Our paths meet on her mahogany branch.

Momentarily -before it breaks
Plunging into her flames



A Westminster Cadet

Raymond E. Bell, Jr reminisces about his time as a cadet in Westminster's CCF.

In 1950 a form of National Service was in effect in the United Kingdom. Manifestations of such service were to be found in upper level British schools in the form of participation in a military education program. In other words, school boys, once advancing beyond elementary school ended up on a periodic basis wearing a military type uniform and performing military related activities. At Westminster School, unless medically excused, every boy put on either an army or naval uniform and engaged in military drills. A conscientious objector, however, became a boy scout which counted for fulfilling the required service commitment.

Such was prelude to my military experience as the first American boy after World War II to be admitted on a competitive basis for term length school enrollment. I was not required to become a Westminster cadet so my first year I became a British boy scout. In the United States I had achieved the scout rank of Star Scout, but in the United Kingdom's scout movement such a rank did not exist and I reverted to that of First Class Scout. My experience with my fellow boy scouts was not particularly enlightening or productive so at the end of my third term I opted out of the boy scouts and sought another activity while my peers went about their military training. Although not compelled to, I became a Westminster cadet in the army portion of the Combined Cadet Force or CCF.

Joining the CCF, as an American whose father was a colonel in the United States Army, was not as unusual for me as it might at first seem. I had long been interested in things military primarily in assembling a large collection of toy soldiers, learning to fire a rifle, organizing miniature army formations, studying military tactics, wearing my version of an army uniform, building mud forts, and playing war games. So putting on a British Army uniform and becoming a cadet almost came naturally to me. And besides, I must confess, it was to a degree fun and a real world adventure. For my fellow students it was no such thing, being at best just bearable.

My cadet service began in the school's 1950 fall term and consisted of learning how to wear and take care of the bulky unattractive battle uniform properly. I learned to shine to a gleaming finish the various buckles and highly polish the tips of my hobnail boots. There was the manual of arms to master to include a rifle salute and marching with the weapon at the left shoulder arms or "slope" position. It was all very mundane, even if necessary to accomplish the basics of soldiering. Part lark, part serious endeavor, my outside military interests as well as my fellow cadets' lack there of, paid off as at the end of the term I took possession of the best recruit cadet award.

All that first term was not "square bashing," however. One day we loaded into a series of coaches and drove out

of the London environs to a large park where we could "maneuver" over the countryside. The convoy of coaches on reaching our destination parked in a lot next to a small body of water and we all disembarked to form into small "squads" or eight or ten cadets. From there we set off on a march in a large formation to parts unknown. After trudging several miles, our leader halted us for a rest break after which we were collectively given a challenge. Each squad was to find its way back to the coaches by itself without further guidance. The squad which arrived first was considered the challenge "winner" although there was no award for the success.

I wasn't the senior cadet in my squad or even its appointed leader so I had no responsibility for meeting the challenge. But I did have a hunch that might help. I noticed that our start point was at the side of a dry stream bed and so suggested to our leader we might follow it to its logical conclusion, the small body of water next to the coach parking lot. You can guess that the hunch proved correct and we arrived back at the assembled coaches well before all the other squads. So much for perceptive and successful land navigation.

Our training with our rifles was rudimentary, mostly drilling with them a slope arms or with them carried on the left shoulder as the British Army prescribed. We learned the rifle salute and at inspections how to present the rifles to the inspecting cadet sergeant or attending British Army officer. Actually firing the standard army issue Lee Enfield rifle for record was normally not to be accomplished by cadets. Not only was it really too heavy for the smallest cadets to carry, but when fired the rifle had a tremendous "kick" which was ameliorated only by holding it very firmly against the shoulder.

In the United States I had learned to fire the small caliber rifle my father had brought from Germany after the war. I was a good enough shot to earn a slightly advanced marksmanship award, so had some idea of properly handling and shooting the British rifle. I think that was one reason why I with a small group of other cadets went to a local rifle range and got the opportunity to fire a few of the scarce rounds of ammunition allotted to the CCF for training. I was given ten rounds to fire at a fixed target which I proceeded to do. After the first shot I seriously began to regret my chance to fire the rifle. The impact on my shoulder was so great that after firing my ten rounds I could hardly hold on to the weapon. The pain was so great it took me weeks before my right shoulder was sound again. It was a hard lesson in how to correctly hold and fire one's basic combat weapon.

The 1951 spring term was a busy one, especially for those aspiring to become cadet corporals or sergeants. The more senior cadets were assumed to be candidates for those ranks, but it required a certain time at a given

Our training with our rifles was rudimentary

I really enjoyed the comradeship of my other militarily indifferent schoolmates



The professional soldier: Brigadier General Raymond Bell Jr of the U.S. Army

cadet rank, demonstrated leadership, and the passing of an extensive written examination to attain higher rank which began at cadet lance corporal level. I had no hope of being other than a member of the "Other Ranks" being so junior in the organization and knowing my time at Westminster would end after the 1951 summer term. My father and the family were going to Germany and I would attend school there. In fact, I really enjoyed the comradeship of my other militarily indifferent schoolmates at the lowest levels of military activity.

The summer term saw the culmination of the year's rudimentary cadet training with attendance at a two week training week at the active duty Pirbright military reservation. Before a bicycle trip to the continent I got the chance to join the other Westminster cadets for an opportunity to live and train as a British soldier. On arrival we were assigned tents as living quarters within which we bedded down on heaps of straw. It was a primitive experience and with it went typical army language. Every other word spoken was the "f" word which for the youngest cadets must have been a special verbal experience but which seemed to be a necessary part of every soldier's vocabulary. Therefore it had to be so for the fearsome cadets.

At camp we got to do a number of different things.

