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VARSITY

King's students organise over housing disarray

Catherine Lally
Deputy Editor
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Associate Editor

King's students living in Bodley's Court have brought to the College concerns that extensive construction work to repair and restore the building's roof has had a severe impact on their living conditions.

Residents of Bodley's Court have cited loud drilling work throughout the day, plastic sheets as windows offering little insulation, and having little to no natural light, with little reduction to relatively high rent charges.

The court's front lawn has been transformed into a base for the construction, with the inner court cordoned off and containing a crane, as well as various construction offices.

Prior to a meeting that took place between students and the College on Wednesday, Sophia Georgescu, King's College Student Union vice-president and a resident of Bodley's, told *Varsity* that students have had little communication with the College regarding the construction plans.

Two weeks ago, Georgescu held a meeting with other Bodley's residents to compile issues that students wanted

to raise with the College. She noted a turnout of around 24 students, saying that it was "nice to see people who aren't normally involved in activism" come together to work for change.

Considered some of the most desirable King's accommodation in a typical year – with large sets in an old building that has views of the river Cam – Bodley's Court rents are some of the highest in College, with many of the rooms labelled 'band six'.

Band six 'short contract' rooms have a weekly rent of £174.53, while 'long contract' rooms have weekly rents of £165.80.

In Easter Term, the College offered the incoming Bodley's students a half-band reduction rent. However, given King's inflationary increases in rent, this means band five and a half rooms still have rents nearly in line with last year's band six rooms.

Questions have been raised over whether Bodley's residents should receive rent reductions due to the ongoing construction work.

Lily Flashman, a second-year at King's, said she has been "driven crazy by these drills" when trying to work in her room, referring to the building work which has disrupted the tranquility of

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▲ Accommodation fit for a King's?

(UMA RAMACHANDRAN/ANYA DAVIDSON)

Analysis Cambridge's postdoc problem

Noella Chye
Editor
Sarah Orsborne
Senior News Correspondent

Who has a say in how the University is run? A motion passed last week by Regent House, Cambridge's central governing body, will exclude an estimated half to three-quarters of the University's research associates – its largest staff group – from its democratic decision-making. The sudden resignation of a member of University Council, Cambridge's executive decision-making body, has brought this question to the fore.

"When I saw the result, it was like Brexit all over again... It's very similar in that you have people voting on other people's rights who do not necessarily have a vote themselves," said Dr Alice Hutchings, a lecturer specialising in cyber-crime at Cambridge's computer science department, who resigned from Council on Monday.

The motion began as a movement to simplify voting rights criteria, but has culminated in the disenfranchisement of hundreds of postdoctoral staff (postdocs). Regent House membership grants individuals the right to directly influence University affairs, including the right to vote in University elections. Senior University and college staff are automatically eligible for membership, but the requirements for their more jun-

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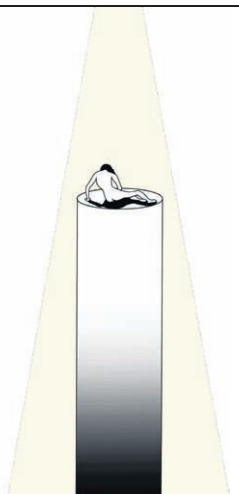
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My first experience in Cambridge theatre leaves me shaking

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John Ridding: 'The FT must not ignore the digital transformation'

The CEO of the Financial Times talks to **Julia Davies**, reflecting on the paper's position in a changing industry

If 130 years ago you had told the founders of *The Financial Times* that they would one day be trying to translate the colour pink, the trademark colour of the paper since 1893, into sound, they no doubt would have been dumbfounded.

Turning the recognisable branding of the FT into something that will be recognisable through the medium of sound is part of the wide challenge of digitising the paper. I spoke with John Ridding, the paper's CEO since 2006, about this issue, and the other trials facing digitisation of traditional print media ahead of his talk at the Cambridge Union earlier this week.

As journalism increasingly migrates to digital platforms, the FT is predominantly focusing on audio technology, regularly producing a range of podcasts and videos. It is also keenly monitoring the rise of the digital companion, such as Amazon's Alexa, and Google Assistant,

▼ **The FT launched a bold new, digital-friendly redesign in 2014** (YOUTUBE/FINANCIAL TIMES)



and the opportunities that such technologies will bring.

This emerging technology is clearly something that excites Ridding, and the advances of audio and digital are "one of those exponential curves we've got familiar with," he says. I am keen to see how he marries it with the content that the FT has traditionally provided. Creating the branding for a sound, however, is a far greater challenge than branding a visual form of journalism. "Print journalism was enough of a challenge, frankly," he reflects.

When he started out as a journalist, working for the FT in Asia, a path he diverged from because he "never felt comfortable ruining someone's day," he could never have foreseen just how technologically-focused, fast-moving, and dynamic, journalism would become.

Ridding argues that in the wake of this transformation, the FT has become more driven in its effort to establish a leading position in the world of journalism. "We mustn't ignore the digital transformation. We have to embrace it." This is aided by the publication's diversity of content. "[The paper] has a role to play for everybody as a very high quality news briefing," he asserts.

From more general sections such as Travel to specialised areas such as the 'Due Diligence' online newsletter on Mergers and Acquisitions, the FT has both breadth and depth to offer its readers. "There are a number of layers in the FT orbit, and our view is that people should be able to come in, at a broad level, and drill down really deep. Frankly, there's no need for anyone to go anywhere else."

I ask him if such an industry-specific publication as the FT can be considered a luxury good. "FT journalism is accessible. A lot of publications, particularly publications trying to be specialist, use a lot of jargon. The best journalists don't need jargon." Ridding staunchly defends the FT's unique role. "Specialist journalism is looking at specific areas in detail, but not in a way that is obscure, and not as a luxury, because quality information is a social good."

In maintaining the quality of this social good, then, Ridding is equally passionate in maintaining the independence of the editorial team from the paper's business administration. "One of the

“ Sometimes in a fast moving, disruptive industry, you just have to roll the dice ”

most important things about the FT is that we are super clear on church and state, although I've never been entirely sure which is which. But whichever it is, I'm one, and Lionel [Barber, the FT's editor] is the other."

One of the chief reasons the FT has been so successful, he continues, is because "there's a very clear understanding of [this division], which is essential because the FT's reputation, branding and authority depends on that editorial independence. Everything we do is based on that editorial independence". The risk of any conflict of interest "could compromise that, even at a perception level. The way we're set up means that's impossible. I can't, and would never, tell Lionel what to publish."

He contends that editorial freedom is especially important because it creates a clear distinction between the editorial and business sides of the paper, which "enables really strong cooperation and collaboration around strategic initiatives." He adds that, "nowadays, to be successful in news media, you have to be an integrated organisation."

And successful they are: the FT's digital subscription is approaching the one million mark, and Ridding is confident it will hit this threshold soon. Its subscription is largely digital, with many City workers reading it as a daily briefing on their phones as they commute every morning to Canary Wharf. When the FT was founded in 1888, its readership would have had no option but to grapple with the broadsheet format, impossible on the Tube in rush hour today.

The FT caters predominantly to those working in high paying jobs in the City. It is these people who have least been affected by the financial crisis of 2008 in the opinion of many, and many hold them accountable for the crash in the first place.

Is it tasteful, therefore, for the FT to include a section called 'How to Spend It'? "The luxury sector has become very dynamic, and created some global giants, and 'How to Spend It' provides the best coverage of that industry. It has a different tone to other parts of the FT, but our readers love it. It has a very loyal following." Ridding also notes that there is a section within 'How to Spend It' which lists items available for less than £100.

But, as with the FT at large, 'How to Spend It' is not merely a list of curated items but also includes lifestyle elements and articles, just as the FT goes widely beyond the remit of being a spartan factual analysis of financial trends and news.

One thing about Ridding which surprises me is his refusal to personally invest in the stock market. "It's a conflict of interest, and I think I'd be useless." So someone who reads the FT every single day, and has done so for years, would not consider themselves au fait with investing?

"If I was going to invest in the stock market I would expect that reading the FT would make me a better investor", he argues. "It gives you the context and insight into a lot of the forces that drive markets. But I don't invest."

Since becoming CEO, Ridding has led the FT through some of the most turbulent years in recent financial history. His assessment of his leadership is measured.

He regrets not always moving fast enough when he can't see an obvious consensus. "Sometimes in a fast-moving, disruptive industry, you just have to roll the dice". It's a sentiment that many non-financiers, who have been footing the

► **Ridding addressing the chamber at the Cambridge Union** (ALISA MOLOTOVA)



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bill of corporate dice-rolling since 2008, perhaps wish did not exist. "There have been times where we've been doing the right thing but we probably could have done it faster. But we have done a better job than any traditional media organisation in transforming our business [for the digital platform]".

Ridding professes that the FT charges for its service not as a profit-engineering device. Some might say that paywall-free papers democratise news and make it accessible for those who cannot pay for a £5.35 weekly digital subscription.

However, to Ridding, the fact that people are willing to pay to read the FT is a testament to its quality, and is proof that the paper is worth producing at all. He protests that the subscription is cheaper than buying a coffee from Starbucks every day, but it may be that him speaking in these terms is emblematic of the corporate outlook of much of the

“*There are a number of layers in the FT orbit, and our view is that people should be able to come in, at a broad level, and drill down really deep*”

paper's audience.

He identifies his most successful trait as "really caring about the FT." His love for the paper is bolstered by the "meaningful mission" that the FT is on, a "mission that is felt ever more keenly by everyone" who works there.

Optimism is something which characterises Ridding's outlook. He states that print journalism will not be obsolete in our lifetimes, and that Brexit - on which he won't comment explicitly now that he is "in business" - is "a whole world of stories", despite the "uncertainty", something which is ideal for a newspaper.

Ridding regularly uses the word "mission" when talking about what the FT does. Perhaps the gospel that Ridding is spreading is one of the importance of quality journalism in this day and age: that it is something intrinsically worth paying for, as a mark of respect for its value.

Perks for corporate Cantabs? Free FT access for University members

The University Library and the Marshall Library last year worked together to give Cantabs paywall-free access to the online and mobile app version of the FT last year.

First covered by the Varsity news team in April 2018, a typical digital FT subscription costs £5.35 a week - or 1.84 Fitzbillies' cappuccinos.

Feel free to browse to your heart's content for something less rooted in the 'bubble'.

This marked one small victory for avid market news-consumers, and a giant one for the commercial awareness of Spring Week applicants.

News

BULLDOG BONANZA

Spooky doggos celebrate Halloween

Cambridge's French bulldog population is set to descend on Antsey Hall on Sunday 4th of November, to celebrate Halloween. The bulldogs are expected to be cloaked in mysterious and spooky outfits, no doubt reinforcing their image as one of the scariest dog breeds! The event organiser, Cambridge resident Charlotte Johnson, hopes owners will "go all out with the costumes." Johnson herself owns three French bulldogs (Iris, Margot and Riley) who are also expected to make an appearance at the upcoming canine event.

A CAT CALLED BOB

Bob the cat to paw-print books

Bob the cat, from 'The Little Book of Bob', is coming to Waterstones in Cambridge to sign copies of his new book. Bob, who will be accompanied by his human owner, James Bowen, is the star of the book, which is a collection of lessons that Bowen learnt during his years spent busking on the streets of London. Their first book together, A Street Cat Named Bob, sold more than one million copies in the UK alone. This signing will begin at 13:00.

FERAL CAT SPAT

Kings' cat struck by feral opponent

Barney, one of the two cats belonging to the Provost of King's College, was put out of action after an aggressive encounter with a feral cat. Barney, a tortoiseshell tabby cat, had to be given stitches after the incident and was fitted with a cone to prevent him from disturbing the stitches. The vet consigned the poorly puss to indoors until early November. Barney is a familiar face around the centre of Cambridge. His brother Freddie went missing for several days over the summer only to be found next door, at St Catharine's College.

YOU'RE A WIZARD HARRY

Potter's Weasley Twins in town

The iconic Weasley Twins from J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter are set to speak at the Cambridge Union on Monday 12th of November. The identical twins, who also go by the names of James and Oliver Phelps, are best known for their roles playing Fred and George Weasley in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, and all of the subsequent Harry Potter films. The twins have also appeared on various other programs, and are supporters of the Teenage Cancer Trust.



This Halloween, Cambridge saw many intricately carved jack o' lanterns and students decked out in interesting, sometimes rather bizarre, costumes

(MILLIE KIEL/JESS MA/ROSIE BRADBURY/ANYA DAVIDSON)



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News

Bodley's Court construction site causes distress in King's

► Continued from front page

the riverside court.

The court's top-floor residents, which included fellows' offices, have been moved for safety purposes.

Students have also described large amounts of dust from the building site coming in to kitchens and bathrooms when they open windows to provide ventilation.

And more recently, some students have had their rooms' windows removed and replaced with plastic sheets, a measure that one Bodley's resident claimed would be in place for at least "two to three weeks", blocking natural light and offering little in terms of insulation.

Some students also expressed their discomfort with seeing building staff on the scaffolding outside their windows when in their rooms or bathrooms, which they said has constituted an unnerving invasion of privacy.

Flashman added that some Bodley's residents have found that "literally outside their room there is a water tank, so they have no natural light".

Bishop said that Bodley's "is very expensive accommodation for somewhere that has kind of a lack of amenities", as its bathrooms and kitchens have been renovated less recently than some other King's accommodation. She noted that "a lot of what is good about Bodley's has been negated by the redevelopment."

Bishop asked, "if you haven't got light and a view... then why are you paying band five and a half?"

This year's construction work reduced the popularity of the Bodley's staircases. Both Flashman and Georgescu pointed to their low positions on this year's room



ballot as reason why they were allocated Bodley's accommodation.

KCSU Accommodation Officer Maddy Bishop, who has been liaising with the College on Bodley's construction issues, said that the college has been "reasonably accommodating" and that "we are reasonably confident that everything will be resolved to our satisfaction."

All of the students who spoke to *Varsity* noted that the College had not yet had the opportunity to rectify their

▲ The building works underway in Bodley's Court

(ANYA DAVIDSON/UMA RAMACHANDRAN)

concerns.

