

VARSITY

YEARBOOK & REVIEW 2022



ISSUE 902

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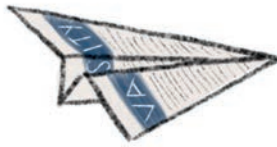
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OXFORD AND
CAMBRIDGE
— CLUB —

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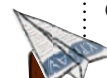
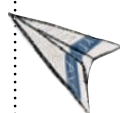
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Front cover illustration by Andy Yu Zhu Li
www.AYZLi.com

► HANNAH CASTLE

Editorial



Hopefully, by the time you are reading this, your exams are all but over; Life is coming together again. You are spending afternoons laying down by the riverbank dipping your toes in the Cam; enjoying late night Gardies on King's Parade, and revelling in the novelty of having nowhere to rush off to.

The evil-looking creature who lurks inside the Corpus Christi clock ticks on relentlessly, reminding us that time is fleeting, as we lick yet another avant-garde flavoured ice cream from Jack's Gelato. That maniacal little time-gobbler serves too, to remind us that nostalgia is a precious gift.

This Yearbook hopefully encapsulates the pleasure and pain, the calamity and calm, and the beautiful and beastly parts of this academic year. We hope that you will indulge, enjoy, and use the contents of these pages to fuel debate and continue important, and unimportant, conversations with friends.

Flick to page 8 for a timeline of the year's events, from feuds between professors, to a secret hot-

tub, and the Rustat trial. Then, take a trip through a selection of pieces from the year, including a face-off on May Balls (page 22), a conversation with Alt-J (page 58), an interview with a Cambridge student serving in Ukraine (page 28) and more. Enjoy, as well, the visuals of our new photoshoot 'Seeing me through seeing you' (page 38), and a tour of the smallest art in the city (page 43). Once you've flicked through (or combed through, depending on dedication), we hope that you keep this Yearbook, and treasure it.

And maybe, many years along the line when you are old, and wrinkled, you can look back with a wry smile at your university years. Maybe even share this yearbook as a memento, something to be lovingly sprawled over, or painfully disregarded by the youthful eyes of a younger family member.

Whatever you do with it — read it with friends, leave it on the bus, or use it as lining for your family cat's litter tray — we hope that you love it and that it represents a slice, even a sliver of your Cambridge.

Lotte Brundle and Juliette Guéron-Gabrielle



Corpus kitchen crisis costs students formals and breakfast

Jacob Freedland and Serge Isman

An ongoing conflict between chefs and college management at the Corpus Christi kitchen has left students with a reduced number of formals, without breakfast and some without a cafeteria.

Breakfast has been abandoned at the main site, and at Leckhampton, the college's off-site accommodation, catered food has been scrapped altogether despite students being billed for it. While previously, students were billed as part of an "Establishment Charge", this year, it has been integrated into increased rent.

However, the apex of students' discontent is the loss of formals. One student, Zack Hilburn, said this feels like a "loss of the Cambridge experience."

From conversations with former staff members, *Varsity* can reveal what led to this situation. Chris Le-Vien was the catering manager at Corpus for 10 years, but in February 2021 left the College.

Under Le-Vien, the kitchen became one of the highest performing in Cambridge, with one former Masterchef quarter-finalist in its ranks.

Le-Vien was well-liked and respected at

Corpus: former colleagues describe him as a "top bloke."

However, anonymous sources allege that he left in connection with a series of Christmas formals last December. The formals took place on three nights from 2-4 December last year. At the time, mixing between households indoors was banned because Cambridge was under Tier 2 restrictions. Corpus nevertheless allowed 50 students to dine together in a marquee where they were able to sit with people from different households at tables of six.

According to former staff, Le-Vien was "scapegoated" for the formals. Given his close relationship with colleagues, this upset a number of people who worked with him.

The College told *Varsity* that Le-Vien left "by agreement" and "was not dismissed." They also claim that all events were "subject to careful risk assessment and carried out in accordance with government restrictions in force at the time."

Sources explain that the discontent was exacerbated by the way the kitchen was run following Le-Vien's departure.

Former chefs allege that college management prioritised cost over quality. They told us that

"the freezers were stuffed." Fresh ingredients were replaced with bulk-bought food, cakes were shop-bought, and vegetables were pre-cut.

To a team of chefs who have since taken jobs at high-end restaurants, the new management felt like a downgrade.

Sources say that crucial roles, such as pastry chef, were left unfilled despite staff requests that new apprentices be brought in. Corpus claimed that these shortages are "small" and "in common with many other colleges."

The kitchen has dramatically shrunk in size from thirteen cooks at the start of summer to just three at the time of writing. A Corpus student who lives at Leckhampton told *Varsity* that he now goes to Selwyn for his meals.

According to sources, the situation is only worsening following the departure of popular head chef, Seb Mansfield, two weeks ago. One ex-employee described him as "the best chef" he'd ever worked with, and said that the staff "get up for him."

This reputation allowed Mansfield's kitchen to attract the most ambitious apprentices. Now that he is gone, some fear that the kitchen may be headed for tougher times still.

Published 21st January 2022:

Dating app dons 'matching' with undergrads

Eleanor Mann, Serge Isman and Bethan Moss

Content Note: Mention of sexual harassment.

Varsity has seen overwhelming evidence that profiles presenting themselves as senior Cambridge academics are attempting to initiate relationships with undergraduates as young as 18 on the dating app Tinder.

Following reports of dons contacting several students over the app, a *Varsity* investigation found 12 profiles claiming to be University staff engaging with undergraduates.

To 'match' with another person on Tinder, both parties must 'like' the other's profile, which is only visible to them if they fall within a desired age range. This was the case for some high-ranking academics who matched with undergraduates on the app. One such don is a former college Vice-Master, while another, who not only matched but also messaged two young undergraduate students, is a professor and a visiting fellow.

Profiles supposedly belonging to University staff include "Sam" who stated in his bio that he is an "Entrepreneur, Professor and Designer at Cambridge," adding "I'm the guy your mother warned you about".

Others, also claiming to be employed by the University, stated explicit sexual preferences in their bios, including "dom and kinky", "ideally non-vanilla" and "You: MILF".