There were the expected every day activities but there were interesting vehicle displays to see and military exercises to conduct. The most spectacular was the attendance of a small group of us at the Passing Out Parade at the nearby Sandhurst military college. Sitting in the stands we observed with wonderment the precision of drill and the rituals of the newly commissioned Sandhurst officers as they passed in review for their last time before an appreciative audience.

My last significant recollection of the camp was a small tactical exercise which was graded for its successful execution by some Westminster senior cadet sergeants. Each cadet peer of mine was required to lead a squad through a series of simple tactical evolutions. I got a chance to lead one such squad and in doing so found myself in a situation which required almost an instant reaction. Surprised, I swiftly deployed the cadets in an acceptable manner as a nearby critical inspector judged the maneuver. In an after action brief he remarked favorably on my quick course of action.

At the end of the summer training there was a ceremony where cadets who had passed all the requirements for promotion to the next higher rank were recognized and the appropriate stripes signifying the new rank were awarded. There were a number of Westminster cadets among those promoted. And then there was me. Not having taken any required examinations and having been a cadet for just a year, I was surprised to be promoted out of the Other Ranks to that of lance corporal and with it presented with the single stripe of the lowest ranking non-commissioned British Army soldier.

I suspect that the promotion, given in an exceptional case, was as much a simple measure of recognition of final attendance in the cadet program as it was one of passing all the rigorous promotion requirements. As it was no one in authority was going to challenge a departed cadet's unusual promotion so nothing was lost in taking the step of making the American a British cadet lance corporal.

A year or so later the Ashburnam House magazine, "The Ashtree," brought home to me the uniqueness of my cadetship and my year as a Westminster cadet. A short blurb mentioned my promotion to lance corporal and in doing so wished me further luck in a military career, hoping to count me among the American five star generals, a first for a Westminster cadet. The note was far off the target although I retired from the United States Army as a brigadier, or in the American Army a brigadier general.

There is no longer a compulsory Combined Cadet Force at Westminster nor does one for all I know exist in the United Kingdom. Although 1950 is a long time ago, the world situation seems to be as tenuous today as it was at the beginning of the so-called Cold War. Let's hope, however, there is no future need for another CCF or Westminster Cadets.



Scholars Processing from the Quire to the Nave, November 2022

Commemoration: From Beauty Through Quietness to Everyday Life

“The Abbey was dark when we came out; it is always more beautiful then, for the corners are shrouded and seem yet more vast, the organ was still playing and the hammers of those erecting stands still echoed through the transepts. It seemed like coming slowly down a staircase from beauty through quietness to everyday life.”
The First Little Commem - CC Magazine 1947

For centuries, Westminster Abbey has had an ancient commitment to education, demonstrated by the foundation of a monastic school within its precincts. The centrality of the Abbey and its influence on political life has increased Westminster School’s reputation as a nursery of talent and scholarship; the immediate vicinity that surrounds it has remained a hub of cultural and intellectual activity since its origins. There is evidence of a school’s continuous existence on this site from the 14th century, even receiving royal patronage in

Elizabeth I was undoubtedly hugely influential in allowing the school's legacy to be cultivated



The Roses being borne to the tomb of Elizabeth I, November 2022

1540 from Henry VIII who ensured its survival despite the dissolution of the Benedictine monastery. However, Elizabeth I's issuing of a new charter to 'The College of St Peter at Westminster' in 1560 is generally taken as the official date on which the school was 'founded', allowing her henceforth to be celebrated as our 'Foundress'. This date also formally affirmed Elizabeth's statutes to select 40 Queen's Scholars, whom she was said to have personally visited, establishing the College tradition and our link to the crown which continues today.

Elizabeth I was undoubtedly hugely influential in allowing the school's legacy to be cultivated, and for it to flourish over the centuries. In 2010, Queen Elizabeth II visited for a thanksgiving service marking the 450th anniversary of Elizabeth I's refounding of the school, with the familiar statue of the Tudor queen being unveiled in Little Dean's Yard. The Abbey's education centre was also opened, which now welcomes thousands of students on visits each year. Even after the school became a separate charity in 1868, our ancient connection to the Abbey has been maintained: the Dean still both is a member of the school's governing body and inducts new Queen's Scholars, and our services are held in Abbey twice a week. For those who are lucky enough to benefit from the education provided at Westminster today, it is vital that we remember and celebrate both our roots with the Abbey and the legacy that Elizabeth I has left us; as written in

her unsigned 1560 statutes, we endeavour to "*strive as far as human infirmity can see its way, to secure that in future... learning shall be pursued with sincerity*" and hope that we "*shall be liberally instructed in good books to the greater honour of the state.*" This both strengthens our community and encourages us to appreciate the heritage of our historic school, by preserving the traditions that formed it.

From shortly after Elizabeth's death, the refounding of Westminster School was commemorated by granting a Play annually on 17th November, the anniversary of her accession to the throne in 1558. However it was only in the late nineteenth century that the service of Commemoration that we know today, 'Commem', was established more formally. Familiar to Old Westminsters, the most recent form of the service now called 'Big Commem' is recounted in an 1889 edition of the *Elizabethan*, as a new "*Latin Service ... held in the Abbey*" with the renewed official purpose of commemorating "*our Foundress and Benefactors*" and "*all who have endowed the school with benefits and enlarged it with privileges, from the Kings and Princes who fostered the grammar school to Queen Victoria.*" What makes this service so unique and special is that it has always been a Latin one, as established under the terms of the 1662 Act of Uniformity which granted the school permission to hold services and pray in Latin, a tradition that we still maintain in Latin Prayers Up School. The 'Westminster Latin' that the school community uses is also a distinguishing feature, not akin

Despite its character of antiquity, the origins of Little Commem are actually relatively recent



Scholars lining the cloister leading from the Abbey, November 2022

to Italianate ecclesiastical Latin referred to by Elizabeth I as “*that dreadful monkish pronunciation*”, but is instead the Latin that was in use in schools and universities at the time of the Reformation, articulated with an English inflection. The 1889 account amusingly describes the ambiguity regarding which forms of Latin should be used in each part of the service, an issue brought up again in a later account of another Commem: “*The pronunciation of the Latin presents an insoluble problem and a triennial subject for criticism.*” Undoubtedly, it seems that with the special quirks and privileges of attending Westminster School, come unique issues and inconveniences!