Bishop added that King's held an "information meeting for Bodley's residents, to let them know what the work would actually be like" at the end of the last academic year, which came after the ballot had already been drawn.

However, Bishop said "nobody attended [the meeting] because it was during May Week", which she felt was not "an appropriate time".

Following a meeting on Wednes-

“
I've been
... driven
crazy by
these drills
”

day in which residents' concerns were presented to the College, the Domus Bursar issued a joint statement with Bishop to *Varsity*: "The building works at Bodley's Court in King's College are causing more disturbance than had been expected."

"The King's College Student Union is working with the College Officers to try to minimise this disturbance and support the students involved. We expect to make detailed proposals shortly."

County Council at crossroads over Pembroke Street junction

Elizabeth Haigh
Senior News Correspondent

Second-year Girton student Lara Parizotto has launched a petition calling upon Cambridgeshire County Council to install traffic lights at the junction connecting Mill Lane, Pembroke Street and Trumpington Street.

The petition demands "an investigation to determine the suitability of a new traffic light system on the junction", citing the dangers that pedestrians and cyclists face as they "struggle to join traffic as there are no measures in place for cars and buses to give way".

Parizotto said that she found the junction "very very dangerous" during

“
You are
already
in a very
vulnerable
position
being a
cyclist
”

her first year due to the high volume of traffic. She said that upon returning to Cambridge, talking to other concerned students combined with several near misses with cars and cyclists inspired her launch the campaign.

The junction, one of the busiest in Cambridge, is used by hundreds of vehicles and cyclists every day, particularly by students travelling to lectures on Mill Lane and Pembroke Street. Nearby Cambridge colleges including Pembroke, Peterhouse and St Catherine's add to the foot traffic at the interchange.

Parizotto explained that although the layout of the junction is not a particular problem, the lack of a clear give-way or traffic light system makes it "very difficult". She stated that it is an issue "not just for cyclists, because some cars try to give way to pedestrians, to cyclists, and don't know whether they can go or not without harming someone."

She has suggested that a traffic light system would make the junction safer, as it would allow cyclists to set off before cars and buses. "You are already in a very vulnerable position being a cyclist, and if you're trying to compete with big cars or buses it can be a bit scary", she added. She argued that it would give cyclists "extra security and confidence" to know that they would not be caught



up behind big vehicles when trying to navigate the area.

Pembroke second-year Catherine Lally expressed her support for Parizotto's petition: "I have to walk across that intersection several times a day and I still find it as scary as I did when I was a fresher, just because of the concentration of cars and cyclists turning around the really steep corners. I just feel like you're taking your life into your hands every time you cross the road."

▲ The Pembroke Street crossing lies in close proximity to several colleges and lecture sites

(ROSIE BRADBURY)

Lally agreed that traffic lights would make the area easier to navigate, describing the crossing as "a safety hazard for cyclists and pedestrians" in its current state.

However, second-year Homertonian Alex Evans disagreed that traffic lights would solve the traffic problems, arguing that they would "only make the traffic worse" due to the proximity of a pedestrian crossing meters away on Trumpington Road. Evans said that he believed that the junction poses a danger to students, largely caused by the narrowing turning area for buses and limited space for cyclists and pedestrians. He called for the prohibition of "buses and large vehicles from going up such a narrow road and, more importantly, for everyone to use their indicators."

A Cambridgeshire County Council spokesperson said that "regular inspections are carried out on all county council roads to ensure suitable levels of safety are maintained." A member of the Council and the Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee, Jocelyne Scott, said "to see so many signatures for a petition in such a short space of time shows how strongly people feel about this issue", adding that "we need to ensure that the safety of all road users are taken into consideration."

‘I think the University loses out’ says Alice Hutchings

► Continued from front page

-ior colleagues are less clear-cut.

Under previous membership criteria, research associate eligibility was entirely dependent on whether faculties chose to enrol their research associates. A Grace was proposed in June to remove these arbitrary distinctions by extending membership inclusively to all research associates across the University. Had this Grace passed, approximately 2,000 postdocs would have gained eligibility, expanding the postdoctoral voice in the University.

However, a motion was proposed to amend the Grace to impose a qualifying period of “at least three years continuously” for research associates, criticised by many as discriminatory against the particular staff group. The amended Grace passed in a closely contested ballot last week, with 402 of 783 votes cast in its favour.

In Hutchings’ department, all senior research associates are included. “That’s ... why I was able to become a member of the Regent House, and later [was] voted into Council”. If she had arrived after this November, following the amendment’s passing, she said, “I would not have been able to stand for Council.”

“I think [the result] is symptomatic of how researchers are perceived in the University.” Research associates are in a unique position within Cambridge. In trying to build their careers, many take on additional responsibilities. Hutchings said, “research staff in this university do a lot more than just research. They teach, they supervise, they run programmes; they do many things that an academic would do... but of course they’re only employed to do research.

“Many people do this because they want the experience, or they see there’s a need that the department wants to fill, so they’re trying to be good citizens within the department.”

The Campaign for Cambridge Freedoms, which advocated against the amendment, characterised the pushback to the original motion: “The forces of conservatism have struck back, in the form of an amendment promoted by the University Council which will impose a waiting period of 3-4 years before a postdoc can vote.” The amendment, campaigners have argued, would “disenfranchise junior research staff, and in a way that discriminates against women.” Hutchings agreed.

The issue is amplified by a disconnect between the lives of research associates and pockets of the University where people may believe that postdocs are not actively engaged in the University; since Regent House membership is limited to those who do, the argument goes, postdocs should not qualify. To Hutchings, the idea that postdocs do not engage is deeply at odds with the people around her.

It doesn’t help that the precarity postdocs find themselves in has not been dealt with urgently. Hutchings remarked:

“They have so many insights in how we can be better”

“There’s almost like a failure to want to engage with this issue, to want to have to take responsibility for it. It’s easy just to blame research funders than to say this is a systemic issue that we should be addressing, because they go: it’s come down to where the money goes, we can’t provide more stability because we can’t necessarily fund that.”

For Hutchings, the issue isn’t just in how Regent House voted, but also that Council called for the amendment, and that it allowed it to be put to a ballot. In a Council meeting in July, Hutchings told the room that she believed the amendment was unlawful – a sentiment echoed in her statement of resignation. Yet, “I don’t think this received the amount of time that it should have,” she said.

After finding out about the ballot



▲ Dr Alice Hutchings is a University Lecturer at the Computer Lab (NOELLA CHYE)

result last Friday, she consolidated her thoughts on the issue, looking into her duties as a trustee of the University under the Charity Commission guidance. “... reading that I felt that the best thing I could do was to resign,” she said.

“One of the really great things about the University is that it’s really democratic, and this makes it a really great place to work. It’s one of the things that I believe has really contributed to the success of the University for the many centuries that it’s been around,” said Hutchings.

Later, she added: “Researchers – because they come from so many different backgrounds – they have so many insights in how we can be better... by not allowing them to participate, I think the University loses out as a result.”

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What impact will you make?

News

Cambridge's Jewish community grapples with Pittsburgh attack



▲ Rabbi Mordechai Zeller is one of the Jewish chaplains for universities in Cambridge (ROSIE BRADBURY)

Rosie Bradbury
Senior News Editor

Content note: This article contains descriptions of anti-Semitic violence

On Thursday evening, members of Cambridge's Jewish and non-Jewish communities attended a vigil held in memorial for the victims of the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh.

"When somebody dies, for seven days, the community gathers together and we support them, because when we lose somebody, we lose our place in the world", said Rabbi Mordechai Zeller, one of the Jewish Chaplains for Cambridge and East Anglia universities. Rabbi Zeller spoke about how members of Cambridge's Jewish community, both those religious and non-religious, having been processing and grappling with the Pittsburgh shooting, since the news first broke on Saturday.

He said many Jewish Cambridge students had been "shaken up" by news of the attack: "When trauma happens, when an accident happens a second after we cross the street we say, 'that could've been me.'"

"There's often something very human in the process of having empathy for another person, part of that is imagining ourselves there", he added.

On Saturday morning in a synagogue in Pittsburgh, a man carrying an AR-15-style assault rifle opened fire while shouting anti-Semitic slurs, killing 11 worshippers and injuring several others.

The massacre – believed to be the

deadliest attack ever committed against a Jewish community in the United States – reverberated across Jewish communities within the country and abroad.

"It's been a tough week", said Rabbi Zeller. "To me, a synagogue is meant to be a safe space, it's meant to be a sacred space, and to think that people who gather together to pray and to worship, which is something that it something that is so personal and communal, to think that they were killed just for being Jewish is heartbreaking".

"I'm nervous of claiming it as my trauma", said Alfie Rosenbaum, one of the student organisers of the vigil, describing her difficulties articulating her emotional response to the attack: "I do think it's scary to see other people being targeted for an identity that you share, but it's a complicated one to navigate, how you talk about it".

Several memorial services have been held in Cambridge over the last week, and counselling has been offered for Jewish students emotionally affected by the attack. A service held on Monday evening at Beth Shalom, a reformist synagogue, was attended by around 70 students and Cambridge residents, as well as members of a Cambridge interfaith group and members of the Cambridge Muslim Trust.

Jesus College Chaplain Paul Dominiak organised a memorial service on Tuesday evening at the college chapel alongside Ariel Cohen, co-president of the Jesus College Jewish Society, where several student members of collegiate Jewish societies in Cambridge spoke and led prayers in English, Hebrew, and Ara-

maic.

The planning of the vigil has brought together what several students described as a "fragmented" Jewish community within Cambridge, organised by members of Cambridge University Jewish Society (JSoc) and Bad Jews of Cambridge, an alternative Jewish collective at the University.

Co-president of JSoc Ellesheva Kissin described organising the vigil as the "perfect opportunity for these two groups who are different in their outlook, but both Jewish and both proudly Jewish, to come together and to show

“
To me, a
synagogue
is meant to
be a sacred
space
”

solidarity”.

"It means a lot of different things, to different people, to be Jewish," added Rosenbaum, who said that the vigil was intended to be a space for Cambridge's Jewish community to "process the feelings we all have about the attack".

"It's powerful to look back into ancient texts and to see the same attacks being repeated through history and the same Jewish response being repeated through history", said Kissin, describing the reading of tehillim, or psalms, at memorial services.

Speaking to *Varsity* before the vigil, Kissin expressed her hope that the "collective memory of Jews always saying those words" would be a "powerful illustration of [how] we're still here, we're still standing, united against all this anti-semitism, this racism, and we just want to build, and to grow, and to help combat racism in all its forms".

Organisers of the vigil have set up a fundraising page to raise donations for the Cambridge Convoy Refugee Action Group (CamCRAG), a local Cambridge charity which regularly sends volunteers to refugee camps in Europe, and HIAS, a humanitarian aid organisation for refugees with which the synagogue in Pittsburgh which was attacked had connections.

The organisers said that they will be committing themselves "to the ongoing fight against fascism, anti-semitism, and racism in all its forms".

"I would like to see an ongoing resistance to fascism and racism in Cambridge whatever that looks like, either from a Jewish perspective or from any other perspective", said Rosenbaum.

She added her hope that awareness of a Jewish perspective be present in anti-fascist organisation: "It's really important that there is a Jewish presence in anti-fascist resistance because Jews obviously are victims of fascism, have been victims of fascism, and will continue to be victims of fascism... it's really important that that narrative is included in whatever organising does take place".

▼ Ellesheva Kissin is a co-president of JSoc and was one of the organisers of the Thursday vigil (ROSIE BRADBURY)

“
I'm
nervous of
claiming
it as my
trauma
”



£12.2m of ‘high risk’ repairs needed in University hospitals

Kiran Khanom
Senior News Correspondent

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is currently facing a backlog of £101.5 million in repairs or replacements of buildings and equipment, according to an NHS Digital report, with £12.2m classified as ‘high risk’ repairs.

‘High risk’ repairs or replacements are those which must be addressed with urgent priority in order to prevent catastrophic failure, major disruption to clinical services or deficiencies in safety liable to cause serious injury and/or prosecution.

The Trust’s data records 49 incidents of patients being harmed or put at risk of harm as a result of infrastructure problems in the Trust’s sites over the 2017/18 financial year. There were 17,900 incidents across England during the same period.

The cost to eradicate ‘significant risk’ repairs is £12.5m, with ‘moderate risk’ repairs totalling £18m and ‘low risk’ repairs totalling £58.8m. Since the 2013-14 financial year, the Trust’s overall backlog has risen by 40%, with the high risk repair bill increasing by £5 million, but, according to Carin Charlton, Director of Capital, Estates and Facilities Management at the Trust, £13.8 million has been set aside to reduce such risks after the allocation of extra funding. She added, however, that “it is important to understand that these works have to be phased so they cause the least disruption possible to a busy hospital.”

49

The number patients harmed/put at risk of harm due to infrastructure problems in 2017/18

Charlton noted that the “Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has the challenge of maintaining a large, ageing estate”, adding that therefore the entire estate “is rigorously risk assessed on a regular basis and on-going programmes of repair and refurbishment are carried out according to priority.”

The University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine is based at the two

sites run by the Trust: Addenbrooke’s Hospital and the adjacent Rose Hospital, which provides women’s and maternity services.

Professor Patrick Maxwell, Head of the School of Clinical Medicine, and Dr Diana Wood, the Clinical Dean, spoke in support of the Trust, saying that they “believe that the Trust has taken every step to protect patient safety and to enable us to teach effectively.”

101.5m

The Trust’s total backlog, in £, of repairs or replacements

They said they do not believe such backlogs have had any effect on clinical teaching because the School of Clinical Medicine “receives frequent, regular feedback from our students relating to clinical placements... and this issue has not been raised by the students as one causing them concerns”.

Maxwell and Wood added: “We are very supportive of the Trust’s endeavours to make a case to NHS England for capital funding for essential maintenance.” They remarked, that “although the situation in Cambridge is at the more serious end of the spectrum”, this is “just an aspect of how the NHS is funded across the country”.