One Tinder user, "Spartacus, 44", who advertised his links to the University in his bio, con-

fessed to having used a fake name on the app.

When creating a profile, Tinder users specify a preferred age range. Some professors' ages are hidden on their profiles, meaning that they pay for one of the dating app's premium subscriptions. After 'matching', both parties are able to exchange messages and can 'unmatch' if they wish.

Profiles can become 'verified' through computer vision technology, which determines whether the images attached to an account match with the one scanned in different poses on the app. Although these accounts may be impersonating staff members, the profiles purporting to be the senior academics above, as well as many other profiles, have passed this verification test.

All academics concerned stated in their bios their connection to the University, citing it in their job title. The undergraduates they matched with also had their age and student status clearly visible in their bios.

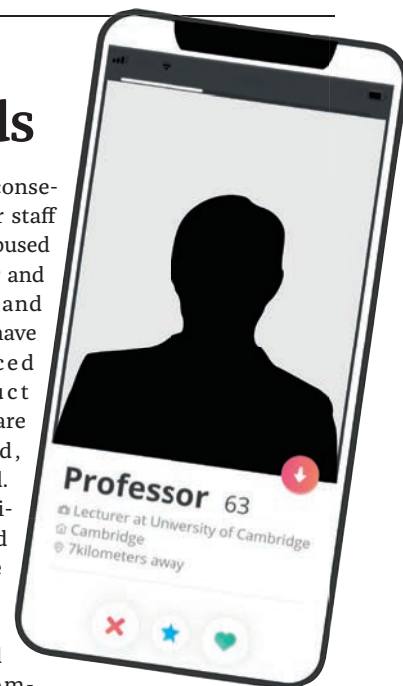
SU welfare officer Ben Dalitz told *Varsity* that "it is deeply inappropriate for academic staff to interact with undergraduates on dating apps," claiming that the handling of misconduct complaints is "woefully inadequate". They went on to allege that within Cambridge there exists "an institutional culture which allows staff to abuse their power."

Dalitz continued: "We would like to see reforms to the Student Complaint Procedure such that cases are dealt with promptly and seriously,

with real consequences for staff who have abused their power and position, and those who have experienced misconduct from staff are supported, not silenced.

The University did not provide a comment to *Varsity*, but cited their complaints procedure on inappropriate student and staff behaviour. University policy does not explicitly forbid relationships — be they romantic or sexual — between undergraduates and members of staff so long as they do not have a "professional connection".

One anonymous student who had received contact from academics said: "Academics being on Tinder undermines the trust students place not only in the staff, but in the institution itself....As a young female undergraduate, these men appear powerful and influential, a fact which they are clearly using to their advantage on dating apps. There is already a power imbalance — and they are exploiting it."



Union President fails to intervene as speaker impersonates Hitler

Jacob Freedland, Bethan Moss and Georgia Goble

Content Note: Discussion of racial slurs and an impersonation voicing antisemitic and racist views.

On Thursday evening (4/11), a speaker at the Cambridge Union impersonated Adolf Hitler as part of a debate on this motion: "There is such a thing as good taste."

Prominent art historian, Andrew Graham-Dixon argued against the motion, using Hitler's artistic philosophy as an example. His argument included an impression of Hitler that used the word "n*gros", leaving a number of students who attended the debate feeling outraged.

Graham-Dixon has since clarified in a statement to *Varsity* that he does not align himself with Hitler's ideology, but simply wanted to use it as an example to reinforce his argument.

The impersonation went unchallenged by the Union President Keir Bradwell, who was chairing the debate, and brushed it off as the "longest Hitler impression" he'd ever heard. With the exception of one attendee who questioned Graham-Dixon's argument, the audience remained silent, save for their applause for Graham-Dixon at the end.

Bradwell was reportedly inebriated ahead of the debate. In messages seen by *Varsity*, he wrote: "It was a light hearted motion. Doing it sober would have been hugely boring of me." Immediately after the event, he claimed not

to have made a mistake: "It was an entirely conscious choice" to let the speaker continue.

Yet some were unconvinced. The Union's LG-BTQ+ officer, Jude Jones, told a committee group chat that he thought the event was "genuinely disgusting" and found Bradwell's behaviour "unprofessional".

The Union President has since offered "unreserved apology for the comments made", adding that "neither [he] nor the society condone the thoughtless and grotesque language used". He has expressed regret for not intervening, calling the impression "inexcusable".

Bradwell also disputed claims that he was drunk, stating that he "had two glasses of wine over dinner beforehand." He states: "I was not impeded in my ability to chair the debate; my failure to intervene was solely a question of lacking the courage to stop someone in front of a room of 400."

Graham-Dixon told *Varsity* that the intention of his speech was to "underline the utterly evil nature of Hitler and his regime... My point was that evil ideas in the sphere of art can have untold and even atrocious consequences...I apologise sincerely to anyone who found my debating tactics and use of Hitler's own language distressing; on reflection I can see that some of the words I used, even in quotation, are inherently offensive."

The Union President has pledged that he "will ensure that this does not happen again."



As it happened:

05/11

Hitler impression at debate

06/11

Video leaked to *Varsity*
Graham-Dixon and Bradwell apologise
Cambridge SU BME Officer calls for
Bradwell's resignation

08/11

Union pledges to create a speakers
blacklist

10/11

John Cleese pulls out of Union talk over
'woke rules'

10/11

Union U-turns on speakers blacklist

Published 14th October 2021:

£400m deal with UAE on pause, Vice-Chancellor reveals

Georgia Goble

The proposed £400m deal between the University of Cambridge and the United Arab Emirates is on hold, *Varsity* can reveal.

Vice-Chancellor Stephen Toope told *Varsity* that the deal was put on hold due to revelations that the UAE was linked to the use of Pegasus spyware.

The Guardian revealed in July that the UAE was responsible for selecting over 400 UK phone numbers which appeared on a list of numbers known to government clients of the NSO group, which sells Pegasus spyware. The UAE had access to the spyware, which hacks and takes control of phones, allowing phone activity to be surveilled. The UAE's access to Pegasus has since been withdrawn, after it was revealed that Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed used the software to hack the phone of his ex-wife Princess Haya and her legal team.