Since 2008, the full commemorative service ‘Big Commem’ has been held in the Abbey biennially, with a private service known as ‘Little Commem’ taking place in alternate years. This involves only members of the Collegiate body encompassing College and the Abbey, and hence has a much more intimate feel. The service of Little Commem held in November 2021 seemed particularly special, as three years had passed since the last Big Commem was held in 2018 due to the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, and for many it was our first proper *Commendatio*. Little Commem starts with the service of Compline, sung weekly by the Queen’s Scholars in St. Faith’s Chapel in the Abbey on Wednesday evenings, and is followed by a shortened form of the Latin commemoration service, concluding with roses being laid

on the tomb of the Foundress. To come together in the same way that so many scholars have in the past and to be involved in an event with such historical value, was a privilege and honour. As to the very nature of the service, one can only hope to describe it: glorious and other-worldly.

There is nothing quite like the unique atmosphere of Little Commem. Standing in the half glow of the candlelit Abbey, processing through darkened cloisters to Henry VII’s Chapel, and singing in Latin responses to the Remove Cantors, one cannot help but feel enveloped in a feeling of age-old tradition and marvel at being part of such a great legacy, passed down through generations. The splendour of this almost surreal experience is certainly grand, but despite its ancient mystery there is also a familiarity within the service, found in such a close-knit community of participants. As the scholars gather in reverence and stillness in a place of exquisite beauty, you might catch yourself gazing up at the magnificent vaulted ceiling of the Chapel, as the melodic contours of Compline wash over you and become all-consuming and ethereal.

Despite its character of antiquity, the origins of Little Commem are actually relatively recent, and not much is widely known about the service’s history. There is a story that this tradition was first instituted immediately after World War Two, when the school returned from evacuation in Bromyard, Herefordshire. An anonymous

donor was said to have sent a gift of roses to the school with the message, 'From your devoted sons', given with instructions that they should be lain on Queen Elizabeth's tomb. This supposedly prompted the creation of a fitting smaller ceremony for the then King's Scholars to partake in. From looking at the history of commemoration services in our school archives, we can ascertain that even throughout the war a number of smaller services took place in commemoration, including a larger celebration held in the traditional way in 1942, albeit "*without much splendour.*" Even throughout the hardships of war, the fact that commemorations continued is testament to the strong legacy that our school's founders have provided us, and that we should remain keen to uphold. Perhaps it was the difficulties the school had endured during the war that prompted the addition of these smaller, more intimate commemoration services; as a reflection of a renewed sense of appreciation for our school life and education, they allowed us to maintain a stronger sense of gratitude to our benefactors, in coming together in shared remembrance and communal spirit.

But when was the tradition of Little Commem properly established? The three year cycle that Big Commemoration services had previously been held in was disrupted due to the impact of the war; when the school returned to its site in London with the Abbey and main school buildings in bad repair facing an uncertain future, no Big Commem was held. The College Magazine from 1945 informs us that in this

year, College was kindly "*allowed the use of St. Faith's Chapel for Evening Prayers by the Dean*", and though there were no special services held, "*A Floreat was drunk in College Hall on Friday night,*" said to be the first one drunk since the return to school. The Captain of the Scholars' ledger further reveals that the first Big Commem after the war was held in 1946, using the original service composed by Dr Rutherford, an old Head Master of the school. An Old Westminster offered to bear the cost of this service and of the reception, yet wished to remain anonymous; here, perhaps, are the roots of the myth relating the gift of roses, 'From your devoted sons', attributed to the origins of Little Commem. The Master of the King's Scholars writes that in this year "*our main regret was the absence of the Head Master*", who could not attend the service, and that in his absence there were no choir boys, no formal receiving of the guests, and that the loss of School meant that "*the whole of the first and ground floors of Ashburnham House had to be utilised.*"

The first official record of a Little Commem is documented in the 1947 College Magazine, describing a small service held in the evening in the Abbey on 17th November. Earlier on this day, a special service had also been held Up School in place of morning Abbey, as preparations for the Royal Wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Philip Mountbatten occurring on 20th November had disrupted affairs in the Abbey, with the King's Scholars even being asked to act as a dummy procession to time the proceedings for the wedding. For this reason, the service seems to have been much more impromptu,

without the nights of rehearsal that we go through now (!), but according to the magazine this did not take away from the service, described as "*very beautiful*" and "*a fitting commemoration.*" As we do today, the scholars sang Compline in Henry VII's Chapel in English and then gathered around the tomb of Queen Elizabeth, "one candle between two", to say and sing a large part of the Commendatio Benefactorum and Psalm 150 both in English. This was also the first time that the then King's Scholars had used that part of the chapel not only for a Commem service, but for any school service since the burial of writer and politician Joseph Addison in 1719. The author of the 1947 account observes that the smaller size of Henry VII's Chapel made the singing sound even more beautiful, a nod to the important tradition passed down by the Cantors in College each year. The account ends noting that with this first service of Little Commem, "*that another bond between us and the Abbey, and between us and the school, had been strengthened by the beauty of the service*"; this seems to perfectly encapsulate the sentiment we share and preserve in Commem today.