However, according to the Health Foundation, an independent charity, the government’s 2018 Budget, despite showing an increase in funding for frontline NHS services, will cut £1bn in areas such as capital investment, which is used for repairs and replacements, as well as the education and training of doctors and nurses. Commenting on the situation, Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner said that “the Government hasn’t made any of this information available”, remarking that “what we do know is that the health service in Cambridgeshire is in debt to the tune of £42m this year alone, and that Addenbrookes is an ageing hospital in serious need of physical improvement.”

► **Addenbrooke’s, around 6 kilometres from the city centre, is Cambridge’s main hospital** (JOHN SUTTON)



Nooses used to decorate Wolfson Halloween formal

Jess Ma
Senior News Correspondent

Hangman’s nooses were hung from chandeliers as a decoration at Wolfson’s Halloween formal, which was organised by the Wolfson College Student Association (WCSA), the college’s combined JCR and MCR.

Rugile Matuleviciute, Welfare Officer of the Wolfson College Student Association, told *Varsity* that though the formal was advertised as an event of the student association, decorations in the hall were handled by the College and the catering team, with no input from the WCSA.

A Wolfson College spokesperson said that “a single, anonymous complaint” was received by email three days after the formal, when the decorations had been removed. The College did not receive any complaints on the evening of the formal.

Wolfson did not respond to *Varsity*’s questions on the appropriateness of nooses as decoration or the process by which the formal’s decorations were decided.



CUSU amendment aims to block non-student endorsements

Felix Peckham
Associate Editor

CUSU have proposed an amendment to their election rules which would prohibit candidates from seeking endorsements from high-profile individuals.

The proposed regulation states that “students should not seek or promote

endorsements from anyone not a member of CUSU or the GU.”

Connor MacDonald, communications officer for CUSU’s Elections Committee, commented that the change was prompted by two particular issues.

“First, we knew that some societies (such as political societies) might have access to prominent figures that other

students simply would not have.”

MacDonald told *Varsity* that this change was not based on any particular instance, affirming that “no names emerged in our discussions on this matter.”

In past CUSU elections, political clubs have often endorsed candidates, with these candidates frequently having chaired or been involved with those societies prior to standing for elected CUSU positions. Last year, Cambridge University Conservative Association endorsed MacDonald, their former chair, with Cambridge University Labour Club backing Siyang Wei, also a former chair of theirs.

MacDonald explained that the second

reason for the change is in order to avoid conflicts of interest between University figures and the students’ union designed to hold them to account.

He said: “CUSU’s responsibilities encompass, in large part, lobbying the University and various figures. Yet, in the past, candidates have sought endorsements from University and college figures. We believe this places candidates, particularly successful ones, in a conflict of interest.”

In the 2017 election, CUSU presidential candidate Jack Drury received a public video endorsement from the master of his college, Sir Alan Fersht. Fersht, a celebrated chemist and then Master of Gonville & Caius, praised Drury as a “very nice chappy”. Current CUSU President Evie Aspinall was also endorsed by her college’s master, Lord Chris Smith.



◀ **CUSU’s headquarters at 17 Mill Lane** (LOUIS ASHWORTH)

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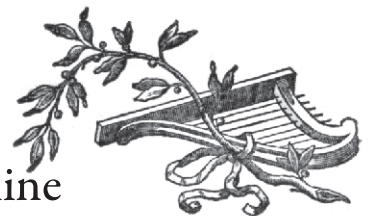
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Features



Picking apart our view of ecology

As we grapple with an era-defining disaster, columnist **Sam Warren-Miell** reflects on how to view what lies ahead

There is a certain strain of ecologism that operates as a kind of barely-secularized eschatology. According to this vision, climate change is the approaching apocalypse, the actualization of the plagues of fire, smoke and brimstone, an unimaginable catastrophe-to-come in which the predatory excesses of us sinful humans will be duly punished. This ideology misses the fact that, not only has climate change been caused and exacerbated by a comparatively very small number of people - businessmen, industrialists and politicians - but it is these same people who will be spared its worst consequences. The reality of climate change will not be the Day of Universal Judgment, but an intensifying state of emergency, over many decades, by which the capitalist

“The reality of climate change will not be the Day of Universal Judgment”

class will absent itself from the consequences of its own destructive activities: the migrant crisis, the food shortages, the natural disasters, many of which are already occurring.

In short, ecology is always in danger of devolving into a conservatism according to which a fallen and essentially doomed humanity has lost its relationship with Nature. At its worst, this ideology advocates the primitivist return to an originary (and always fictional) harmony between individual humans and a nourishing, maternal world. It is true that in the shining techno-futurism of the early twentieth century we now see only the promise of manmade annihilation, but the danger comes when this is taken to license the conclusion that man's capacity for creation and reinven-

“The real problem is how to organise a non-reactionary ecological vision of history”

▲Illustration by Kate Towsey for Varsity

tion is aligned entirely with the nihilism of the contemporary world; that because every historical leap forward has been a leap towards the disaster in which we find ourselves, it must now be time to leap backwards.

It is a question of the relationship between nature and history. Since its inception, philosophy has entertained a strong relationship to this question: from the Greek debate concerning the opposition *physis/nomos* (nature versus law and order) to Descartes' designation of man as the master of nature. The history of this question is one of the very separation of history from nature, and therefore of humanity from naturalness. Ecology interrupts this history by situating mankind within a nature which must be conserved in its universal continuity.

The real problem, then, is how to organise a non-reactionary ecological vision of history, that does not end in the rejection of history in favour of a fabricated natural totality, in the replacement of the future with a re-animated and transcendent past.

The solution, for me and for groups like the Zero Carbon Society here at Cambridge, is to locate ecology within a politics that extends beyond the purely ecological. From the recognition that the thought of the future cannot start from the derogation of the future, and that our catastrophe cannot be addressed without the means of the modern world, we affirm that the refusal to separate history from nature cannot consist in the subordination of history to an idealized nature.

Politics is, for me, essentially affirmative. This means that it starts with the creation of something new, outside of the accepted organisation of the world, not from the negation of what is the case. This creation is not of the order of the destructive innovations which ecology is right to condemn. Rather, it means that one affirms the possibility of real creativity and of the genuinely new: not new in the sense of new products to buy, new policies to disenfranchise the poor, new methods to extract oil; but new in the sense of new political forms that organise democracy in the reality of practice, new associations between hitherto disjointed elements of the social body, and new sites of association, education and thought.

What this means is that we do not give ground to the contemporary ideology that primitivist ecology unwittingly endorses by making change and novelty in themselves synonymous with the hollow law of change that animates capitalism.

It means rejecting what Bifo Berardi, an Italian Marxist theorist, characterised as ‘the slow cancellation of the future’: a pure nihilism which for us is manifested in something like continued investment in fossil fuel companies. It means reconceiving the future not as the unfolding of destruction but rather as the scene within which which politics, acting in its own name, can think ecology concretely and practically, without any veneer of sanctification. It is a future that, for us, starts here at the university. It is a future that is, in the words of Mallarmé, ‘over there, wherever it is, denying the inefable, which lies.’

Features

Experiencing colourism as a mixed-race person

Columnist **Priya Edwards** discusses how colourism is confusing as a woman of colour who sometimes benefits from white privilege

When I first started Cambridge, people seemed to find my background unnecessarily fascinating. My freshers' week seemed to be filled with making jokes about how my mum 'escaped' a marriage to another British Indian man for my dad as soon as people found out I was mixed race. Flash forward a month, to Downing's Diwali formal – I was already shocked such a thing even happened – when a friend asked, "Wait, are you actually Indian? I thought you were white when I first met you". I had never been confronted with someone who didn't at least think I was 'exotic'. I had no idea how to react. It seemed to be delivered as a compliment. My comparative paleness, next to other people of colour, seemed to be something worthy of praising. To someone who knew the problems that colourism causes for the self-esteem of women of colour, it stung. My 'fair skin' has often been praised; people would tell me I was beautiful and trips to the mandir would often result in my being told I could make it in Bollywood, "they like pale girls there".

The idea that whiteness was the epitome of beauty had been instilled in me young. In a society where women's value and beauty are so often conflated, it created an inferiority complex that has taken years to deconstruct. I am ashamed to admit now that when I was little, I wished I was white. In my imaginary games, I saw myself as white with rosy cheeks, jet black hair and bright blue eyes.

Western beauty standards have long damaged the self-perception and confidence of women of colour. Colourism actively disadvantages dark-skinned women of colour as it associates their skin with negative characteristics. In India, it has its roots in colonial oppression and the caste system. Whiteness was the ideal and those of higher castes tended to be fairer than those lower on the social strata, thus reinforcing classed ideas of impurity and undesirability. However, colourism is rife in the UK. Of the 68 female artists to top the British

Top 40 since 2017, 17 are of black heritage and the vast majority of those are light skinned.

When my beauty is seen beautiful only because I appear white, it reminds me I will only ever be a poor copy. I can never be an English Rose or tanned California Girl, merely a poor imitation. At the same time, women who are far-removed from the 'idyll' of whiteness are exoticized, fetishized or straight up derided and ignored. Black women are often called 'chocolate' which under the guise of a compliment, reinforces that women of colour are different, exotic, to be desired only for our deviation from the norm of whiteness.

Last week, it was announced that a team of students and academics are launching an 'End Everyday Racism' project in Cambridge. This is encouraging, because as we have seen in recent weeks, existing as a BME student in Cambridge can be incredibly political. Whether you are Oliver Moodie being racially abused in a club or Dr Priyamvada Gopal receiving questionable looks from porters late at night around college, skin colour is hard to ignore. While in no way is the awful experience of Moodie comparable to the everyday slights I am talking about, it is a reminder that as a university and as a society we have so much further to go. Both overt and insidious abuse contribute to the alienation of students – and staff – of colour. Ending racism requires us all to deconstruct our notions of whiteness and 'the Other'; we must deconstruct what it is

▲ Illustration by Lisha Zhong for Varsity

“I began to question how often I had benefitted from 'accidental' white privilege”

we perceive as desirable, in any context from academia to the club to the workplace.

It suddenly felt that, in being mistaken for being white, I was unable to claim a part of my own life experience. I am a woman of colour; although I benefit from light-skinned privilege, it does not detract from the fact that I have had my fair share of racist encounters. One only has to be told that you are fulfilling a quota once for the insecurity and imposter syndrome to flourish.

I began to question how often I had benefitted from 'accidental' white privilege. It is uncomfortable to supposed that people perhaps saw you a certain way because they had assumed your whiteness. I suppose, if you were unaware that Priya is one of the most common names in India, you could perhaps assume that I am the child of two parents inspired by a unique sounding name.

I have really struggled with such a perception. On the one hand, it has benefitted me to appear white-passing, yet it has filled me with a sense of insecurity about whether I can even claim the right to fight the oppression I am so determined to fight. I am currently college BME Officer and hope to work in promoting racial equality after university. The idea that somehow, I benefit from the same structures of oppression that disadvantage family and friends at the same time was, and still is, a reality I find disheartening and struggle to navigate.

I suddenly became uncomfortable;

“In recent years I have tried to dismantle inbuilt beliefs I had”

I wasn't 'properly Indian' and yet was regularly made uncomfortable in the overwhelmingly white environment of Cambridge. I was BME but not quite enough. I was white but never enough to feel truly acceptable.

In recent years, I have tried to dismantle inbuilt beliefs I had, and still have, about beauty and what it means to be a woman of colour, particularly when people often do not believe you to be so. Until we all consciously and subconsciously break down the notion that whiteness is better, the inferiority complex within so many women of colour will remain. Attempting to exist as a mixed-race woman has been complicated somewhat by this. I have to be aware of my privilege, and yet, at Cambridge, I often mix in very white circles. Trying to carve out a healthy balance when I'm 'exotic' but the same person wouldn't 'date a black girl' is difficult.

In my own life, I have tried to negotiate a peculiar balance that I did not anticipate having. My accidental privilege by virtue of my light-skin has probably benefitted me far more than I have ever realised. Since it was highlighted, I have become more aware of it. Acknowledging I benefit from a privilege which I always thought I was disadvantaged by – by being a woman of colour – I have tried to find a way to assert my identity as a mixed-race woman without erasing those who are more disadvantaged than I. I cannot say I have found that balance, yet, but I am sure as the conversations continue, I will.





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Outside the Old Building

Features

Who gets to tell Africa's narrative?

Daniella Adeluwoye explores how her African heritage was coloured by a Eurocentric view of Africa

“**D**ad, some girls in the playground said my relatives ride animals in Nigeria,” I said in between tears. I’m met with silence at the dinner table.

“It matters who tells our story, Daniella,” he whispered in response.

Whenever African history was discussed in the classroom, a feeling of shame and humiliation would well up inside me. ‘Backwards’, ‘primitive’ and ‘hopeless’ were adjectives that dominated the prevalent narrative. I grew frustrated because I just didn’t understand why my heritage was labelled as inferior.

Considering that our culture honours schools as institutions where education is taught objectively, it didn’t make sense to me as to why these misrepresentations of Africa were being perpetuated. As I’ve grown older, I’ve realised that the crucial question we should have been asking is whether this ‘neutrality’ towards Africa’s narrative is objectively tenable in the world we live in today. Why is the rich history of the Benin Empire filtered out and instead we are taught about how colonialism wasn’t inherently evil? I’ll answer that one for you: for heaven’s sake child, they gave us the railway system, be grateful!

Did we ever engage with the fact that knowledge is always imbricated with power? No. Did we learn how our perspectives are influenced by our geopolitical positioning which circumscribe how we narrate? Of course not. The dominant narrative around Africa has focused on depicting the continent as ‘underdeveloped’ while conveniently juxtaposing this image against the beacon of hope that Western civilisation provides, the beacon of hope that Britain itself is deemed to represent.

The labels ascribed to my culture confused my younger self. My African identity was something I was taught at home to be proud of. But as soon as I stepped outside, society said otherwise.

In retrospect, I would have been delighted to know that I could criti-

cise the premise of the word ‘civilisation.’ I didn’t have to accept the narrative that Africa was ‘underdeveloped’. Africa was never meant to conform to a Eurocentric metric of progress. Instead, it should have been allowed to formulate its own criteria of ‘development’ that suited its people. Civilisation is a relational term and thus it only makes sense when you have alternative outlooks with which you can contrast it. Implicated in the word ‘civilisation’ is the notion that Africa deviates further from the universalisation of free market capitalism and neoliberalism, temporally marking the continent as ‘uncivilised’. It is this rhetoric of civilisation that has historically perpetuated the colonial encounter and Africa’s portrayal as the ‘Dark Continent.’ It’s this rhetoric that has contributed to making me feel ashamed in my understanding of my own heritage. My heritage was not something to be proud of, but to be pitied by the girls in the playground.