Toope told *Varsity* in an interview: "The revelations about Pegasus caused us to decide that it's not the right time to be pursuing these kinds of really ambitious plans with the UAE."

He added: "It's always a question of fine balance. Of course you have to assess the opportunity that's being presented to make a difference in the world and the risks to reputation of a whole series of important values for the University."

"There are existing relationships across the

University on a departmental and individual academic level but there are no conversations about a big project. It's all on hold for now," Toope continued.

The proposed deal initially sparked controversy due to ethical concerns about a relationship with the UAE, given the country's history of human rights abuses, its lack of rights for women and LGBTQ+ people, the restrictions placed on freedom of expression and the treatment, detainment and torture of academics such as Mathew Hedges. The Cambridge branch of the UCU, as well as Cambridge Ethical Affairs Campaign, opposed the deal for these reasons.

"Will we ever engage with these conversations in the future with a whole range of countries who don't share our values? I'm sure we will," the Vice-Chancellor stated, "but I hope we'll be doing it with our eyes wide open and with a rigorous assessment which says that the need to collaborate is greater than the risks that we're willing to undertake and how do we mitigate those risks. And, if we can't mitigate them, we absolutely shouldn't engage."

The University told *Varsity*: "Cambridge has numerous partnerships with governments and organisations around the world. It approached the United Arab Emirates as it does all potential partnerships: with an open mind, and rigorously weighing the opportunities to contribute to society — through collaborative

research, education and innovation — against any challenges...We will be reflecting over the next few months before further evaluating our long term options with our partners and with the University community."

A spokesperson for the Cambridge Ethical Affairs Campaign told *Varsity* that they welcome the news that the deal is on pause: "The campaign has been fighting this collaboration since its announcement... Nevertheless, it is regrettable that the university only cancelled the deal when revelations emerged about the UAE's use of Pegasus Spy Software, and not because of the existing moral concerns... We already knew that the UAE government practiced arbitrary detention (particularly of its critics), had violated the human rights of British researchers, and repressed the rights of LGBTQIA+ people and women." They also expressed concerns that the University has not ruled out pursuing the deal in the future: "the Ethical Affairs campaign calls on the University to scrap this deal outright, not merely put it on hold, and commit to making no similar deals in future with other oppressive regimes."

Cambridge UCU echoed similar concerns: "What is at stake here is not just the issue of "reputational damage", but the ethical question of whether accepting funding from state or corporate bodies which engage in practices which damage the environment and violate human rights is ever consonant with our "values" as a community of learning."



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Illustration by Richard Briggs

News

Timeline of the year

University propose £400m deal with UAE

In August 2021, the University of Cambridge announced a proposed £400 million partnership with the United Arab Emirates to be launched during Michaelmas 2021. The plans involved a 10-year collaboration between the University and "several educational, governmental, and corporate partners" in the UAE in the areas of research, education and innovation. The University claimed that they had recognised and considered the potential challenges posed by the deal, including the UAE's human rights and environmental sustainability records, as well as questions about academic freedom and institutional autonomy. The Cambridge SU Ethical Affairs Campaign launched a petition opposing the initiative and calling for it to be scrapped immediately.

Toope announces 2022 resignation

SEPTEMBER

Master's student helps ex-pupils flee Afghanistan

At the start of October, a master's student at the Judge Business School helped three of her former pupils escape Afghanistan when the Taliban took over. Selene Biffi had set up the Qessa Academy in 2012 to support the preservation of Afghan folk tales. When the Taliban captured Kabul last year, she contacted several of her students and helped them to evacuate. Biffi told Varsity that she "spent days working around the clock on papers, logistics and coordination" to help her students and their families escape to safety. Following quarantine, the students were reunited with their former teacher in Italy.

SELENE BIFFI ▶



Anti-abortion society pitch up at Freshers' fair

The annual Cambridge Fresher's Fair took place in October, featuring the Universities pro-life society, Cambridge Students For Life. The group, which largely campaigns against abortion and the legalisation of euthanasia, was met with a negative reception. Several other universities had similar groups featured at freshers fairs, with one Oxford student wishing to "reassure Oxford freshers that the vast majority of this university is firmly of the view that abortion is a fundamental human right".

Jesus College first worldwide to return a stolen Benin Bronze

On 27th October 2021, Jesus College became the first institution in the world to return a Benin Bronze, presenting it to Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments.

This followed after a long period of discussion following demands in 2016 that the statue be repatriated. The statue had been displayed in the Jesus' dining hall, gifted to the college by a parent of a student in 1905.

The Benin Bronzes were looted from the Court of Benin, now part of Nigeria, by the 1897 British Expedition to Benin. In an exclusive interview with Varsity, current Master Sonita Alleyne OBE celebrated the "historic occasion" of the handover ceremony, which had been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, after the 2019 decision to return the statue by the College's Legacies of Slavery Working Party.



CHRIS LOADES

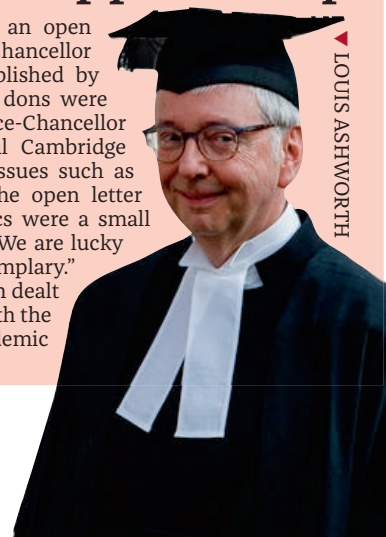
Medwards pres suggests fertility classes



Medwards President Dorothy Byrne sparked controversy in October after seeking to introduce a series of seminars around fertility and family planning, among personal fears that women were 'forgetting' to have children. While Byrne believed fertility education could empower young women, critics argued that the plans were sexist and narrow minded. LGBTQ+ students saw the plans as heteronormative, risking the alienation of "many of Medwards' male, non-binary, and gender minority students".