As our school life continues, it is clear that further traditions are being developed and formed. Girl Queen's Scholars were only recently introduced in 2017 and prior to this point, the only girl involved as a main part of the commemoration service would have been the Head Girl. Even the special 'Micro Commem' held in 2020 in place of the usual 'Big Commem', has formed a unique part of

the school's history. The environment of Westminster has certainly progressed since Elizabeth I refounded it, but the basis of her educational ethos is still firmly in place; each new pupil who attends the school adds a new component which contributes to the school's great history. John Carleton, former Head Master, documents in his book Westminster School, that the words on Elizabeth's tomb: *Regno consortes et urna, hic obdormimus Elizabetha et Maria sorores, in spe resurrectionis* (consorts in realm and tomb, here we sleep, Elizabeth and Mary, sisters, in hope of resurrection), are a reminder that 17th November has a wider significance, capturing the long religious turmoil of the sixteenth century. When we lay roses on the tomb of the Foundress, and therefore also of her sister, we acknowledge that the fortunes of the school have been sculpted by great events. Commemoration is crucial, as it allows us to see our school as part of a greater culture, and to keep traditions and history alive.

After the first Big Commem in four years held in 2022, we look forward to the next Little Commem this upcoming November with anticipation. We can only hope that it lives up to that magical sentiment captured in the 1947 College magazine, describing the first ever Little Commem. I am sure that it will.

With thanks to Mr Edlin, Mr Mann and Ms Wells for their expertise, assistance and guidance.

The smaller size of Henry VII's Chapel made the singing sound even more beautiful



Warren Hastings

A snapshot of 18th Century Westminster

Hugh Pagan OW records his discoveries about Warren Hastings and his contemporaries at the Gibson Boarding House in College Street

Published accounts of the career of Warren Hastings (1732-1818), successively Governor and Governor-General of Bengal, and the most distinguished of all those educated at Westminster School who made their careers in the service of the East India Company, have recorded the fact of his education at Westminster and the regard which he showed for fellow Westminsters in later

life¹. As has always been known, he was elected head to College in the summer of 1747, above nine other King's Scholars elected in that year who included, in fourth place, the future Sir Elijah Impey (1732-1809), Chief Justice of Bengal between 1774 and 1787, whose career was to be

¹ The most familiar instance of this is his declaration that 'Distance of time or place never erases from the mind of an Old Westminster that early friendship which always participates of the success we meet with in life', as quoted by S.C. Grier, ed., *Letters of Warren Hastings to his wife transcribed in full from the originals in the British Museum*, Edinburgh and London, 1905, 456.



A view of College Street in the early nineteenth century. It would have been recognisable to those who boarded in Mrs Gibson's house there just over 50 years earlier.

2 guineas each to Mr Percivall Bentley and to Mr John Crofts “for mourning”

intimately entwined with Hastings’s own.

Sir Keith Feiling, in his biography of Hastings published in 1954, was the first to put into the public domain the fact that the boarding house where Hastings lodged prior to his election to College was that kept by Mrs Gibson in College Street². It recently occurred to the present writer to put together what can be discovered about Mrs Gibson and the Westminster School pupils enrolled at her boarding house. It is proper to begin with what is known about Mrs Gibson and her husband, Rev. William Gibson.

The will of William Gibson, “of the parish of Saint John the Evangelist in the liberty of Westminster clerk”, dated 8 February 1745/6, was proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on 20 March 1745/6, allowing the deduction that he had died between these two dates. It is a simple document and bequeaths “all my worldly estate” to “my dear and loving wife Isabel Gibson”. The will was witnessed by John Milbanke, Ann Barnes and Margaret Barnes, of whom the first can be identified as John Milbanke (c.1725-1806), a pupil at Westminster School between 1733 and 1742³. Mrs Gibson’s will, dated 28 August 1753, is a rather more elaborate document. She made a series of bequests to her relatives, members of the Milbanke family and to her servant Ann Barnes and the Barnes family. Other bequests included:

2 guineas each to Mr Percivall Bentley⁴ and to Mr John Crofts⁵ “for mourning”

My “silver soup ladle” to Mrs Elizabeth Bentley, “wife of the said Percivall Bentley”

My “leather screene” to John Crofts, a “mahogany dining table” to his wife, and “my silver punch ladle” to his son Daniel.

She bequeathed “all the rest and residue of my personal estate” to Sir William Russell, Baronet.

This will has two intriguing features. The first are the legacies to members of the Milbanke family, foreshadowed by the presence of John Milbanke as a witness to her husband’s will seven years previously, but not explicable by any family relationship stated in his or her will. The second is her decision to make Sir William Russell, Bart. (c.1735-1757) her residuary legatee and executor, although the will similarly records no family relationship with him.

This is the more surprising in that although Sir William Russell had been a baronet since succeeding his father when a child aged about eight⁶, he was in career terms at the time of the date of the will simply an eighteen-year old Ensign in the 1st Foot Guards.

To the core of fact supplied by these two wills, it is appropriate to add that it seems very probable that the marriage at St. Benet’s, Paul’s Wharf, in the City of London, on 2 May 1734, between William Gibson, of the parish of St. John the Evangelist, Westminster, bachelor, and Isabel Wharton, of the same parish, spinster, was that between Rev. William Gibson and his wife Isabel. Unfortunately, William Gibson’s clerical career is elusive. He was not Rev. William Gibson (1717-1754), Archdeacon of Essex and holder of a number of ecclesiastical preferments from the early 1740s onwards. A William Gibson, Rector of Cockfield, co. Durham, and Vicar of Staindrop, co. Durham, from 1735, died at some date prior to July 1746, when a successor was appointed to him at Cockfield, and both the dates of his appointment to these livings and the presumptive year of his death fit not badly with a marriage that probably took place in 1734 and the known death in February-March 1746 of Isabel Gibson’s clerical husband. Cockfield and Staindrop are however very far from College Street, Westminster⁷.