Geography classes further contributed to my confusion: I would only get the mark if I labelled Nigeria as an example of a ‘least developed country.’ What the education system did manage to do was conceal the cracks of Africa’s exploitation by the West. So, stop telling me how Africa’s ‘lack of development’ is its own fault. The idea that Africa suffers from a lack of development is flawed because it suggests there is a teleological direction that all societies must aim towards. And, you guessed it, the finish line is the West’s ‘universally’ applicable model of development.

In retrospect, it was telling to uncover the long-term detrimental effects that

▲ Narratives around Africa have often focused on it being ‘underdeveloped’

(WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/MERLYN THOMAS)

“*I would only get the mark if I labelled Nigeria a ‘least developed country’*”

the Berlin Conference had on Europe’s colonial history and their own cultural consciousness. Writing this column, it upsets me that British society taught my younger self to be ashamed of Africa’s current position when I now know that it is not Africa’s shame that I carry, but rather it is white Britain’s unprocessed colonial guilt forced onto me, a person of African heritage, to carry.

But please don’t sit too comfortably, I must remind you that this epoch is not as historical as you may think. In a society which has failed to come to terms with its colonial past, I have spent much of my time searching through endless tabs on my browser to explore the backdrop of Western imperialism. The fact that those political and economic parameters through which the West operated during the transatlantic slave trade are still maintained today, in the form of neo-colonialism, is often overlooked. What I have realised is that

it’s an identical narrative to the one that the world witnessed in the previous century. It’s just subtler, so you don’t notice. After the Cold War, many countries in Africa were reduced to crises-ridden nations. Structural Adjustment Programmes were used by the US to secure Africa’s ‘stabilisation’ whilst they extracted their natural resources. So, don’t tell me how this veneer of international humanitarian intervention is not as violent as it used to be. If anything, the subtleness of the West’s interests in our modern age poses consequences that are just as dangerous as the ones in our history textbooks.

I always wonder what, if we were more of the West’s rhetoric and terior motives, Africa’s narrative would be today?

To my younger self: I understand the frustration you feel. I am sorry that you had to feel that way, it’s not something that you need to

carry. Growing up as a young girl of Nigerian heritage, you were never given any reason by the education system or the country you live in to be proud of your heritage. It upsets me that it is only writing this now, 10 years later, that I have begun to understand why you weren’t always proud of your identity.

You will soon grow to love your heritage. You will get to tell Africa’s true narrative. You will get to tell your own narrative.

“*To my younger self: I understand the frustration you feel*”

The fragility of citizenship

Legally American, yet raised abroad, Allison O'Malley Graham considers the implications of defining home

As an American abroad, U.S. politics is something I usually try to avoid. To some, it must look like cowardice — who am I to dodge their pointed questions about the war in Iraq, or Trump's Muslim ban? It is, I'll admit, cowardice — but not the cowardice of an American refusing to acknowledge their country's shortcomings; rather, I'm afraid of being tied to a country I don't call 'home.'

Being an American born abroad and made American only through my father is a lesson in the fragility of citizenship, home, and belonging. While I'd sooner run off to fight for Australia in a second Great Emu War, many undocumented immigrants in the United States would, and do, enlist on behalf of the U.S. Yet if anything were to befall us, and we were to seek help abroad, the Australian government wouldn't lift a finger to help us. The U.S. government would not help them. If nationality and belonging are about more than the law, how is it that legal privilege can be so at odds with any sense of belonging?

I've spent my life running from an American identity, training myself to never say "y'all" and emphasising an Irish accent I didn't actually learn from my Irish mother. Born in Singapore and raised by an American father and an Irish mother, identifying as simply 'American' seems ridiculous. Sure, I have a U.S. passport, but I spent far more of my life in Chile, Australia, and Oman. 'Colour' will forever have a 'u', and football will always be played with a round ball.

Short of burning my passport and resigning myself to mind-boggling immigration lines every time I visit my American family, I can't change the fact that, regardless of my own idea of 'home', being legally American is something I can't shake. Nor can I shake the fact that this legal status shapes how others understand where I belong, let alone how I understand it. I first learned this lesson as an eight-year-old in Oman, struggling to figure out who George W. Bush was as an older student accused me of undermining peace in the Middle East. At the time, I thought the leader of my country was not the U.S. president, but the Sultan of Oman. Still, I walked away from that dress-down realising that my notion of home, and of myself, was shaky. No one would ever take me to task on Omani politics — why would they?

Nine years on, sat in class in Indonesia and watching the U.S. election results in real time (unfortunately, we didn't get to sleep through the ordeal), I

faced anger and disgust from my classmates. Rightly so. Outside, heartbroken American teachers pulled me aside and went to great lengths to explain what 'we' could do to represent our country. In the library, the news, and online, I was being asked what it meant to be an American. Scrolling through my Facebook feed that evening, I had a different question: what makes *me* American? Is citizenship alone enough to define 'home'? Unlike many Americans that day, I struggled not with the idea of Donald Trump as my president, but with the idea that any American president could be my representative.

Home, citizenship, and belonging are only becoming more complicated as the arcs we travel around the world widen. So what, then, does it mean to lay claim to a country, and to call a place 'home'? It's an idea that I obviously struggle with. During Freshers' week, countless British-born and British-raised kids confessed an envy of my upbringing; I, meanwhile, envy them. There is a continual frustration in having your sense of 'home' fail to line up with how others perceive it; with being connected to a culture you don't understand; with knowing that you owe a great deal to your passport, but wishing it reflected your identity. Isn't it laughable to call a place 'home' if I need a visa to get there? How do I explain my loyalty to a country that bears no loyalty to me?

As an American, these particular is-

“Oaths of citizenship don't erase the years that go into building a sense of home”

sues are even more difficult in light of the U.S. immigration system. It would be easy to say that law does not determine identity, but clearly that takes the role of law for granted. I struggle to understand how in the United States, I have more right to be at home there than a child brought across the border 15 years ago. There are undocumented immigrants who salute the U.S. flag with far more ease than I ever could, and sing the national anthem proudly while I struggle to remember the words. Are they somehow less American than I am? Surely that makes no sense.

It seems ungrateful to struggle so much with an American identity, knowing full well that so many others struggle to lay claim to it. And worse, that they struggle for their families, livelihoods, and safety because of it. I won't mince words: watching others sit an exam, hire lawyers, and march in the streets for the right to be 'from' or 'of' the United States makes me feel equal parts guilty and infuriated. Guilty, because my own internal struggle pales in comparison to theirs. The complaint seems ridiculous — a problem of privilege if ever there was one. But my comfort in holding an American identity will do nothing to bring them to it; our differing experiences with notions of 'American' identity and belonging only illustrate how tenuous legal claims to identity can be. It reveals flaws in the system.

More than anything, I'm infuriated by

▲ Illustration by Zoe Matt-Williams for Varsity

“I'm afraid of being tied to a country I don't call home”

this discrepancy between us. Our legal ability to 'belong', in the face of our lived experiences, is arbitrary. If Americans can claim me as their countrywoman without hesitation, there is no reason not to extend that same courtesy to so many others. I know no way of reconciling the reality of lived experience with the reality of the law.

Our ideas of belonging and home are so much larger than the law, as much as they may be influenced by it. My mother's decision to take on American citizenship wasn't driven by any sense of belonging, but by shorter immigration lines. Oaths of citizenship don't erase the years that go into building a sense of home. They cannot undo culture, heritage, or memory. Yet legal citizenship brings the privilege of claiming and being claimed by a country — especially one as powerful (for better or worse) as the United States. It legitimises.

While I can't define 'home' with any certainty, I can say that it's larger than one definition, whether legal, colloquial, or anything in-between. Law might not dictate who I cheer for in the Olympics, but it does have a say in where I belong. I'll never escape questions about Trump or Bush, or even about how American football works, and that connection to all things American will never cease to annoy me. As trapped as I may feel by this, I'm learning to accept that my passport may never reflect who I am. The law is only one part of who we are.



Opinion



Cambridge normalises destructive drinking

When self-destruction for the sake of academic success is the norm, is it really a surprise that harmful drinking is normal here?

Cecily Bateman

It's common knowledge that Britain has an alcohol problem. Despite progress being made with the NHS reporting a decrease in levels of binge drinking, this does not mean that the problem is solved, and Cambridge is not immune to the dark sides of Britain's drinking culture. Ever since last year's revelations about drinking societies, Cambridge has seen a steady stream of discussion about 'lad culture' and alcohol, and writings about the ubiquity of alcohol in social situations throughout the University. However, there has been little discussion about the existence of a culture which normalises and even romanticises a self-destructive relationship with alcohol at Cambridge.

University is accepted as a time in our lives to get drunk and go on late-night adventures which, of course, can be done safely, but this often hides real problems. If you bring these problems with you to university, they can be exacerbated not only by the easy access to alcohol, but by the undeniable existence of a constant pressure to drink here. Vomiting on every night out and losing three sets of keys in as many weeks are often accepted as the actions of the 'wild one' of

the group. And, sure, a lot of people have done these things before. But not every week. Not enough to become a habit. If someone is getting black-out drunk on every night out, multiple times a week, it is no longer a laughing matter.

It is hard to reconcile the image of drunken messiness at formal with the mainstream perception of alcoholism. Alcoholics seem to be somehow 'outside' of society — this could never be you, a member of one of the most prestigious universities in the world.

This comes down to outdated notions of class: Alcoholism is stereotyped as belonging to the poor as a means of dealing with their situation or, worse, a moral failing which results in being perennially unemployed. Not only are these stereotypes inaccurate, classist, and harmful to those implicated by them, but they harmfully contribute to the acceptance of 'middle and upper-class drinking' so prevalent at Cambridge.

Harmless as we may be conditioned to think it, what proliferates at Cambridge is 'high-functioning alcoholism', a notion inextricably tied to class; someone who maintains a 'normal life', but just has a few charming eccentricities. They

are often someone who has a 'cultured' knowledge of 'classy' alcoholic drinks, which tends to help people overlook the fact that they are still black-out drunk on a regular basis.

The conditions of a Cambridge term are equally dangerous when it comes to how we relate to alcohol. When the pressure is so high and the work so tough, the release has to be equally extreme. When you go out, there is an expectation that you go hard.

Binge drinking alcoholism is particularly common in young people, and it is this form of alcoholism to which we, with an eight week term, are vulnerable, as this creates an expectation that living at Cambridge is living life in the fast lane.

However, this relationship between Cambridge culture and alcoholism is hardly surprising. Self-destructive tendencies are the norm here, and just as it is seen as normal to engage in harmful study practices and lifestyles — pulling all-nighters and confining yourself to your room — unhealthy behaviour such as binge drinking is also accepted.

This kind of self-destruction as a way to 'excel' is also romanticised here in a

▲ Illustration by Alisa Santikarn for Varsity

way that fuses the 'high functioning alcoholic' and Cambridge's veneration of the past.

The portrait of the 'genius eccentric alcoholic' is the extreme form of this, venerated in art and literature in figures such as Hemmingway and Byron — figures who in reality lived short, miserable lives. Self-destruction is not beautiful or compelling, it is sad, it is a waste and it is boring. It is boring because it follows the same script every time, and always ends up in the same place, no matter how exciting or unique it may seem at first.

Alcoholism is not black and white. A person's life doesn't have to be falling apart to make them an alcoholic. It could be your friend that drinks alone when they're sad, or your friend that's smashed four nights a week and sleeps through their classes. To be clear, this is not the 'fun police' — it is perfectly possible to enjoy getting drunk and have nights out with no harm at all, and the majority of people do have a healthy relationship with alcohol. But equally, alcoholism is far more pervasive than we would like to admit. Paying attention and looking out for your friends will never be a bad thing.

“
When the pressure is so high and the work so tough, the release has to be equally extreme
”

CUSU Council's voting members are not elected to be political; this needs to change

The way in which JCR presidents are elected, without Council being a priority, limits their ability to be political

Connor MacDonald

As representative organisations come, CUSU Council is certainly an oddity. While its members (JCR presidents and vice presidents) are 'directly elected' to become voting members of Council when they are elected to their JCR, this is rarely understood to be a significant part of their mandate. Speaking as a former JCR President, I can count on one hand the number of students who kept up to date on the goings on in Mill Lane, and the students who actually ever cared enough to consistently raise issues with me numbered in the zeros.

Considering the fact that CUSU is meant to be the voice of students, the primary body by which we make our voices known, my experience of student interest in CUSU Council is disparaging. What's more, amidst the awful events of the past few weeks, I couldn't shake the uncomfortable feeling that it often seems as if the national press is more interested in the decisions made at Council than members of the student body, regardless of the motivations behind that interest.

CUSU will remain an irrelevant body

“There clearly are students who care about CUSU, but they are often not the students who run the JCRs”

so long as the people elected to it are elected by accident. I don't mean this in a literal sense, but rather that I have yet to meet, and I proclaim that I will never meet, a JCR or MCR president who was elected primarily (or even secondarily) to attend CUSU Council once every two weeks. On a ranked list of importance encompassing all the activities a JCR has to perform, attending CUSU Council would have a hard time cracking the top 10.

The fact is JCR presidents are usually too busy working on College policy that they hardly have time to set policy for the University as a whole. Even if they *did* take an inordinate interest in the workings of CUSU (and the list of JCR presidents that do can yearly be counted on one hand), there simply isn't time to scrutinise policies properly. I don't know how many weeks I've come to Council having not actually read the motions until the very day, and by that point it is both rude and counter-productive to offer amendments. This difficulty is particularly acute when it comes to the liberation campaigns and Sabbatical Officers, all of which are required to re-

port to CUSU Council. Most of the issues they deal with are rather sensitive and technical insofar as they are trying to enact pretty substantial policy change. This means that it would be difficult to give proper scrutiny at the best of times, leaving CUSU Council to ask inane questions and wave through policy proposed by officers - and that is when we have anything to debate at all.