Cambridge dons support Toope

Over 300 Cambridge academics signed an open letter in support of outgoing Vice-Chancellor Stephen Toope, following an article published by The Times that claimed that Cambridge dons were "delighted" to see Toope step down as Vice-Chancellor next year. The article had cited several Cambridge fellows who had criticised Toope over issues such as free speech and political correctness. The open letter aimed to demonstrate that Toope's critics were a small minority, saying of the Vice-Chancellor: "We are lucky to have him and his service has been exemplary." The signatories added that Toope had been dealt a difficult hand, having had to contend with the impacts of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic during his term in office.



LOUIS ASHWORTH

OCTOBER

Land Economy pressured by students to return in-person lectures cancel online lectures

Varsity ski trip sells out in half an hour

Uni U-turns on UAE deal

In early Michaelmas, *Varsity* revealed that the proposed £400m deal between the University of Cambridge and United Arab Emirates was on hold due to the UAE's use of Pegasus spyware. This spyware had hacked and accessed phones across the UK. The initial plans with the UAE attracted criticism due to the concerns about the UAE's human rights track record. A Cambridge Ethical Affairs Campaign stated that the deal "reflects poorly on the moral character of the university."

Hitler impression sparks free speech row at Union
Full story on page 6



Cambridge SU cancel Qatar Airways partnership

Police 'discriminatory' and 'negligent' with hate crime

A PhD student who had been the victim of an anti-Asian hate crime in October claimed that Cambridgeshire police had been negligent and discriminatory in the handling of the incident. Ting (not her real name), who is Chinese, claimed the police neglected to help her as the racially-motivated crime was taking place and failed to acknowledge the racist nature of the incident. The hate crime took place as Ting was walking down Mill Road; a group of teenagers threw bread at her and shouted racist abuse. Although Ting phoned the police while the incident was taking place, they did not send an officer to the scene.

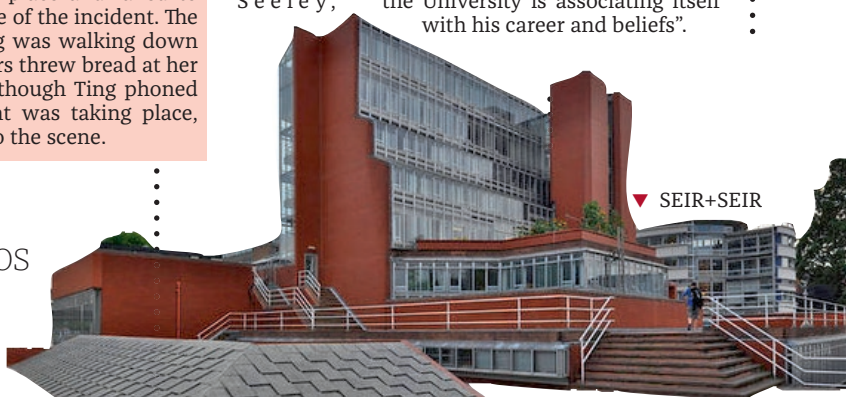
New Design Tripos announced

Mutiny in the Corpus kitchen costs students formals

Full story on page 5

Students demand Seeley library be renamed

In November, a group of students set up a campaign to rename the Seeley Library. The Library was named after Sir John Seeley, a historian and political essayist, known for his contributions to justifying the British Empire. The group launched an open letter to the Faculty of History, calling on them to change the name of the library to the History Faculty Library. In his most famous work, *The Expansion of England*, written in 1883, Seeley defended the British Empire and argued that British rule was beneficial for India. The students' open letter stated that by naming the library after Seeley, "the University is associating itself with his career and beliefs".



NOVEMBER

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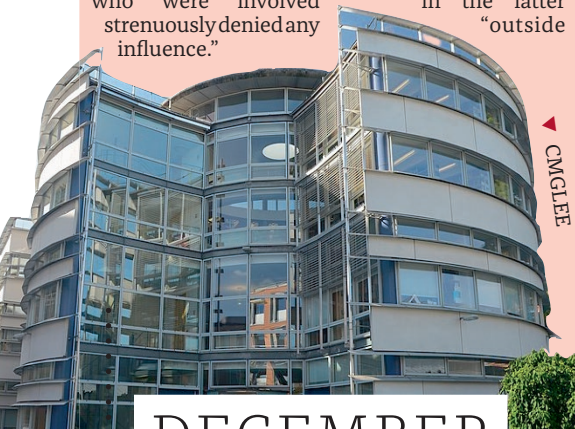


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'Divine dissenters' call for investigation of secretive right-wing network

A group of academics in the Divinity Faculty calling themselves the 'Divine Dissenters' published a written statement calling on the University to investigate an alleged secretive network of right-wing academics that they claimed was backed by billionaire Trump donor Peter Thiel. The 'Divine Dissenters' suggested that the network constituted a "fifth column" that was engaged in an "organised campaign" to oust Stephen Toope and other members of the University leadership. They were particularly concerned about the alleged influence and interference of outside individuals like Thiel on matters within a university campus. The 'Divine Dissenters' linked this network to the recent invitations to individuals like Jordan Peterson to speak in Cambridge, as well as the opposition to Toope's free speech amendment in 2020. Academics who were involved in the latter strenuously denied any "outside influence."



Huawei give Cambridge £25.7m

In December, it was revealed that University received £25.7 million from the Chinese tech giant Huawei. The funding was divided between general donations and research grants. The Spectator's investigation shows Cambridge received significantly more than other universities with Oxford having accepted between £500,000 and £2.39 million. The revelations came after increasing concerns about the influence of the Chinese corporation. Back in September, it was reported that three out of the four directors at the Cambridge Centre for Chinese management had ties to the company.

Senate House splashed with black 'oil' by XR

Gopal: 'Eloquent' can be discriminatory

The beginning of 2022 saw increasing tensions between Cambridge academics David Abulafia and Priyamvada Gopal. Gopal accused history professor Abulafia of a 'dismissal' of writers of colour due to his description of Black historian David Olusoga as "eloquent". Gopal had argued that Abulafia's quote was racist and that the language he used "can quite often be a little sleight hand of dismissal."