It is now time to turn to the identities of the known pupils in the Gibson boarding house alongside Warren Hastings. Dr Nicoll’s admission registers record for the period between the middle of 1735 and a date early in 1753 the house at which each boarding pupil was entered when first admitted to Westminster School.⁸ As it happens, the Gibson boarding house took in twenty boys in the period between June 1740, when the first of these was admitted, and January 1750/1, when the final two boys were admitted. Of these twenty, identified in Dr Nicoll’s registers by given name, surname, and age on admission, the identities of fourteen are certain, plausible identifications can be suggested for two, and the remaining four are at present merely names. This may not seem a rich field for present-day scholarly exploration, but a name by name review of those concerned is instructive, and, as will be seen, the identities of Mrs. Gibson’s initial three boarders are particularly significant.

The first pupil in the boarding house, admitted in June

2 K. Feiling, *Warren Hastings*, London, 1954, 6.

3 Milbanke, one of the younger sons of Sir Ralph Milbanke, Bart., a landowner with extensive estates in North Yorkshire and North-East England, was to make an advantageous marriage later on to Lady Mary Watson-Wentworth, a sister of Charles Wentworth-Watson, 2nd Marquis of Rockingham (1730-1782), himself a former pupil at Westminster School, a prominent Whig politician who was to serve as Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury in 1765-6 and again for a brief period, cut short by his death, between March and July 1782. This enabled Milbanke, during Rockingham’s first spell as Prime Minister, to vacate an appointment as a Commissioner of Salt Duties, which he had held since 1753, for an evidently better paid role as a Commissioner of Customs for Ireland.

4 Percivall Bentley was a “laceman”, i.e. a manufacturer of gold and silver lace accessories to clothing, with premises in Bedford Street, Covent Garden.

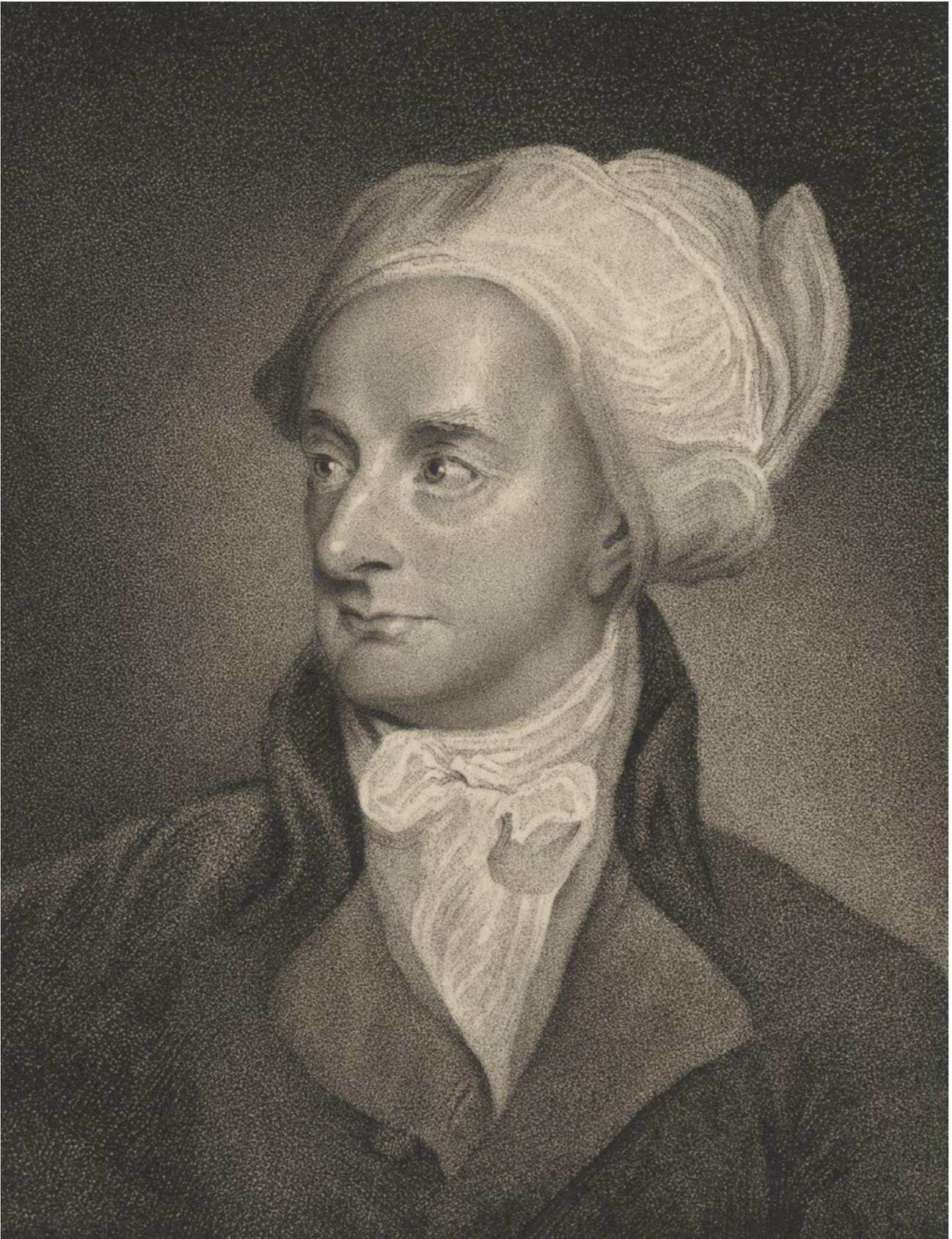
5 John Crofts was a solicitor, based in Lincoln’s Inn. His son Daniel Crofts (c.1741-1785) was a pupil at Westminster School at this date.

6 His father, Sir Francis Russell, Bart., had been a senior employee of the East India Company at Calcutta. He had died there on 26 February 1742/3.

7 It should be noted that the Rev. Peter Fisher, William Green’s eventual successor at Staindrop, had served as his curate there since September 1735, and it may be that by employing a full-time curate to serve for him at Staindrop, and doubtless at his other Co. Durham parish as well, Green had been able to justify to his bishop the fact that he was an absentee incumbent.