It isn't just because of lack of time or diligence either. JCR presidents are often resolutely apolitical, precisely because they have a mandate to represent students across 'ideological' divides. Lacking any sort of 'CUSU' platform, JCR representatives will leave any overtly political questions to sabbs.

Similarly, the recent discussion over supporting a second Brexit referendum was tabled, because JCRs were worried about taking an 'overtly political' position without consulting members, although it was obvious to everyone the consultations would be perfunctory and attract the voices already at CUSU Council supporting or opposing the motion. Indeed, it is no accident that six of the seven speakers on the motion at Council

were members of political societies, with the most vocal JCR representatives falling into this category.

As absurd as last Council was, though, it also shows a path out of the rut. There are clearly students who do care about CUSU, but they are often not those who run the JCRs. To actually have an active Council, we should be electing people who want to be there - and they should be directly elected by the students.

I see no reason why we can't turn Council into some kind of quasi-parliament - with slates and platforms which offer varying positions on a range of issues. Using CUSU's complex software, we could have STV elections, elect about 20-30 people to CUSU council, and actually offer definite alternatives to student voters. While the turnout would be low (no more than 20-30 percent like all CUSU elections), at least it would be more intentional than the current elections for CUSU reps. There should be elections where CUSU Council never even gets a mention.

If we want to make CUSU Council relevant, direct elections are the way to go.




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Opinion

Do we have a right to complain about tourism in Cambridge?



◀ Punts on the River Cam during the peak tourist season (ARDFERN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

As students, some question how different our impact on the city is from that of tourists

Lucy Fairweather

Studying in Cambridge can feel a bit like a fairy tale, particularly if you live in one of the older colleges. Castle-like spires, ancient buildings, cobbles, people wandering about in gowns: the centre of Cambridge still feels steeped in the past. One thing that definitely brings you back into the present, however, are tourists.

Whether it be the microphones and headsets used by tour guides, or the cameras and phones snapping pictures of the beautiful buildings in which we are lucky enough to live, work and study, Cambridge is visibly a tourist hotspot. The town, which has a population of 124,000, is visited by over 7 million tourists every year; and it's a number that seems only set to rise. The congestion and inconvenience caused by large tour groups can certainly burst the fairy-tale illusion and bring you back to reality.

To complain about tourists as a student can risk sounding gratuitous. After all, many on the 'town' side of the Cambridge divide find students objectionable for many of the same reasons as they do tourists: increasing prices for locals, disrespecting residents, creating mess and noise. All the complaints of market distortion and rent increases that come with holiday property rental services can equally be applied to student accommodation and other University developments, and it is not difficult to spot the parallels between the disruption caused by tourists littering and the remnants of student nights out or trashing after exams. Students moaning about tourists changing the character of Cambridge can easily have their gripes thrown back at them.

However, Cambridge is also meant to be our home for at least half the year,

and the worst excesses of tourism can stop this being the case. Colleges are understandably attractive to visitors, but when tourists go into private areas, such as staircases and even students' bedrooms, this can make Cambridge feel more like a zoo than a place of higher education. Such cases led to Clare, for the first time in 700 years, closing college grounds to the public after repeated cases of intrusion. While the inaccessibility of colleges, and by extension a large proportion of central Cambridge, to the public is a frequently cited issue in the 'town vs gown' debate, the fact that colleges want to protect their students is understandable. Having pictures taken of you, being stopped repeatedly by punt touts, having private spaces invaded ... studying in such a beautiful and historic setting has its downsides.

Like many of the issues facing Cam-

“
To enjoy the benefits Cambridge confers on its graduates, being miped on King's Parade seems a small price to pay
”

bridge today, to a certain extent this problem boils down to the question of 'who is Cambridge for?' While it is easy to moan about tourists as a hindrance to students, it is important to recognise that as members of the University, we are to a large extent shielded from some of the worst excesses.

For many Cambridge students, living near the centre of Cambridge means that even owning a bike is not necessary for some, and we are far less impacted by the traffic caused by coaches and other vehicles (which is already some of the worst in the UK). Campaigns to cut the rent notwithstanding, for many Cambridge undergrads, college subsidised rents for all three years of a degree means that students are not exposed to Cambridge's rents, which again are some of the most unaffordable in the country.

Cambridge students also tacitly benefit from the presence of tourists. Entrance to visit colleges can constitute a substantial source of revenue for many central colleges, with King's charging £9 for adult entry.

Cambridge has a world-renowned reputation, and to enjoy the benefits this confers on its graduates, being impeded on King's Parade or being asked if you want to go on a punt tour seems a small price to pay. Finding the right balance between residents, students and tourists is always going to be tricky, but all three are crucial for the city's success. At the moment, we would do well to remember that it is Cambridge's residents that seem to be sacrificing the most.

Don't feel guilty about acknowledging Cambridge's downsides

Lucky as we are to be here, recognising the difficulties of Cambridge is necessary to our wellbeing

Tom Cleere

The home of Newton, Keynes, and Stephen Fry, it goes without saying that Cambridge is a prestigious university. As well as being one of the best universities in the world, our history sets our University apart – arguably, so does the difficulty of getting in. In the 2017 admissions cycle, only 27.8% of applicants received an offer, with 33% of these not meeting the conditions of their offer. A BA or MA from Cambridge undoubtedly looks good on a CV and opens up many doors. On a personal level, with my mother's family being poor immigrants to Australia and my father having never attended university, I certainly felt like I had “made it” when I was accepted.

With the weight of these facts and personal experiences on our shoulders, the assumption is that we should step up, compete, and certainly not bemoan our fortune. The notion that studying here is a blessing is something that we're reminded about almost constantly, both from our peers within the University and

those outside of it. It's hard to evade the laconic chorus of “wow, that's impressive” (or, alternatively, “what a nerd”) when talking about attending Cambridge.

Mythologising the University in such a way is a dangerous thing to do. Prospectuses don't mention the brutal workload. To consult the memoirs of famous Cambridge alumni, such as Clive James, is to read about Bacchanalias of theatre shows, spirited romantic adventure and honing one's prosody. They don't mention the culture of intense competition among the students. And they certainly don't mention the prevalence of stress-related mental health issues. Actual life at Cambridge is often ignored for its supposed upsides, and even those who love it here have to acknowledge that everything isn't always rosy.

But it can often be difficult to feel that it is okay to ask for help. As someone who ended up intermitting at the beginning of this year due to a pretty severe bout of depression, I certainly felt this

“
Complaining is not an admission of weakness, or of defeat, or a lack of gratitude
”

way. The fact that their son was studying at Cambridge was a source of pride for my parents, and I didn't want to let them down. I was pooled, and I didn't want to disappoint my Director of Studies who had specifically chosen me. There was the difficulty of knowing that everyone else was constantly battling with the same deadlines, which can often lead us to invalidate our own genuine anxieties and exhaustion. *I'm not the only person to feel immense pressure and stress — Why can't I keep up?*

All these feelings are obviously unhealthy. It is perfectly valid to acknowledge your privileged position as a student at Cambridge while also acknowledging that the culture here has many issues. The amount of work we cram into an eight-week term is ridiculous. University is supposed to be a time where, while studying for a degree, you are able to really discover who you are as a person and form connections that will last you a lifetime. You can't do that if you are spending 14 hours in the library every

day of the week.

Some people may argue, fairly reasonably, that this is something we signed up for. No one forced us to come here. Of course Cambridge was going to be difficult. One can't expect to attend an elite university and have it be a cakewalk. Even as that is true, it does not mean that we should just accept every unreasonable thing that is expected of us. Just like everything else, Cambridge is not perfect. It is not right to get “yeah, but you go to Cambridge” as a response to valid criticisms of our experience. Over my time at Cambridge, I have realised that complaining is not an admission of weakness, of defeat, or of a lack of gratitude.

Cambridge is a special place and studying here is an opportunity to be seized. But you should not let it get in the way of your own wellbeing. If you're struggling, you shouldn't just accept it. Talk about it with your friends, your supervisors, and your DoS and tutor. In other words: complain. It's good for you.

Cambridge still feels alienating for working-class students — just look at the Varsity Ski trip

What does it say about our University that fitting in here often means heavy and carefree spending?

Charley Barnard & Dominic Caddick

We have an access problem. 80% of Cambridge students come from the most advantaged areas in the country, while only 11.5% come from the least. While much is being done by access initiatives to get more working-class people into the University, for the students who are currently here, the culture surrounding money, spending and class can be hugely alienating.

The way in which the Varsity Ski trip is discussed and promoted at Cambridge is the perfect example of a wider Cambridge culture which assumes wealth and alienates and excludes those who don't have it. From the moment we get our offer, Varsity Ski reps are telling us all about about this incredible opportunity.

I remember the trip being discussed on my freshers' group chat before I had even arrived: "Who's going on the ski trip?!" someone asked excitedly. Despite never having had an interest in skiing, I felt that it was expected of me to go, that I was expected to have the same sort of wealth as 80% of the students here. "I'm considering it!" I found myself typing. I knew I'd never be able to consider it in a hundred years.

Money seems to be spent readily on events for which the details haven't even been confirmed: £15 for a formal with an unknown menu, £150 for a May Ball with a line-up yet to be released. If working-class students want to feel that they are getting the full Cambridge experience, they have to adopt a middle and upper class way of living – this isn't always possible when it equates to a middle and upper class way of spending.

Working-class students must play social catch up, and the cost to do so more often than not comes out of our own pockets rather than those of our parents. "Only £379!" cry the Varsity freshers reps who, whether consciously or not, are appealing to the need to fit in no doubt already felt by freshers. "It's the cheapest ski trip you'll find!" But let's be realistic: Varsity Ski is only cheap if you've got all the equipment and have been skiing before, a privilege only afforded to those from advantaged backgrounds whose parents have been able to pay for this. For those without the kit and experience, you're looking at a figure which exceeds £600, the burden of which falls entirely on us.

But, thanks to Cambridge's generous bursary system, students from disad-

vantaged backgrounds can afford everything that Cambridge has to offer. At least, that's what we are told by many of our peers time and time again as they demonstrate their complete lack of understanding of what life is like for us. Yes, we get more bursaries, but the £3500 we get from the University each year isn't just fun money. It is spent on groceries, the rent some of us have to pay over the breaks because we have no home to go back to. People on the bursaries send money back to their families because their parents are struggling to make ends meet, or save the extra few hundred to pay for an eventual masters that parents will never be able to fund.

It goes without saying that choosing to go on Varsity Ski does not make you a bad person. But the more privileged among us need to become more conscious of the fact that, as unbelievable as it may seem, some students are made to feel even more excluded by its existence. Sat in a lecture the day the Varsity Ski tickets were released and overhearing conversations about the trip made me feel like the only working class person in the room. It was incredibly alienating.

"Are you going on Varsity Ski?" One girl asked.

"If working-class students want to feel they are getting the full Cambridge experience, they have to adopt a middle-class way of spending"

"Yes, but they'd run out of tier one by the time I got online, so I had to go for standard tier instead," another replied.

"Oh no!"

"It's okay, it'll be an adventure!"

"Does that mean you'll have to get the coach?"

"Yeah."

"Wow, brave girl."

Some of us live our lives in the metaphorical standard tiers. Tier one is not the norm, but to the majority of people I live and study with, it is. What does it say about our University that students do not recognise their privilege enough to see that being able to afford to go on a ski trip puts them in among the very few for whom this is even an option? That having to downgrade to a coach from a plane is not even slightly brave? If writing this article achieves anything, I want it to make students aware that they share their university with people from vastly different backgrounds, but I fear that at present we are a long way from even a simple, reflective recognition of privilege. This problem will not be solved until access issues are solved, and there is equal representation of students from all backgrounds. This University needs to be as much ours as it is theirs.



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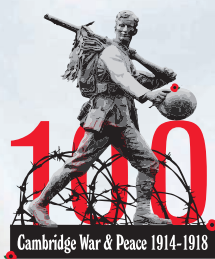
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Illustration by Ben Brown

Learning lessons from loss

Holly Platt-Higgins Lifestyle Columnist

The majority of us are incredibly lucky when we come to university, because for the past eighteen or nineteen years, life has been pretty kind to us. We're likely in good health and yet to suffer any kind of serious trauma; the world looks like a rather nice place. Because university is such an indulgent time, a time for you to meet new people and fall in love and learn new things and figure out who you are, you slightly forget the rest of the world is still there. That you aren't actually the centre of the universe comes as something of a surprise. While you're growing up, some of the most important people in your life are getting old. The next ten years for all of us looks like jobs, housewarmings, weddings and babies. But for our parents and their parents, the next ten years don't look quite the same. Most of us won't leave university without having lost someone truly, deeply important to us.

My grandma died over the summer. She had cancer and she held on to life for far longer than any doctor expected. She was incredible. Even when she was in hospital she insisted on wearing huge black Chanel glasses and cared only about having her lipstick within reach at all times. She was scathingly rude about the other patients on the ward. She

recounted stories and laughed and was always jolly whenever my siblings and I were there. She continued to ensure that plants were bought for her window boxes and that my mum ordered her skirts which she'd recently seen in magazines from M&S. I admired her more than anyone else I'd ever known.



▲ Even when she was in hospital she insisted on wearing huge black Chanel glasses (HOLLY PLATT-HIGGINS)

One of the things you don't get taught in school, along with how to do your taxes, is how to deal with the people you love dying. It's funny - I think when she first died, I just pretended she hadn't. And I suppose that was far easier to do when I was at home and surrounded by family, who needed me but

who were also experiencing the same thing as me.

Coming back to Cambridge, I didn't know how to fit grief into my timetable for term. So I just tried to ignore it. Yet I noticed the other day that every single background photo I use is of her. I see her on my phone and lap-

top screen at least 20 times a day. Subconsciously, I clearly hadn't finished processing the situation. Cambridge terms always move at an incredibly fast pace and most days you barely have time to blink. I seem to spend my entire life writing lists and frantically trying to cross things off as quickly as possible. But there are some things which you can't really consider fin-

ished, or cross off a list, no matter how much else you have going on. It is somewhat ironic that for a lot of us, our busiest years at Cambridge will coincide with some of our biggest emotional undertakings. (The black-comedy of my spending this term studying tragedy, exploring the capacity death and bereavement

has to affect people, has not been lost on me.) And while it is impractical to wallow and let certain emotions consume you or your time here, it is also deeply unwise to ignore their presence in your life.