Later, in response to pieces by Varsity, Gopal's claims of a coordinated attack from the paper were later met with condemnation from The Cambridge University Jewish Society (CUJS) who deemed them "conspiratorial attacks on Jewish students".



First case of Omicron variant confirmed in Cambridgeshire

DECEMBER

JANUARY

Spiking by injection on Oxbridge ski trip

Students reported being spiked by injection while partying at clubs on the Varsity ski trip in Val Thorens. The trip's student organisers confirmed that several students had been spiked, but comments online suggested that the actual number was significantly higher. NUCO, the company that organised travel and security on the ski trip, responded by increasing security measures such as door searches and ensuring that medical staff were on-hand. The victims, including both male and female students, reportedly recovered quickly. Students posted online about feeling unsafe, with some deciding to wear long-sleeved clothes in clubs for protection. The student organisers of the ski trip claimed that such incidents of spiking had never been reported before, and promised to improve communication and security at nightclubs in future years.

Three days of strikes across Cambridge

Asymptomatic testing program ends

Cambridge University sues Mastercard

The University filed a competition suit against Mastercard, the American multinational financial services corporation, in the High Court of Justice of England and Wales. The nature of the suit was not made public knowledge. The suit follows a judgement in 2020 which ruled that Mastercard and Visa's mandated interchange fees broke anti-competition law, after which the UK Supreme Court heard and denied an appeal from Mastercard and upheld the lower court's ruling.



Fitz Fellow appointed new Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education



Cambridge scraps Learning Together after 2019 terror attack

Senior academics caught 'matching' with undergrads on Tinder

Full story on page 5

Homophobia and misogyny at Tory social

Speakers at a social held by the Conservative Society (CUCA) in January left guests shocked after homophobic and misogynistic remarks were made by members of the society. Lent term Union President James Vitali was implicated, with witnesses claiming he described a waitress as “fat” and stated “all good parties start with men in one room and women in the other.” Vitali denied these claims. Witnesses also claimed that one member attacked gay marriage and later in the evening, another argued that “women are sinful.” Guests described the shock from female attendees, and an atmosphere that was “unwelcoming” and “uncomfortable.”

Students in Russia ‘must return’ as Ukraine invasion begins

Nick Griffin spotted at Blues boxing match

FEBRUARY



▼ TIMUR RAKHIMOV

Slaver memorial hearing begins at Jesus

Racism testimonies surface within Divinity Faculty

In January, testimonies of racism within the Divinity Faculty surfaced. These included allegations of academics mocking Black students' voices, referring to travel grants to “bongo bongo land”, and defending the actions of Christian missionaries in Africa.

Anonymous testimonies were published on the “Divine Dissent” website: a campaign working to “expose alt-right influence in the Divinity Faculty.” Critics cited the invitations made by the Faculty to controversial figures such as Jordan Peterson and Charles Murray, as falling short of their statement following George Floyd's death in May 2020, which urged members to “think more deeply about race and learn from those who have been marginalised”. The Faculty defended themselves against these concerns on the basis of free speech.

Corpus May Ball ask workers for £160 deposit to ensure ‘good behaviour’

Caius votes to stop flying pride flag during LGBTQ+ history month

In February, Gonville and Caius College Council sparked controversy when they voted to only fly the “politically neutral” College flag from the college flagpole. The decision threatened to end the six-year tradition of flying the pride flag and progress flag during LGBTQ+ history month. In a statement, the College justified the decision by stating that “choosing to fly only the College flag avoids concerns regarding political neutrality.” Caius then reversed this decision in May, accepting a proposal for students to choose up to six flags to fly on the College flagpole over the course of the year, and allowing the progress pride flag to be flown in on 1st June for the start of Pride Month.

UCU strikes continue



REBECCA TYSON ▶

Favour minority actors, drama society urges

Students occupy lecture block in support of strikes

In February, around 50 student activists occupied a lecture block at Sidgwick Site, during (and in solidarity with) UCU strikes. The students from Cambridge Defend Education (CDE) demanded that the University meet a comprehensive recognition agreement with the UCU. They refused to leave until their demands were met, barricading themselves inside and covering windows with banners and pamphlets. As a result of the occupation, lectures and classes were moved online. The University threatened the occupiers with legal action. Graham Virgo, Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor, wrote to the students, saying: “Your occupation is disrupting the education of your student peers and is adversely impacting staff.”

Student kept hot-tub in college room for a year



VARSITY ▶

'Yes' wins reading week referendum

In March, the SU held a referendum on the introduction of a reading week in Michaelmas and Lent terms, in which the 'Yes' campaign won. 64% of voters supported the introduction of a reading week, although voter turnout was just 16%. While not binding for the University, the referendum result meant that the SU was able to continue to lobby for the change to be implemented. The issue had been high on the SU's agenda for a while, with the University setting up a reading week working group the previous year.



Zaynab Ahmed elected as SU Undergrad President

March also saw Zaynab Ahmed elected as Cambridge SU's Undergraduate President for the academic year 2022-23. She won 53% of the vote, beating her opponent and incumbent Undergrad President Zak Coleman by 140 votes, while Amelia Jabry won the position of Postgraduate President. Ahmed and Jabry's victories marked an unusual achievement as they became the first candidates to successfully re-run for a position on the SU sabbatical team in at least seven years. Turnout for this year's elections was low, coming in at 12%, even lower than last year's figure of 18%.