8 Although it does not necessarily follow from this that an individual pupil remained at the boarding house at which he was originally entered, there is little evidence at this period for pupils changing boarding house, except when boarding houses were closed for such reasons as the death or retirement of their proprietor. It will be assumed in what follows that pupils admitted to the Gibson boarding house remained there until being elected into College (in four cases) or until they left the School.

The poet William Cowper was, as it happens, a school contemporary both of Warren Hastings and of Sir William Russell



The poet William Cowper

1740, turns out to have been Aclomb Milbanke (c.1731-1766), mentioned as a legatee under Mrs Gibson's will. He was then aged nine, and was to remain at Westminster School until 1747, when he was sixteen, and it is easy to see why he should have been sufficiently cherished by Mrs Gibson to have been left by her so large a sum of money as £50. His subsequent career was to be as an officer in infantry regiments in the British army, rising to the rank of Captain in the 28th Foot by the time of his death in 1766.

He was to be joined in the boarding house in February 1742/3 by Sir William Russell, Bart., already mentioned above. Russell was only to remain in the boarding house until he left Westminster School at the age of about twelve, in the same year, 1747, as Milbanke⁹, but, as has been noted, he had lost his father and it is easy to see why Isabel Gibson might have felt an even greater degree of motherly affection for him than Milbanke.

Russell and Milbanke were to be joined in the boarding house three months later, in May 1743, by Warren Hastings. Four years were to pass until Hastings was elected to College in the summer of 1747, a major portion of his Westminster School career. During this period Mrs Gibson never had more than eleven boarders at any one time, of whom Warren Hastings was one of the more senior in terms of age and consequently in status within the School. It may be guessed that it was during the evenings spent with his small cohort of fellow boarders in the College Street premises after School hours that he began to develop some of the leadership qualities that he was to display in later life.

The poet William Cowper (1731-1800) was, as it happens, a school contemporary both of Warren Hastings and of Sir William Russell, having been admitted to the School as a boarder with Mrs Playford in Little Dean's Yard in April 1742¹⁰. By a remarkable coincidence, the only two of Cowper's Westminster contemporaries to be the specific subject matter of poems written by him were Sir William Russell, in a poem expressing Cowper's grief at Russell's accidental death by drowning while bathing in the Thames in September 1757¹¹, and Warren Hastings, in a poem induced by the sympathy that Cowper felt at the long drawn out Parliamentary proceedings against Hastings in the late 1780s and early 1790s¹². The poem addressed to Hastings begins with what are, in the present context, the two notable lines :

*Hastings ! I knew thee young, and of a mind,
While young, humane, conversable, and kind,*

9 Dr Nicoll's register records his age on admission in February 1742/3 as seven, but he appears to have been baptised at Calcutta on 24 March 1734/5, which would make his probable age on admission a year older.

10 The management of this boarding house passed soon afterwards to Mrs Playford's niece, Mrs Ludford, and most of Cowper's school career was spent in the boarding house under its new name of Ludford's.

11 The poem was originally composed by Cowper as part of a letter, already lost or destroyed by 1803, probably written by him to his cousin Lady Hesketh. The non-survival of the letter means that the poem cannot be precisely dated, but internal evidence suggests that it was written not long after Russell's death.

12 The poem formed part of a letter from Cowper to Lady Hesketh, 5 May 1792. In an earlier letter to Lady Hesketh, 15 February 1788, Cowper had expressed his "particular value" for Hastings.

Although William Hayley, a personal acquaintance of William Cowper and Cowper's first biographer, was to describe Sir William Russell as Cowper's "favourite friend" at the School¹³, insufficient attention seems to have been paid to the disparity in age between Cowper and Russell. The difference of some four years between their dates of birth would have been a chasm in terms of their respective standing within the School, and it seems likely that theirs was not an intimate friendship between equals, as was the case with Cowper's later friendships with young lawyers of his own age at the Inner Temple, but a relationship in which Cowper felt protective of a younger school contemporary. This would have been not dissimilar to the relationship in which Warren Hastings stood to Russell, some three years his junior in age, within the Gibson boarding house, and it is legitimate to speculate that it was through their common concern for Sir William Russell's welfare that Cowper, who was in a different boarding house, came to appreciate Hastings's qualities of head and heart.

The year 1744 saw the arrival in the College Street boarding house of four further boarders. The first two of these, taken in by Mrs Gibson on their admission to the School in January 1743/4, were Henry Blake (1728-1780), from Lelinch in Co. Mayo, Ireland, admitted at the age of sixteen, and leaving in 1747, and William Harper, admitted at the age of nine, and leaving in 1745, but Blake made no great mark in the world¹⁴ and Harper remains a mere name. They were followed a term later, in the summer of 1744, by Robert Delaval (1733-1758), admitted to the School in May 1744 at the age of eleven, leaving in 1747, and Robert Blake (c.1734-1754), admitted to the School in June 1744 at the age of ten and leaving in 1751. Delaval and Blake both came from well-to-do landowning families in Northumberland, and were in fact cousins, a sufficient reason for their respective parents to have chosen to send them almost simultaneously to the same boarding house for Westminster School. It will be seen from their years of death that neither lived very long into adult life, Blake dying when perhaps still an undergraduate at Hertford College, Oxford, and Delaval, after a brief period as a Cornet in the Royal Horse Guards, dying when on his way to India in command of an European Grenadier Company which he had personally recruited for service with the East India Company.