Cambridge will teach you a lot of things and the world will teach you far more difficult things. But, although we often forget it, these two places are not mutually exclusive. As we travel through our degrees, slowly beginning to encroach on the real world, the real world and those real problems are also beginning to move closer to us. Obviously, there's nothing we can do to prevent this. It is however worth making a conscious effort to create a space for reality, the things affecting you on a personal level, to comfortably exist within your academic life. Even in third year, it is very easy to forget that Cambridge is not actually a bubble. You cannot separate your home life out from your life here and I don't think trying to would be a good idea. All you can do is try to make the two coexist in a functional way.

So, maybe instead of asking people how their dissertation is going or if they're heading to that event on Thursday night, we should be asking people - asking ourselves - if we're okay. Because, although it's extremely easy to forget here, keeping track of your emotional status is far more important than keeping track of your supervision timetable or your academic progression. The world isn't going to stop for you, but just occasionally, it's very important that we stop and give ourselves time to consider our worlds outside Cambridge.

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3.9.2018

by Edan Umrigar

And I think I might miss you —
When your warm seeds,
That gather together all that which
has come before —
Germinate and ruminate
Filling out the bellowed form of a
once hollow husk

Steeped now in a gentle bask
(‘That feels comfortably warm’)
Curious as to how that creeping
feeling could have come over
And with such short notice
(‘Surely it wasn’t invited?’)

Far too late now to question
Those rugged impressions that bear
so little importance
Despite their odd imposition.
Perhaps this repose may settle well
Amongst this cooling air.

► Experiencing love in Autumn in a
digital age (NICK COLLIN)



The Struggle with the Angel

by William Hall

rise up

22

JACOB rose up that night: saying
Do thou bless me?
Thy name shall be on more Jakob,
though as He passed over Penuel

gather together

22

Do thou; Jacob, the part
that night much machoire to inflame
Tonsilling thou gum,
And responsive to the waning season:
16 Combat between the villain & hero

send over

23

remain alone

23

Rise up, Jacob, from the angel
Wherefore is it thou dost ask after her name?
The glitter is in the beard
be Preserved:
He had a good meal

22

pass over

Eat not of the sinew which shrank,
He touched the hollow (Authorized Version)
Text back
(And all of us watching)
Back

(second the struggle in red, seasonal foreground)
While our bonnets clang in the spectacle
And be called by my name,
ISRAEL

Just how good is Sally Rooney?

Nick Harris unpacks the latest from Sally Rooney, a social novelist for our century

Writing for and about university populations just like Cambridge's, the almost saccharine applause for Sally Rooney's first two novels has been extraordinary. *Conversations with Friends*, her debut, was nominated for a platter of awards, and was followed by *Normal People*, which was preemptively longlisted for the Booker before release. Both explore the same spheres of interest, concerning themselves with the nicotine-stained and wine-swilling world of Ireland's top university and Rooney's *alma mater*, Trinity College in Dublin. *Normal People* builds a fairly simple *Bildungsroman*, tracking the sixth-form and then university lives of two friends Connell and Marianne. The fundamental power comes from the bare honesty of Rooney's incisive commentary about young life in the modern world.

Rooney's four young protagonists occupy a world which is peculiarly recognisable, espe-

cially using Cambridge as a reference point. Strident but callow students are heard to declare 'I'm never going to get a job', the campus population 'have identical accents and carry the same size Macbook under their arm' and the sixth-formers dance to Kanye West in a 'cavernous, vaguely purple' club.

Rooney's style, described as 'spare and unelaborate' in *The Times*, is integral to how clearly this message is delivered. Her prose is idiosyncratically unadorned, reading generally as a confident series of statements such as 'Marianne nods. He rubs at his neck' and 'She felt frustrated. Her face and hands were hot'. The effect is a clear-eyed candour, perfect for the weighty emotional subjects which Rooney tackles.

At times though it can feel stolid and even ascetic, particularly given that these are novels about the internal meanderings of adolescents. For instance, when reading that 'her body was all soft and white like flour

dough' (from a male narrator), one wonders whether the relentlessly honest solemnity which surrounds this distinctly unerotic sentence is appropriate for the moment of sexual *chaleur* it describes. If you are expecting a female Alexander Portnoy you will be sadly disappointed. Rooney's acclamation by her publisher as the 'Salinger for the Snapchat generation' by no means includes Caulfield's juvenile twanging voice.

This is only minor however, and the style, plain and direct thought it might be, is very much distinctive and hers. It is far more gratifying to read someone who has such a capable grasp of the 21st century world for students and young people, comparable perhaps to reading the social comedies of Kingsley Amis as a youngster in the 1950s. In her insights, description and occasional humour, Rooney has confirmed herself as the foremost chronicler of what she herself calls 'that weird age where life can change a lot from small decisions'.

My first experience in Cambridge theatre still leaves me shaking

An anonymous student recounts their experience portraying abuse for a play in Cambridge

Content notice: discussion of abuse and violence

I was slightly later on the Cambridge theatre scene than a lot of people, auditioning for my first play near to the end of Lent term, and having started to realise how stressful Cambridge could be I thought a play could be a nice escape. I still remember emailing my old drama teacher to tell her that I'd been successful in the audition, although I did have one slight reservation – which was that I hadn't been offered the part I'd auditioned for, and in fact had been offered the one part I didn't want – a victim of abuse.

It's worth noting that while I'm writing this I am feeling a completely unanticipated wave of anxiety – given the time that has passed, it says a lot about the effect the whole thing had on me. Anyway, I trusted that the director would be aware that a role that dealt so heavily with abuse had the potential to trigger the actor doing it, and so decided to take the role.

Subsequent character chats I've had have been pretty short – but this one lasted about an hour and was in a rehearsal room. In it, I hinted as best I could that I was uncomfortable with the theme of abuse. I wouldn't avoid it altogether and would still do the best performance I could – but as someone with a history of abuse, I didn't want to spend the best part of three weeks replaying that. My hints went unnoticed – or were ignored, and I was pushed to talk about things that I haven't spoken to my closest friends about. It was about a week into the rehearsal process that I found out another cast member had a very similar experience.

Realistically, I should have quit at this point – and I did seriously consider it. But as a fresher with a genuine passion for theatre I felt it would really be a waste of an opportunity to drop out. Besides – at that point I was unwilling to admit to myself the amount that this process was affecting my mental health. I had undergone a large amount of therapy and considered myself “recovered” – admitting that I couldn't stick out one play seemed like I wasn't as okay as I thought.

It's worth remembering that this was my first play also – I thought this was the norm for Cambridge, and knew that other plays had triggering content. If the other actors could deal with it, then I reasoned I should be able to.

I was either unable or unwilling to make

the connection that within a week of this play beginning rehearsals I had signed up to sessions with the college counsellor.

Later experiences of theatre proved to me that I am, actually, very capable of dealing with triggering content – if the director is sensitive to it also. But the rehearsal process followed on in tone from the character chat – and for some reason it was deemed necessary to ask a predominantly fresher cast to method act the roles. I don't know why I never thought about how utterly inappropriate it was to ask me to method act things that were triggering – but I didn't. I did what I was told, and I participated in several half hour to hour long improvs to help “get into character”.

I felt the rise of anxiety and shame that I associated with my real life – and I got praised for how it improved my acting. It's something difficult to fully get across – but there are certain songs that I struggle to listen to because they remind me of certain experiences. Being asked to go through the motions of someone who has been abused – to act out what hadn't been an act became a regular element of my week. At times when I withdrew and attempted to detach from the process I, along with other cast members, got told that it seemed I was “faking it”.

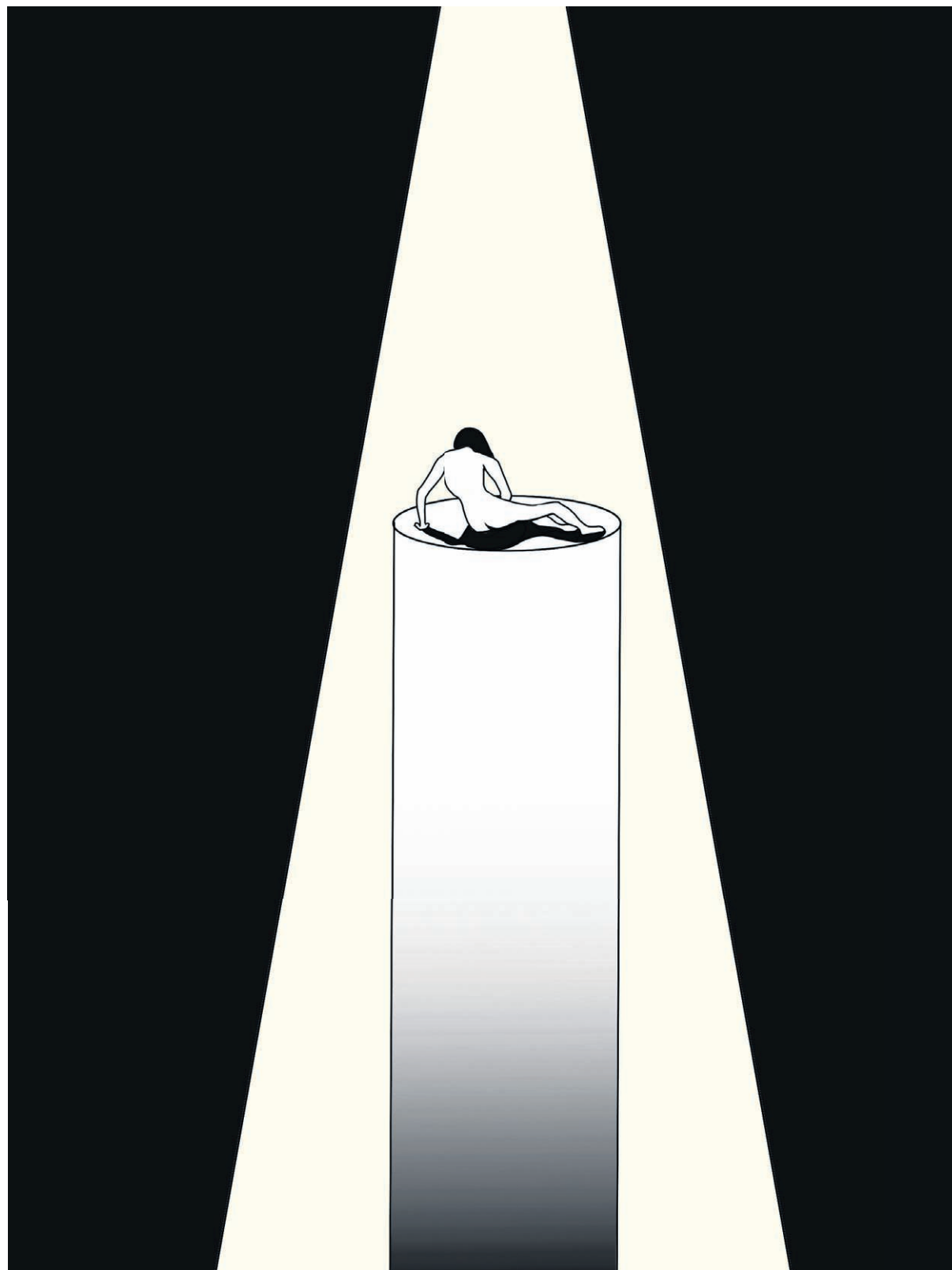
I have done other plays with similarly triggering content – because there's never been any idea that I would have to method or improv the role, I've been able to detach and understand that I am not my character. Here, that wasn't an option. I had rehearsals after which I would go home and have a panic attack, rehearsals that left me with trauma memories so strong that I was unable to use any of the skills I had learnt in therapy.

None of this was unnoticeable to the director. I was clearly uncomfortable at points – other cast members would ask if I was okay. We would improv scenes where the abuse of my character was key, and from that emo-

tionally exhausting point we would go into a scripted scene.

Yes I could have and should have spoken out explicitly. My friends often comment on the fact that I didn't. But many of you reading this will remember how it felt to do your first play. The fear that you'd mess it up.

The belief that the director was some kind of genuine authority, rather than just another student muddling through. The reliance on the director to show you what Cambridge theatre was like. Those things meant that I



▲ Illustration by Lisha Zhong for Varsity

was perhaps too trusting – I believed that my reaction was due to my own weakness.

I only did a few plays after that – I avoid most with triggering content now just in case it happens again.

I did enjoy parts of it – I made great friends with the rest of the cast, and acting will always have pleasure for me. But I shouldn't be shaking as I recall the experience of my first play at Cambridge.

Walking the college catwalk: King's edition

Sophie Weinmann talks to two students at King's about how Cambridge has shaped their style

As many of us can attest to, cycling in too tight pants or running from lecture to lecture in uncomfortable shoes can seriously spoil your whole day. On that note, King's students Abdullah and Zareen both agree that comfort is most definitely key when it comes to Cambridge fashion.

Abdullah tells me about his grandfather's jacket that has proven to be invaluable during busy Cambridge days. Providing much needed warmth now that the temperatures have dropped without being a big puffer jacket, makes it ideal to take to lectures and not have to worry about carrying around. Abdullah makes sure that what he wears is versatile enough to deal with days where you are sitting in a boiling lecture room one minute and cycling in the freezing cold the next.

Describing her overall style as “boxy, kind of baggy and tomboy-ish” - comfort is also one of the key considerations for Zareen when it comes to deciding on her outfit of the day.

“On a day to day basis what I wear is mainly streetstyle - something sporty. That's just

what I'm comfortable in and what reflects my personality. For the most part, I'm quite easy going, quite chill and I don't feel comfortable in a place unless I dress like that.”

For Zareen, fashion is above all a way of showing your personality and expressing yourself creatively in a way that makes you feel like the best version of yourself.