TOBIA NAVA

Hundreds gather for Ukraine vigil outside Senate House

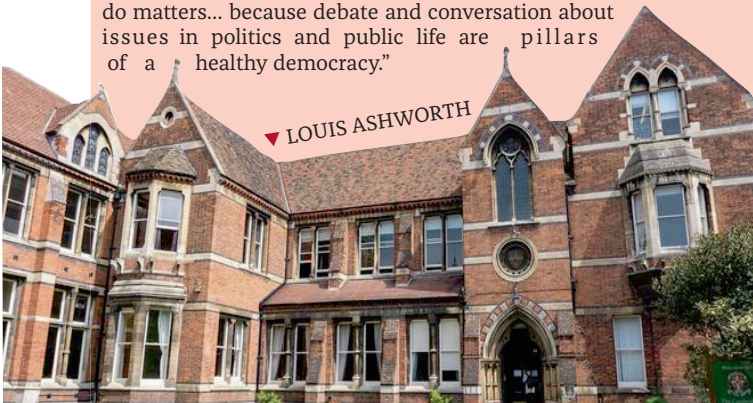
MARCH

Ex Ambassador to Russia becomes Hughes Hall President

Cambridge Union stands by Ukraine debate despite backlash

The Cambridge Union became involved in yet another controversy when it announced that it would hold a special 'urgent debate' entitled 'This House would send troops to Ukraine' on the same day (24/2) that Russia launched its full-scale invasion of the country. This decision was met with a wave of backlash online. A former SU president tweeted that the war in Ukraine "isn't an edgy debate topic to get traction for your society. Real lives are at stake," while anonymous posts on Camfess branded the Union's decision "tone-deaf and disgusting" and criticised the Union for "constant, relevancy-hungry capitalisation of current events." Nevertheless, the Union stood by its decision to hold the 'urgent' debate, citing similar examples of debates in the past. They claimed that "what we do matters... because debate and conversation about issues in politics and public life are pillars of a healthy democracy."

LOUIS ASHWORTH



UCU recognised

In April, the University announced they would finally recognise the University and College Union (UCU) after years of being the only one of Britain's 150 public universities not to do so formally. Before this, the UCU was often consulted on issues informally, but they argue that the lack of an official right to be consulted in negotiations about pay and working conditions hindered the ability of academic staff to advocate for improvements. The Cambridge UCU's president said that formal recognition will "open a lot more doors", as caseworkers and officers will be given time to work on union business as part of their working day, instead of their free time.

Missing Darwin notebooks returned to UL after 20 years



PHILLIP HERTZOG

APRIL

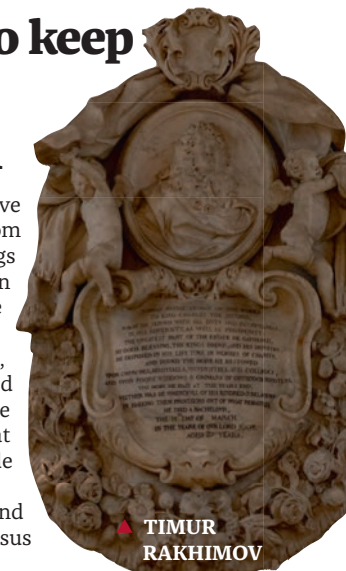
Former student killed fleeing Mariupol

Leading academics demand universities ban fossil fuel funded climate research

Church court rules to keep Rustat memorial in Jesus College chapel

A church court ruled that the memorial to slave trader Tobias Rustat would not be removed from Jesus College's chapel in March. The hearings saw the College pitted against a coalition of Rustat's descendants and supportive alumni. Rustat was an investor in the Royal African Company and the Royal Adventurers, both corporations that trafficked and traded enslaved Africans. The hearing ruled that the case was founded on a "false narrative" that Rustat had used his wealth from the slave trade to benefit the college.

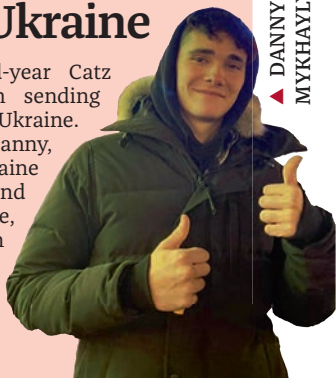
Jesus College said it was "disappointed" and "shocked" by the decision, alongside JCSU (Jesus Colleges Student Union).



TIMUR RAKHIMOV

Catz student sends £6k of equipment to Ukraine

Danny Mykhaylyuk, a second-year Catz student, spent his Lent term sending £6,000 worth of equipment to Ukraine. While continuing his studies, Danny, who moved to the UK from Ukraine aged 14, sent medical supplies and bullet proof vests to the frontline, as well as raising £1,500 through fundraising. He's now involved in education programs for Ukraine's child refugees, and finding them safe housing in Poland.



▲ DANNY MYKHAYLYUK

Student wins City Council seat

Local elections in May saw Sam Carling, a second-year Natural-Sci student at Christ's, win a seat on the Cambridge City Council. He ran as a Labour candidate in the West Chesterton ward, winning 1,229 votes to gain his seat from the Liberal Democrats by a narrow margin. Carling said he hoped to "make Cambridge greener and more affordable for all".



▲ SAM CARLING

University offers 50 students places on free pre-degree course

In April, Cambridge heard how over 50 students were offered places for the University's new foundation course. The uni said the course is designed to engage students "who have been prevented from reaching their full potential by their circumstances." The course is free and fully funded, financed by a £5 million donation from Cambridge alumni. It's an interdisciplinary course, designed to prepare students for a Cambridge degree in the arts, humanities and social sciences.

If students perform well in the course, they won't have to reapply for their chosen undergraduate degree. 11 colleges made offers to Foundation Year students.



▼ RWENDLAND

Labour MP reveals gang rape threat while at Cambridge

In May, Labour MP Stella Creasy revealed she was threatened with gang rape during a two-year campaign of sexual harassment while she was studying at Cambridge. In an interview with GB News, she said that she is still "terrified" of seeing the men who allegedly abused her. "I'll never forget the night that I was in a room with them all and they threatened to gang-rape me," she told GB News. Creasy studied HSPS at Magdalene. The harassment started during her first year at uni, lasting from 1996-1998.

When she reported the harassment to college, she was accused of trying to cause trouble and "admonished" by Magdalene authorities. In a statement, the University said that it was "extremely sorry" to hear of Creasy's "horrific ordeal".

Beef at Emma 'vegan' formal

MAY

Caius U-turns on pride flag decision

▼ KYLE BUSHNAND



Toope 'storms away' after being quizzed on University fossil fuel ties

In April, Stephen Toope, the vice-chancellor, was filmed "storming away" after students questioned him about the University's connections with the fossil fuel industry. After an event during which Sir Patrick Vallance gave a speech on science and policy making, a student approached Toope and asked how the IPCC report released earlier that month would impact the University's climate policy. They also questioned the University's "continued involvement with companies like Shell and BP and Schlumberger". Toope refused to answer the question and covered the camera before striding away, telling the activists: "If that's what we're doing, I'm not getting involved."