The next arrival in the house was William Bacon, admitted to the School in January 1744/5 at the age of eleven, leaving in 1750. Technically he remains a mere name, but the present writer is tempted to suggest that he should be identified as John William Bacon (later John William Bacon-Forster) (1733-1767), another boy from a Northumberland landowning family, who was to matriculate as an undergraduate at St. Mary Hall, Oxford, on 4 July 1750, in the year that Mrs Gibson's boarder William Bacon left Westminster School. This John

13 W.Hayley, *The life and posthumous writings of William Cowper, Esqr.*, London, 1803, vol.1, 13, note.

14 He was to inherit his family estate in Co.Mayo. For some unexplained reason he is buried at Bromley, Kent, and his tombstone there records, unusually, the fact of his education at Westminster School. He was seemingly unrelated to Robert Blake, his fellow boarder with Mrs Gibson.



Elijah Impey, Hasting's contemporary in College

Hastings! I knew thee young, and of a mind, While young, humane, conversable, and kind

William Bacon, inheritor of estates at Staward, Styford, and Adderstone in Northumberland, and at Newton Cap in Co. Durham, can plausibly be identified as the father of three sons admitted to the School in 1772, and it would not be unreasonable to suppose that he had been educated at the School also.

Four further boys were to be taken in by Mrs Gibson as boarders before Warren Hastings's election to College in 1747. Edward Dymoke Willaume (1736-1787), admitted to the School and placed in the Gibson boarding house in February 1745/6, just about the time of Mrs Gibson's husband's death, was the eldest of three Westminster School-educated sons of a prominent London goldsmith turned landed gentleman in Bedfordshire. He was to be elected to College in 1750, went on to be ordained a clergyman in the Church of England, and held a succession of livings in the countryside north of London, ending up as Rector of Tingrith, Bedfordshire, the parish where his family had their principal residence, and as a Prebendary of Lincoln.

Thomas Sawell (c.1734-1784), a schoolmaster's son, who arrived at Mrs Gibson's in the same month as Willaume, seems at first sight something of an outsider in a boarding house which primarily housed boys from privileged and wealthy backgrounds.¹⁵ The explanation for his presence in the boarding house alongside Willaume must lie in the fact that Tingrith, the Willaume family base, is only four miles east of Woburn, where Sawell's father conducted his school¹⁶. After obtaining election first to College in 1749, and then, in 1753, to Trinity College, Cambridge, he, like Willaume, was ordained as a clergyman in the Church of England and settled down as the incumbent of three Bedfordshire parishes.

William Davis, an arrival at the School and at the boarding house at the age of eight in June 1746, is only a name¹⁷, but Hastings's final contemporary at the College Street boarding house, described as Peter Brown when admitted to the School in February 1746/7, is potentially of rather more interest. Peter Brown was aged sixteen, a rather older age than was customary for entry to a public school in that era, but in fact exactly the same age as Henry Blake, the boy from Co. Mayo mentioned earlier. Pupils recorded as admitted to Westminster School at such an

age in the mid-eighteenth century seem habitually to have come to the School to finish off education commenced in Ireland, North America, the West Indies or other distant locations, and the late John Beach Whitmore FSA justifiably suggested in his unpublished manuscript additions to the *Record of Old Westminsters*, preserved in Westminster School's archive, that Peter Brown, who left the School in 1748, should be identified as Peter Browne (later Peter Browne-Kelly) (c.1730-1780), son and heir of John Browne, 1st Earl of Altamont in the Irish peerage. Peter Browne is known to have been an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford, a habitual post-school destination for a Westminster School-educated aristocrat, where he matriculated on 26 October 1748, this date chiming in with the Westminster School leaving year for "Peter Brown", and he was subsequently to sit as Lord Westport in the Irish House of Commons and as 2nd Earl of Altamont in the Irish House of Lords.

If these fellow boarders with Mrs Gibson have not featured in published discussions of Warren Hastings's circle of friends and contemporaries, the explanation is that a good proportion of them had died before Warren Hastings's career in the service of the East India Company had reached a point at which he had achieved any very striking level of prominence. It serves as a telling reminder that average life expectancy in eighteenth-century England, even for individuals with comfortable upper-class backgrounds, was very much shorter than it is today.

This brief review of the available evidence for the lives of these twelve Westminster School pupils who boarded with Mrs Gibson offers in microcosm an insight into what might have been the approximate social composition of any of the boarding houses attached in the middle years of the eighteenth century to such major public schools as Westminster and Eton. It turns out that Warren Hastings was the only one of Mrs Gibson's small band of boarders to play a major figure in the wider history of the period, and it is appropriate that as well as being the most distinguished of her boarders he was their last survivor.

¹⁵ Of the identifiable pupils in the Gibson boarding house, Warren Hastings was the nearest in social class, but Hastings's father and grandfather had been Church of England clergymen, and Hastings's uncle Howard Hastings, who paid his Westminster School bills, was a protégé and confidant of William Fitzroy, 3rd Duke of Cleveland.

¹⁶ Sawell was some two years older than Willaume, and it may be that Willaume's father decided to help with his boarding fees on the ground that Sawell, as older and more mature, would be a suitable companion for his son.

¹⁷ Two boys named William Davis were admitted to Westminster School at the age of eight in June 1746, of whom one was a boarder with Mrs Gibson. It is not possible to determine whether the Gibson boarder was the William Davis admitted in June 1746, son of Robert Davis, of London, who was to be elected to College in 1752, or whether he was the other William Davis, of whom nothing at all is known beyond the fact of his admission to the School.

Endpiece

Beatrice Ambrose evokes the essential presence of the coffee shop

When I stand in line, waiting to scan my Pret subscription for my daily coffee, I am not, perhaps unsurprisingly, thinking about Samuel Pepys. In fact, I give no thought to the history of the coffee house as I walk down Tufton Street sipping my coffee to go. However, the coffee houses around Westminster and indeed all over London, have an unexpectedly vibrant history dating back to the 17th century, and played an often unacknowledged role in Restoration England.