“I think Cambridge is a good place to express yourself ... uni in general is a good place to express your creativity, particularly if you're coming from a background where you might not be very free to do so. While it's not a problem in my immediate family or when I step out into the wider world, sometimes not dressing very feminine can be out of the norm in terms of my culture and background. So coming to Cambridge where I am fairly free to define the parameters of my own personality and style and how those things interconnect is freeing and I think that would be the case for most other people.”

Discussing her sources of inspiration, Zareen describes how her style includes impressions from the familiar streets of London, her home country Sierra Leone and travels to new cities.

“I'd say I'm inspired by London Streetstyle. So I grew up in Southeast London, and I definitely appreciate a good tracksuit - I think they go a bit underappreciated - and just gen-

erally that whole aesthetic, I really appreciate. I also went to Japan this summer and if there's one thing I took from Japanese streetstyle it's these t-shirts with longer style sleeves; really



▲ Zareen Roy-Macauley in King's

(SOPHIE WEINMANN)

basic, but I've kind of been obsessed with them since then. I'm from West Africa, Sierra Leone, and I have a lot of Ankara prints that I fit into streetstyle which I think reflects the combination of me, of London and Sierra Leone”

For Abdullah, a big part of fashion is individuality and making sure your personal taste shines through. Shoes, he says, often goes underappreciated and underused in terms of adding an individual touch to outfits. “It seems as though people tend to be less innovative and stay in their comfort zone a bit more when it comes to shoes.”

Reflecting on how Cambridge has influenced his relationship to fashion, Abdullah recounts how he has started to be more conscious about his choices in terms of fast fashion and high-street brands versus ethical fashion.

I think that's definitely something I focus on more now. Personally, I've also had the experience that in Geneva and Pakistan there's less of a focus on big chains like Zara or Topshop.

So you rely on brands like that less and look for other ways to create your style, especially when you have a less busy schedule at home and more time to focus on things like that.”

Searching for Ingmar Bergman

Madeleine Pulman-Jones

Searching is at the heart of filmmaking - searching for locations, the right words and images. However, perhaps the one thing that filmmakers need not search for, is their influences. Filmmakers often influence each other almost imperceptibly, with images creeping from one cinematic universe into another.

In her documentary *Searching for Ingmar Bergman* (2018), a portrait of the great film master through interviews with his devotees, Margarethe von Trotta claims that she never “deliberately” quotes from Bergman in her films - that his influence just finds its way into her work almost subconsciously. Undoubtedly, Bergman is one of the most quoted and impersonated filmmakers in cinema history. His films, which include *Persona* (1966), *Fanny and Alexander* (1982), *Cries and Whispers* (1972), and *The Seventh Seal* (1957), also shown at the Cambridge Film Festival, are among the most celebrated in film history. There are Woody Allen's shameless New York translations of Bergman's Swedish melodramas, there is Olivier Assayas' nod to *Persona* in *Clouds of Sils Maria* (2014), there is even Tarkovsky's *The*

Sacrifice (1986) which he shot with Bergman's cameraman Sven Nykvist. Somewhat disappointingly, Von Trotta's portrait of Bergman seems to suffer from the very Bergman poster syndrome she claims to avoid.

An often touching and perceptive snapshot of the Swedish master through the people who knew and admired him, *Searching for Ingmar Bergman* ultimately lacks the dynamism of the subject it depicts. Von Trotta, who was the only woman to make it onto Bergman's famous list of favourite films with *The German Sisters* (1981), travels around Europe “searching” for the *essence* of Bergman. On her cinematic scavenger-hunt, Von Trotta meets and talks to filmmakers such as Carlos Saura, Olivier Assayas, Mia Hansen-Løve, and Ruben Östlund, as well as eternal Bergman muse, Liv Ullman. These interviews are loosely woven together with Bergman-esque sequences shot specifically for the film, most of which feature a little boy sitting in Bergman's local church in Stockholm, or Von Trotta posing on Fårö, the iconic island where Bergman shot most of his films.

The film only really comes up for air from film-chat for a couple of interviews with Bergman's relatives, namely his son Daniel Bergman and his grandson, who characterise the filmmaker as by turns obsessive, control-

ling, and beguiling. Daniel bitterly relates how Bergman used pregnancy as a way of controlling his love-interests, and how he finds it impossible to regard him as a father figure, referring to Bergman throughout as “Ingmar.” Even when taken in context with Bergman's grandson's anecdotes of watching “only the action sequences” from *Pearl Harbour* (2001) with Bergman in his cinema on long Sunday afternoons, the underlying resentment and hurt left in the wake of Bergman's masterpieces pervades the film. When Mia Hansen-Løve describes the ghostly presences she felt on Fårö, where she recently shot a film, one can't help but think of the emotional ghosts Bergman himself must have left behind. Although the documentary never fully finds its feet cinematically, the insights shared by Bergman's colleagues and enthusiasts are always insightful and often humorous. From stories of Bergman's stresses and strains from his script girl, to insights on his cinematic vision from his wife and muse Liv Ullman, Von Trotta leaves no stone unturned in her search for the auteur. I have to admit to feeling a sense of guilt at having decided to review this documentary for the Cambridge Film Festival. As I climbed up the stairs to Screen 1 at the Picturehouse on Friday, I saw posters for a retrospective of silent woman filmmaker Lois Weber, and asked myself whether we really

needed any more films or writing about Bergman, by many accounts a narcissistic, emotionally abusive auteur. But like Bergman's own films, Von Trotta's *Searching for Ingmar Bergman* reminded me once again of the magic of Bergman - of how important it is to appreciate Bergman's genius while problematising his behaviour. Olivier Assayas told the most insightful story about Bergman. When he first met Bergman, Assayas asked him whether he believed in the supernatural, reminding him of a scene where a magician hides two children in a trunk, and when he opens it again they have disappeared, turning up in a different trunk on the top floor of the house. Bergman replied to this. “I am an old, experienced filmmaker. If I decide the children disappear from the trunk, they disappear.” We should all give up the search for Bergman - like the children in the trunk, the more we look for him, the more likely he is to magic himself away.

► A still from Berman's *Persona*
(AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PICTURES)





Music through the lens

Music is about so much more than the sound - it's an emotional experience. Several students share the gigs that have impacted them, and how they captured it through an iPhone lens.

A crowd nervously awaiting a stage-dive; an eye blinded by strobe lighting; a guitar lying in pieces. These may be fleeting moments in the dramatic whirlwind of a concert, but with just one hasty snap from a smartphone they are immortalised. The protests against the taking of pictures at gigs today are numerous, and in a variety of ways justified. But as the following demonstrates, one image has the potential to capture an instance that may otherwise fade for us.

Amber Run
Noella Chye

I first saw Amber Run in London before I came to university. I discovered them a few years ago when I wasn't in the best place; years later, their music continues to speak to me in a way that no one else's does. One moment of their gig in Cambridge stands out above all others. I took a picture because I didn't want to forget it. Everything was bright,

loud, red, and all-consuming. For a split second I forgot where I was, who I was.

Eurovision song contest

Alex Thomas

Eurovision is a spectacularly fun evening, not least when controversy strikes around a stage invader ranting about the UK media during our poor entry's performance. There was a palpable sense of congratulation among the audience in Lisbon once she had finished her song, unphased by the bizarre interruption. The fans were far more vocal in their dislike of Russia and Serbia, with the scorers forced to wait until their grumbling had died down before they could deliver their verdicts. It was certainly a night of unforgettable entertainment, with all the strange and unique trap-pings which Eurovision is famous for.

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

Miles Ricketts

Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' 40th an-

► **Amber Run's music continues to speak to me**

(NOELLA CHYE)

► **Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' 40th anniversary show in Hyde Park**

(MILES RICKETTS)



► **The Japanese House on stage in Camden**

(ALICE FRENCH)

◀ **In Leicester, Leicester City goals would be celebrated with the chorus of Kasabian's Fire**

(VIVIENNE HO-
PLEY-JONES)



niversary show in Hyde Park last year was naturally going to be special. Having waited impatiently for years to see Tom, a true hero of mine, I was perhaps alone in greeting the airing of rare album tracks like old friends. But the moment that brought 65,000 strangers together was Tom introducing who he and the Heartbreakers had always considered “the girl in our band”, Stevie Nicks. ‘Stop Draggin’ My Heart Around’ was a genuinely affecting performance that has taken on a real significance for me. As that concert was Tom’s final show in the UK before he passed away last October, the image is an emotional and yet strangely comforting one. Barely a week into my time at Cambridge, blasting out ‘You Wreck Me’ in honour of Tom was the first of many times over the year my neighbour (a fatigued fourth-year) would thump the wall violently and demand for the music to be turned down. On this occasion, the answer was an emphatic ‘no’.

Bilderbuch

Anna Mochar

Seeing the Austrian band Bilderbuch was a bittersweet evening, as the concert was a brief homecoming after three months spent working abroad. Seeing everyone again, if only for a short time — and going to see a band which had connected me to my friends back home while I was gone — was happy and sad all at once. Overall, this concert sticks out in my memory as a point at which everything seemed to be gradually falling into place: I was preparing to go up to Cambridge that autumn, my friends were all settled in Vienna, and summer was just around the corner.

The Japanese House

Alice French

This is a picture I took at The Japanese

House’s gig at KOKO in Camden in May last year. It has probably become my favourite gig ever, not just because Amber is such a stunning performer (and her music is amazing), but because it took place just a week before my second year exams started, and was a welcome escape from the madness of Cambridge exam term.

Kasabian

Vivienne Hopley-Jones

I first saw Kasabian live when I was 16. They performed on the large park in the centre of Leicester, transforming the grassy plane that we’d walk across on the way to college, work or town into an electric space that lives in my memory outside of the familiarity of the gig’s location.

The tragic events of the last week have left me thinking about my home city more than ever. We grew up on the rough lyrics of Kasabian, on the opening chords of LSF and Fire. My dad used to take us to watch Leicester City play in the third tier, when the team was at its lowest. Every solitary goal scored would be celebrated with the chorus of Fire. Seeing them again following Leicester’s Premier League victory in 2016 was unlike anything I have experienced: the air was thick and palpable with emotion.

Leicester is a beautiful, multicultural city that brims with life. This gig will always remind me of that: it encapsulates my childhood within the temporal borders of that park.

The sense of unity I know Leicester will share following the loss of Vichai Srivadhanaprabha — someone who contributed more than anyone to the uniting and rebirth of our city — will be as thick and strong and binding as it was in the summer of 2016. The summer of the underdog.



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Science

As an autistic woman, I have been overlooked and understudied

Ella Catherall writes about being an autistic woman in Cambridge and the lack of representation of her experiences in research and the popular perception

From TV shows to books to movies, more and more autistic characters are being introduced into popular narratives. While this increased representation is good, one issue is that almost all fictional characters with autism are male. Some argue that this reflects a real-life pattern — after all, four times more men than women are diagnosed with autism. The idea that autism is a “boy’s issue”, is, however, a serious misconception: there are many women with autism.

I am one of them. When my parents told me that they thought I might be autistic, everything made sense. Suddenly, I didn’t feel so insecure about my interactions with other people, or the fact that I cried a lot in class. I now want to raise awareness of the fact that women can be autistic, too, in the hopes that this may encourage more women to embrace this part of their identity: something I have found to be a truly liberating experience.

12% of Cambridge students are on the spectrum, compared to only 2 to 3% in the general population. At Cambridge, I met Maia, Lillian and Kiki — first year women students with autism. Although our stories differ, they share important features: compared to boys, we were diagnosed late — and at first, incorrectly. Kiki was initially misdiagnosed with anxiety and depression, saying that she “had to wait a long time for the right team”. Lillian is yet to be diagnosed and has only realised that she is autistic relatively recently; she is from China, where the culture surrounding autism is toxic

— “it’s almost like you can’t have any social value if you have autism”. She said that the media presentation of autism is that people with the condition need to be cared for and pitied, as opposed to being understood and treated as equals. It is as if a boundary is set up between neurotypical (non-autistic people) and autistic people, leaving the latter feeling very isolated. She says that she feels that the general attitude is “You’re different. We’re not going to stop you being different but we’re not going to interact with you any more.”

I wanted to find out more about the science behind autism, and came across what is known as the female autism phenotype. According to this idea, there are just as many autistic women as there are autistic men, but women present themselves in a different way to autistic men, and are therefore less likely to be diagnosed. Instead, many are misdiagnosed with conditions such as anxiety, depression or multiple personality disorder. Being autistic and female does, however, increase the chances of a person suffering from anxiety, depression and eating disorders.

Hans Asperger, the first person to have theorised the condition in 1938 initially thought that autism was primarily a male condition. A month ago, Professor Francesca Happé from King’s College London told *The Guardian* that hundreds of thousands of girls and women with autism are going undiagnosed due to it being viewed as a “male condition”. According to Professor Simon Baron-Cohen, director of the Cambridge Autism Research Centre, “autistic females on average may try to hide their autism more than do autistic males, perhaps a reflection of the greater pressure on females in our society to fit in and be sociable”. While many autistic boys, upon hitting puberty, become aggressive, girls are more likely to be anxious. In my case,

“12 percent of Cambridge students are on the spectrum, compared to two to three percent in the general population”

“When my parents told me that they thought I might be autistic, everything made sense”



▲ Butterflies are the most recognised symbol of autism awareness. Illustration by Ben Brown for Varsity



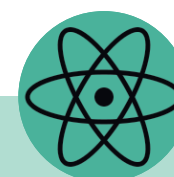
that manifested by being so scared of getting a detention in school (something that never actually happened to me) that I threw up every Tuesday morning before assembly. Because the stereotypical autistic person is male, it has been difficult for researchers to recognise the ways in which autism presents itself in women. Many women have had issues when trying to persuade healthcare professionals that they are autistic. All of these factors result in it being less likely that adults in the girl's life will notice that she is more than just a bit eccentric. Professor Baron-Cohen mentioned that as clinicians' awareness of the female autism phenotype increases, the ratio of diagnoses is slowly moving from 4:1 men to women to 3 or 2:1, "which I think is getting much closer to the true sex ratio in autism," he said.