▲ PEACH ROSE

Cambridge welcomes Ukrainian refugees

Refugees who fled Ukraine following Russia's invasion began to arrive in the UK over the Easter vacation, on the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme. In Cambridge, students, staff and residents set up various initiatives to support and welcome refugees, and to raise awareness and funds. The Cambridge Ukrainian Society organised protests and candlelit vigils on King's Parade and other events. The Cambridge Russian Speaking Society launched a helpline offering trilingual translation services to facilitate communication between refugees and host families. Other initiatives included guided tours and meetings for the whole Ukrainian community in Cambridge.

Women's only gym proposal sparks row at Churchill

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Cambridge's attainment gap: Why do women, state-school and BME students receive fewer firsts than their peers?

Yearbook & Review Exclusive:



▲ LOUIS ASHWORTH

Akrit Agarwal

A *Varsity* investigation has found exam attainment discrepancies which suggest that the University is continuing to fail students along intersecting class, gendered and ethnic lines.

Data seen by *Varsity* show that women, students of colour and those who attended state schools are significantly less likely to receive first-class degrees than their peers. Despite narrowing in recent years, the gaps continue to be a cause for concern.

For starters, there is a sizeable difference in the proportion of men and women that earn first-class honours in the final year of their Tripos exams at Cambridge. Over the last ten years, the average proportion of male undergraduates that receive firsts is 33% to just 25% of women: an 8% gap. The gendered discrepancy widens in STEM subjects to above 10%. Last year, the gap was especially large, with 36.9% of men gaining firsts compared to only 23.8% of women – a staggering 13% gap.

This is a University-wide phenomenon, with a considerable variation between colleges. Some colleges, such as Trinity and Hughes Hall, have much bigger gender attainment gaps in STEM – 33% and 44% respectively. But there are also colleges like Trinity Hall, which saw the trend reversed as its female undergraduates tended to get more firsts, and Emmanuel – for which the gender attainment gap was close to zero for both STEM and arts/humanities.

Unfortunately, this investigation cannot discuss exam results for individuals with other gender identities, who are excluded from these statistics since the University's exam results database uses a binary system, with data only available for the attainment of 'men' and 'women'. The University told *Varsity* that this is "to ensure individuals cannot be identified, owing to the small number of students in this category."

Academic attainment gaps also exist on ethnic lines. At first glance, the data suggest that BAME and white students receiving firsts are

represented in roughly similar proportions. In fact, they appear to swap every couple of years. However, when you break down BAME students into subgroups, you'll find the attainment gap between white and Black students to be sizeable – it stands at 25.7% in arts and humanities and 24.1% in STEM. This is hidden by the inclusion of other minority groups such as British Asians (Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis), who achieve more firsts than Black students but fewer than white students.

The gap is even larger between the subgroup of Black students who identify as British-Caribbean – they achieve 27.1% fewer firsts than their white peers in the arts and humanities and 32.9% fewer in STEM. In fact, zero Black or British-Caribbean students in STEM received firsts in their final exams last year.

Gaps between white students and students of other ethnicities not mentioned above were smaller, but the bottom line is that white students are consistently more likely to be awarded firsts than students of any other ethnicity.

State school students also do worse than students from independent schools in both arts/humanities and STEM, receiving 6.6% fewer firsts in arts and humanities, and 9.9% fewer in STEM subjects.

Fortunately, the gender gap is on the decline. Whether this is due to grade inflation, a steady increase in the performance of female students, social change – or a combination of these three – the fact of the matter is that Cambridge is ever so slightly becoming less unequal for women. No such trend appears for state school students or BAME students, unfortunately, for whom the attainment gap has been relatively stable across the past decade.

A University spokesperson told *Varsity* that "the University is aware of awarding gaps between different cohorts of students and is undertaking research to try to understand the reasons why they exist. The University is committed

to eliminating all awarding gaps as part of its current Access and Participation Plan."

Yet the attainment gaps are still significant, and discrimination against marginalised groups persists at Cambridge; in 2020, the End Everyday Racism project found that students felt "powerless" to report racism. In response, the University affirmed that the project raised "important issues" that "we must all address."

According to the Advance Higher Education UK website, addressing the attainment gap means "action needs to focus on institutional barriers and inequalities rather than 'improving' or 'fixing' the student."

Students from state school backgrounds have also stressed the need for consistent help throughout their time at the University – rather than merely throughout the application process. As outlined by a student, "it's not enough just to offer help to us when we apply, we need it when we're here – and not just financially."


Varsity has contacted the University, Trinity Hall, Emmanuel College, Hughes Hall and Trinity College for comment.

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students than British
Caribbean students
in STEM

9.9%
more firsts are
awarded to
students from
independent
schools than
from state
schools in STEM



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THOUGHT
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Sally Higson

BA and MSci in Natural Sciences
(Chemistry), University of Cambridge
(2013)
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Tales of a broke, brown babysitter

Nabiha Ahmed writes on the challenge of navigating different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds as a nanny, finding common ground in the everyday

I spent most of my life before university in a limited list of places: home, school, the chicken shop, the East London Mosque, and my nan's. By extension, I was primarily around people similar to me: Muslim, non-white, inner-city Londoners coming from low-income backgrounds who — maybe, except my nan — have a universal appreciation for 'Hot & Tasty' boxes.

I knew coming to Cambridge would teach me about ways of life that both contrasted and intersected with my own. The gong at formals evoked that same anxiety induced by stampedes of schoolboys charging their way through me to their lesson. The unsolicited quoting of Latin proverbs in supervisions left me dazed, not unlike my how nan's Bengali ones do. What I *didn't* know, however, was that I had access to these lessons before I even came to Cambridge. Except, they existed ten minutes from my home in London — in



▲ DEMELZA OKWAN

meal deal snack in my face.

At the tender age of five, he had never known many Muslims, working-class, or non-white people. The majority of his life was *also* experienced in a limited number of places. Private school, his Wembley-sized house, Waitrose and grandma's holiday home in France.