The first coffee house in England was established in Oxford in 1650, during the time of the Commonwealth when the sale of alcohol was banned under the puritan rule. Having originated in Ethiopia, coffee first made its way to England via Tudor connections with Constantinople and later via Venetian merchants who traded with vendors in North African ports. Slowly, over the 16th century it grew in popularity and by the 17th century the wealthy welcomed the craze with open arms. It was regarded as exotic and luxurious, especially when mixed with copious amounts of sugar to make what was known as ‘politicians’ porridge’.

Coffee houses quickly became a popular alternative to inns and establishments ranged from those with the atmosphere of a private club to others where men argued, chewed tobacco, and played card games. Even Samuel Pepys in 1660 wrote in his diary: “[I went to] the Coffee-house in Cornhill, the first time that ever I was there. And I find much pleasure in it through the diversity of

company – and discourse.” By 1663 there were over 80 in London, and by 1675 there were 3,000 coffee houses in England.

As they proliferated, they became increasingly sectarian, from politicians meeting in White’s in St. James’s, to artists in Old Slaughter’s on St Martin’s Lane, to writers in Button’s on Bow Street. They were, in the words of one of the King’s chief ministers Lord Danby, ‘hotbeds of political intrigue’ where opponents of Charles II could distribute their inflammatory pamphlets. They were also the birthplace of new industries. Famously it was from a coffee shop near the Royal Exchange, frequented by shipping agents and owned by one Edward Lloyd, that the Lloyd’s of London insurance market developed. The influence of coffee shops extended far and wide, with their unique combination of caffeine, conversation and coincidence of interests creating crucibles of new ideas. Alongside Pepys, Hooke and Dryden were also coffee house enthusiasts and one can speculate that without the stimulation of the coffee houses the Restoration would have been altogether less colourful.

So although Pret à Mangers on every corner, Starbucks in every tube station and highstreets teeming with artisanal cafes may seem a 21st century epidemic, the England’s coffee house culture goes back much further. Next time you are waiting for your black americano or café latte, spare a thought for the aged industry which helped lay the foundations for England today.



List of Contributors

Beatrice Ambrose is in the 6th form. Studying English, French, History and Philosophy she is usually found reading but also enjoys athletics and playing the piano.

Raymond E. Bell Jr, PhD (OW) has enjoyed a distinguished career in the US Military, retiring with the rank of Brigadier-General.

Ingrid Berg is in the Sixth Form, studying double Maths, Physics, and English. She has interests across the array of subjects, particularly in law, metaphysics, and the philosophy of language.

Raaghav Das (Upper Shell) is keen on politics and its relationship with technology. When not writing pieces for various publications, he spends his time baking cakes for his neighbours and sipping bubble tea.

Alice Gelosi is in the Sixth Form and enjoys exploring links between literary, philosophical, historical and cultural topics. Her passions include photography, art, theatre, film and modern languages.

Denis Goshchansky is studying History, Philosophy, Economics, and Maths in the Sixth Form. He takes particular interest in defending the institutions and culture of the meek and abused United States.

Clara Hartley is currently reading English at Queen's, Oxford. Her main interests still include David Bowie's music and lyrics, so not much has changed since Westminster.

Ben Heyes is in the Remove, with plans to read History at university. He is particularly interested in 18th century European history and post-war British politics. His other pursuits include leisurely cycling jaunts in the home counties and reading Maigret novels.

Julian Herbst is in the Lower Shell. He enjoys learning modern and ancient Greek as well as Mandarin, participating in Model United Nations, and reading P. G. Wodehouse.

Isabella Jain is in the Remove, studying History, Philosophy, Maths and Economics. She particularly enjoys exploring the interdisciplinary links between Politics and the Arts. Next year she plans on taking a liberal arts degree.

Alexandra Kogan has started to read History of Art at university.

Hannah Lee is in the Sixth Form and currently studies Maths, Biology, History and Philosophy. Her contribution was fuelled by caffeine.

Rafael Leon-Villapalos is in the Sixth Form. He has a keen interest in politics, history, and Model UN. Outside school, he enjoys reading, hiking, and writing obsessively detailed alternate history.

Andreas Metzger studies Latin, English, History, Maths & German in the Sixth Form. He spends his time reading the London Review of Books and convincing his friends that he isn't that pretentious.

Blake Morris (HH) is an Upper Shell pupil interested in learning about anything that could give him an edge in a pub quiz. In his spare time, he enjoys knitting, adapting Czech novels for the stage, and restoring old electronics.

Tara Mottahedan is in the Remove. She is an avid committee member of both poetry and lit soc at Westminster. She strives for balance in all aspects of her life and outside the classroom enjoys performing arts, cycling and football.

Hugh Pagan was a Queen's Scholar from 1958-1963. He is an antiquarian bookseller, numismatist and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Hugh Pagan has acted as editor to Volumes IV and V of The Record of Old Westminsters, the school's biographical dictionary of alumni.

Amelia Ross is in the Remove with an offer to study History at Oxford. When she's not reading in the library, you can probably find her singing in Abbey or binge-watching box sets, drinking endless cups of tea.

Laetitia Sanai enjoys reading post-colonial literature, journalism, and listening to Joy Division. She is in the Remove, planning to study History and English at university.

Mattias Shuper is in the Sixth Form and studies Physics, Economics and Double Maths. When he is not zoned out listening to music, he enjoys his other passions of sports and photography. Either that or trying without much success to learn skate tricks in Yard.

Sharon Segaye is in the Sixth Form studying English, History, Economics and Philosophy. She is passionate about African politics, bookbinding and the Model United Nations. She is often found in the Library with Yovana Konrad, calculating the probability of being set a pop quiz that day in any given subject.

Alexandra Sullivan is in the 6th form studying English, French, Philosophy, and History. Outside academia, she is a keen reader of any work of foreign literature which encapsulates individual periods of history and culture.

Jijith Thukaram (Lower Shell) is particularly interested in Mathematics and advancements in technology. He is inspired by the reaches of AI and its expanding influence on our world.



Trinity College Library, Dublin