Not everything is different for autistic women, however. Socialising is an issue for all of us. Kiki described socialising as a "very high risk, high reward activity". Statements often confuse her, and that quickly turns into paranoia, a sentiment echoed by Maia: "Sometimes if I talk to people it will go badly and I don't know why." The issues with socialising can have large impacts when starting at Cambridge. I, for instance, struggle to start conversations with people unless I already know that we have a shared interest. This means that for me, college group chats are a gift – having one made the transition much easier for me. Lillian said that "the toughest experience I've had so far is dealing with a lot of new friends – I have no idea how much time or how much effort I should put in because there's no clear boundary. Obviously, I like to make new friends but I don't know how much effort to put in to get them to accept me as a friend." When asked about how her condition has affected her first month at uni, Maia said that "I had a good five days where I didn't really have a routine that I was in, because lectures hadn't started yet and I didn't really know what I was doing...I felt very alone, which definitely had an impact." She also had issues with executive function, making it hard for her to organise her thoughts. After talking to the college counsellor, this was put down to the fact that she was wearing her glasses more – such a subtle change can have a massive impact on people with autism. However, the support here in Cambridge has so far been excellent. Kiki said that "this is the only university that was able to make my mum feel better about me living independently" – she has access to a counsellor, a mentor and a study skills tutor. Maia has also had great interactions with her college counsellor, who was very experienced in dealing with people with autism. For Lillian, the fact that society is more accepting of autism here is very freeing; she now feels less isolated and more like she can properly be herself.

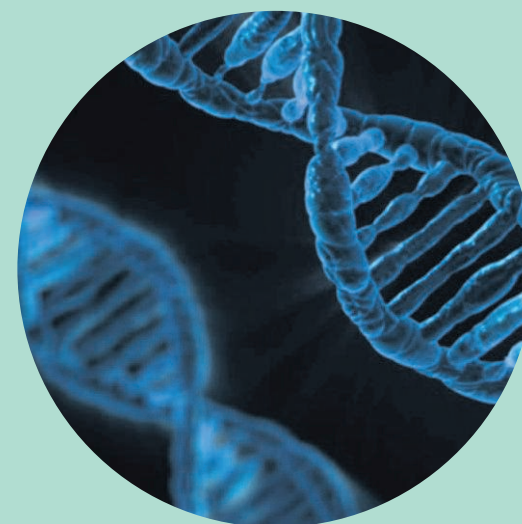
Maia said that she cried during the movie *Ghostbusters* because of the (apparently unintentional) autism representation. Finding a character that you just 'get' can have that impact on anyone, not just autistic women, but it is rare for us. We need to stop thinking that autism is just a male condition. When it comes to autism, anyone can be affected.

“Sometimes if I talk to people it will go badly and I don't know why”

► Looking at how DNA tests work (DAVE WARNER)



Varsity explains How do ancestry tests work?



Bethan Clark
Staff Science Writer

When Spotify and Ancestry.com announced their new partnership last month, they kicked off a controversial debate. Users can input regions from their ancestry test to Spotify, to receive a "DNA-curated" playlist. The announcement drove wide-ranging discussions on the relationship between genetics, culture, and music. So, how do ancestry DNA tests work?

In the saliva sample you provide are some of your cells, each containing a complete copy of your genome – a full copy of your personal blueprint. Various companies extract data from these cells differently. One option is sequencing, which converts the chemical code into a corresponding digital string of the letters A, T, C, and G, representing nucleotides. 23andMe compares this to a library of reference genomes, to find the percentage of genomic stretches that match genomes from different countries. Rather than compare whole chunks of genome, Ancestry.com looks at a few thousand specific sites that are known to vary between people. This means it's not necessary to sequence your whole genome: simpler test for just these sites is enough. These sites can then be compared to the equivalent sites from reference genomes, to find the best matches.

While these algorithmic approaches are valid, a major limitation is the availability of reference genomes. For example, a scarcity of Native American genomes means the algorithms can't differentiate between different tribes. Beyond these technical limitations, the promise of genetically uncovering ancestry has fuelled misconceptions about defining race with DNA. Of course, the DNA-testing companies are not based on these ideas, but the association has brought old, discredited racial theories back into the light. The crux of the issue is that the social concept of race simply does not match up to humans' genetic differences across different world regions. Interesting though DNA ancestry tests may be, they provide genetic, not cultural information – and it's important to remember that.

Science

The wildlife we don't see

Wildlife is more than simply native birds and mammals. **Zak Lakota-Baldwin** discusses past follies of human interaction with the wild, arguing that we can place too much stock in superficial appearance

Few people can claim to have loved Shakespeare as much as Eugene Schieffelin. Born into a wealthy New York family in 1827, he made his living as a pharmacist, but he is best-remembered for the part he played in the now notorious American Acclimatization Society. As chairman of the society, his goal was simple and utterly ludicrous: to introduce into America every species of bird ever mentioned in the complete works of Shakespeare.

The American Acclimatization Society, a New York City group founded to import European plants and animals to the United States, was one of many such societies around the world springing up in countries colonised by Europeans. This was a very peculiarly 19th-century phenomenon; so was Shakespeare-mania, which reached its height around this time. The two combined in a perfect storm with Schieffelin at the centre, who saw it as a necessary homage to his literary hero that all the bird species to have graced Shakespeare's pen, over 600 of them, should be released into his

own homeland of America.

Needless to say, Schieffelin was not wholly successful. Nightingales, skylarks and bullfinches all failed to gain a foothold, as they flew off into the frigid skies of New York and were never seen again. One species, however, fared rather differently. The common or European starling, mentioned in a single line of *Henry IV Part I*, made its American debut in 1890 with the release of a sixty-strong flock in Central Park. Another 40 were added to buoy their numbers the following year, and the damage was done. Starlings not only settled, but conquered, multiplying at an unstoppable rate and outcompeting numerous native species for nesting sites. They now number in the hundreds of millions, incurring costs of \$800 million a year as they devour entire orchards and even disrupt air traffic with their sky-spanning flocks. And all this from a single line in a play.

“Spare a thought for the species you don't see, the hidden heroes of our ecosystem”



Illustrations by Ben Brown for Varsity

Today, Schieffelin's disastrous introduction of starlings is often held up as an example of ecological near-sightedness; the consequences of not understanding the ways in which a single invasive species can radically alter a new environment. Taking a step back from the outcome, though, and looking again at the motivation, it also tells us something more subtle about the relationship between biodiversity and national identity. Schieffelin might have been an especially dramatic case, but he was not an isolated one.

Certainly, there were economic reasons such as controlling pests and establishing food stocks, but some commentators such as ecologist John Marzluff argue that the motives of 19th century acclimatization enthusiasts were largely cultural: they simply liked their own native flora and fauna. Often, animals take root in the national consciousness for precisely this reason – they appear to embody some trait that we admire. The deer is regal and elegant, the falcon swift and unfettered. Other times, it is a more banal but no less powerful connection: we simply find them cute. This preoccupation with cuteness in nature manifests itself in some unusual ways, and not all of them harmless.

The struggle of the native red squirrel

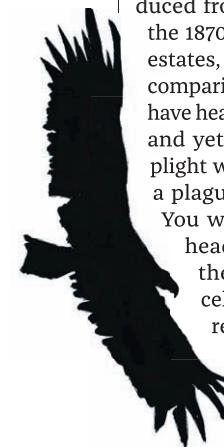
rel against the invasive grey, first introduced from eastern North America in the 1870s as a fashionable addition to estates, is a well-documented one. In comparison, significantly fewer people have heard of the white-clawed crayfish and yet it faces a similarly dramatic plight with its numbers decimated by a plague-bearing American invader.

You would be hard-pressed to find headlines lamenting the loss of the white-clawed crayfish, or celebrating its resurgence, while red squirrels continue to adorn Christmas cards and calendars despite the fact that most Brits have never even seen one. For all our pretensions of loving our native flora

and fauna, we seem guilty of preferential treatment, with a worrying skew towards the bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. What kind of natural stewards are we if we stand up only for the cute or the charismatic?

Take a walk along the Cam, and you'll likely see some ducks, perhaps a swan if you're lucky. But spare a thought for all the species you don't see – the hidden heroes of our ecosystems, less beautiful in form but just as important for our landscape, and just as much a part of the wonderful British wild.

“What kind of natural stewards are we if we stand up only for the cute or the charismatic?”



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Taking wing with the University gliding club

With his feet now squarely planted on firm ground, **Marcus McCabe** recounts his adventures in the skies above Cambridgeshire

The sun was shining as I tore myself out of bed at 7:30am (middle of the night for a humanities student) to catch my lift to the Gliding Centre where my trial flight would take place. And by the time we were out on the runway there wasn't a cloud in the sky — perfect flying conditions.

However, before we could get up in the air, our first job upon arrival was to carefully unpack the gliders from their hangar, where they were stacked like winged sardines. Once out, I was given the enviable task of wiping spattered bugs from the leading edges of the glider's wings.

Once the gliders had been successfully disentangled from their hangar and the processions of preparations and safety procedures completed, I certainly had a few unreleased butterflies in my stomach as I wrestled my way into a parachute that looked a bit like a primary school book bag. I was up first.

But in fact, statistically speaking, gliding is an incredibly safe sport — much safer than driving. As we sat on the runway, myself up front, Andrew in the seat behind me, ticking off final checks and readying to take off, I couldn't wait to get started. Gliders are launched by a 7.5L engine attached to a winch, which pulls them at great speeds down the runway until they take to the air like a giant kite. The pilot then releases the cable at a few thousand feet and uses natural airflow and thermal currents to fly.

I saw the cord pull taut and we were off, up and away. I had anticipated a drawn-out takeoff like a commercial jet before we were properly airborne. However, the glider whooshed into the air almost immediately, shooting vertically upwards to a few thousand feet in a matter of moments.

One minute we were on the ground and the next, after a surge of G-force, we were looking down on a patchwork of East-Anglian meadows extending off into the horizon on every side. My instructor pointed out a distant wind farm, the speck of a water tower from when the airfield had been a WWII Base for RAF bombers, and a miniature wedding marquee in the grounds of a toy stately home far below us. The engineless glider was so silent that it was easy to forget it was there, and we just soaked up the view.

I was so enraptured by the endless, completely flat vistas below us that it came as something of a shock when my instructor told me that I was now in con-

“We alighted like a paper plane delicately coming to rest on a front lawn”



trol of the plane. The joystick was incredibly sensitive; a nudge up pointed us, Icarus-like, towards the sun, while a nudge downwards sent us plummeting towards the ground. Having levelled us, I was directed to make a series of banks and turns across the Cambridgeshire skies, each one flipping the little aircraft sideways so that the ground filled my side-window. Wheeling across the sky with such delicate control felt like flying. Not just technically flying, packed into the economy class of a 747, but flying like a bird, like in a dream.

All too soon, though, it was time to land. My instructor took back the controls and angled us around to face the runway, tilting the nose forward so that we would gather

enough speed to beat the wind that was blowing from the opposite direction. Our final approach was so fast, the ground rushed up at such a pace, that I thought that there was no way that the small craft would hold together in one piece upon impact. We shot in, the tiny figures of cars and planes rushing up to fill their proper size again, scattering birds in a panic towards the grassed runway, on a collision course with ground, until, at the last minute, we pulled up and our wheels brushed the ground. We alighted like a paper plane delicately coming to rest on a front lawn. I had lived to fly another day.

▲ The runway was surrounded by open country on every side (MARCUS MCCABE)

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We're soaring, flying. *Varsity's* sports editor takes to the Cambridge skies in a gliding trial **31**



CUBaC

4

NTU Badminton

4

Cambridge Women's Badminton Blues go toe-to-toe with Trent in hotly contested tie

Tom Wade
Sports Reporter

With the men's match postponed by virtue of De Montfort not managing to field a team (rumour has it they caught wind of how strong Cambridge's was), all eyes switched to the women's match against Nottingham Trent as it spread itself out over the four available courts. For the Light Blues, playing singles were

Katie Clark (Murray Edwards) and Maria Chukanova (Selwyn); the doubles pairings were Neha Madhotra (John's) & Claire Zhang (Trinity) and Felicity Coan (Murray Edwards) & Becky Donaldson (Newnham) – a formidable team with 11 Varsity matches worth of experience between them.

However, the NTU team wasn't going to go down easily, with a player formerly ranked in England's top 60 headlining their lineup, backed up by another five

solid players. When play got underway, their top singles player showed her class, beating Chukanova, who nevertheless put in a valiant effort, in two straight sets. On the adjacent court, a battle royale had commenced. Having won the first set with a fairly convincing 21-15, at the change of ends her opponent took the upper hand and Clark found herself on the back foot and eventually losing the second. It all came down to the third and final set, but under the watchful eye of everyone present Clark kept calm under pressure, pulling off some amazing defensive shots in the process, to win the final set 26-24. An incredibly narrow victory, but one that could prove vital to the outcome of the match.

Meanwhile, the doubles games had been completed; Madhotra & Zhang were victorious in their 21-11, 21-10 win over NTU's second pair. Coan & Donaldson, although a well-oiled duo, got off to a shaky start and were unfortunately overcome by their opponents in two straight sets. This left the scores all level at 2-2 at the halfway point – all to play for.

Back to the singles, and this time it was Clark who fell victim to the precision

▲ **The formidable Blues team had 11 Varsity matches of experience between them**

(HARRY TAYLOR)

and speed of NTU's number one – tired from duking it out in her first match, she perhaps unsurprisingly lost out. Meanwhile, Chukanova was painfully close to winning the first set of her match, and also fell just short in the second despite putting on a great show, putting the Light Blue team 4-2 down.

On the doubles court, and having scraped through their first set 23-21, Madhotra & Zhang upped their game to make the second end a slightly more comfortable 21-17.

Coan & Donaldson played well in their first set, but had a minor hiccup at the beginning of the second, having to take some medical timeout. After Coan was diligently quizzed by sports centre staff, she was back on court and back to business, finishing off the second set to take the game and bring the overall score to a 4-4 draw.

Both teams left with a feeling of "what could have been", attributable to losing tight matches that could so easily have gone either way. The Cambridge team have discovered some points for improvement before travelling to "the other place" for a match against Oxford Brookes next Wednesday.



◀ **Both teams left with a feeling of "what could have been"** (HARRY TAYLOR)



Could you be a match for Varsity? Email our sport team at sport@varsity.co.uk to get involved