He wasn't, however, yet at the mental capacity to understand how his privilege played out in wider society. He'd scream after I refused to buy him a more expensive "prize" in museum shops. Or he'd become a behemoth if I said that he couldn't play with his Lego until he ate *some* of his dinner. There we would be in all our glory: a bourgeois five-year-old boy telling me he hates me for not buying him a California roll, and my skint self — too busy to reply because I'm bending the wire of my knock-off phone charger in that one position so it would work.

At five I only went to free museums with my nan, both of us probably at the same reading age and equally as unable to decipher any of the captions. And in an Asian household, children refusing to eat dinner wouldn't be solved using a £200 Lego Ninjago set, but a £2 sandal from Shoezone. I explained this to him (except the Shoezone part, of course) in that child-friendly, 'when-I-was-your-age' manner. But he looked at me blankly. He expected to have all his wants fulfilled. It was the only way of life he'd ever known.

Sometimes, he'd make me feel like that girl in reception who felt too visible in a class of white kids again. But mostly, he'd take me back to Cambridge. *Why do you wear that scarf? Where are you really from?* I could almost hear his words coming out of the mouths of people I knew at university. He didn't only see me as a new babysitter. Like some of my flatmates, to

him, I was a new skin colour, a new religion and a whole new way of life.

Yet in spite of the rude stares from fellow commuters when he'd fall asleep on me on the tube, or parents who'd look at me like I was a kidnapper during school pickups, we were alike. We both have messy kitchens. But my mum can't afford a daily cleaner. We both have strong attachments to our parents; he wailed whenever his mum was at work, and I'd secretly shed tears when I first moved away for university. We both were competitive, losing at Bananagrams being enough ruin our day. We both know what it means to have loved ones, to lose loved ones, to be loved and to feel loss.

He enjoyed being around his broke, brown babysitter. 'Can I ask my mum to give you money?' he'd plead after hearing about my Sainsbury's birthday cakes, or

“

Are your parents the same colour as you?

”

the form of a little boy who wore a tweed jacket and was obsessed with Lego.

On my first day nannying, I was welcomed at the door by a lady and her son sitting on her hip. She invited me into what can only be described as 'if Wembley was a house', and we politely went over the babysitting basics: her son's allergies, bedtime and whatnot. That is until he asked something along the lines of:

"Do you have hair underneath your headscarf?"

Pause. Mum looked at me to assess any offence. The boy was now standing at my feet, his neck craned back and his eyes fixed on my escaped baby hairs.

I smiled and told him I was indeed *not* bald.

We eventually got used to being each other's only company for the majority of the day. "Are you from Muslim?" He asked while observing me through the mirrors of the Westfield bathrooms. "Are your parents the same colour as you?" He questioned on the hottest day of the year, realising that I didn't need the sun to be tanned. "Do you want this brownie, you know, because you're brown?" he laughed, shoving his

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Do you have hair underneath your headscarf

”

my dishwasher-less kitchen. 'Is *this* one Halal?' he'd ask while pointing at the beef jerky we'd pass in the snack aisle of his local Waitrose. 'I saw Nabiha's hair today!' he'd say triumphantly to his mum once she'd come home — sometimes I'd show him it to distract him from the fact he didn't have a California roll at hand.

But I was defined beyond being just broke and brown. I was a good babysitter. In fact, I deduced this from his mumbling of, 'Why don't you just stay?' on my last day.

Cambridge through the eyes of a cancer patient

Drawing on his experiences as both a Cambridge student and cancer patient, **Moby Wells** imparts his newfound appreciation for the present and the intrinsic value of the day

Rows of chairs, eyes glued forward, hushed whispers, and periodic speech from the front. If not for the “controlled area X-ray” signs or the milky after-taste from my morning’s Allopurinol this could be a lecture room on any ordinary day.

My lecture room for the day, however, is not in the Seeley. It is in the X-ray department. The subject is my health, and I do not need to take notes.

This is not the first time I have been in this room, and the ease with which I have adapted to (or accepted) my new situation gives me a warm feeling inside. A few weeks ago I was in this very room, awaiting an X-ray which I thought at the time would dispel the marginal possibility of cancer and prove I had a lingering viral

My lecture room for the day, however, is not in the Seeley. It is in the X-Ray department

infection. Weeks have past, chemotherapy has started and my life has changed — it was not a virus.

“Hodgkin Lymphoma, Stage 2”.

I am not, by nature, a calm person. Three years into my degree, supervisions continue to turn my stomach. Throughout my life I have been dogged by two words: “What if?”

What if I forget my textbook?

What if I fail my exam?

What if I disappoint them?

These insidious questions, and countless more like them, pushed me through school to Cambridge.

Now, with everything thrown into chaos, I feel more content with myself than I ever have before. This change of circumstances has demonstrated to me that the constant fear of what could be is meaningless in the face of health uncertainties. I can relax and be pushed along by the tide of medication, cycles of chemotherapy, and new medical jargon.

Our lives are structured by milestones. So far, for most of us here, they have been

exams: SATs, GCSEs, A-Levels, Prelims, and Finals. These milestones hang like millstones, and continue as we chase the job, the house, the perfect family. Once my cancer is beaten it is natural that I will con-

The constant fear of what could be is meaningless

tinue to worry about these issues, but it has shown me the value of thinking about the day. Incessant deadlines had rendered this unit of time largely meaningless to me. Every strange Cambridge week would be spent looking to the next week, the term ticking over in chunks of reading and writing, until the bliss of holiday.

Every day counts. It should not be seen only as a step toward tomorrow, a day should be seen as valuable in itself. Don’t put off that thing you have been scared to do. The balance between health and illness is fragile. It is a bank account where overdraft could be a day away.

The process of cancer treatment itself involves risks (cheerfully the consultant told me I have less than a 1% chance of death from the chemotherapy!). Chemo renders the body extremely vulnerable to infection, and the injections I take to raise my

white blood cell count could cause excruciating bone pain. One evening I could feel fine and the next I could be taken to hospital at risk of neutropenic sepsis. Everyone has a health balance — thankfully most are less precarious than mine.

The three nights on the C9 cancer ward at Addenbrookes made me feel restless. My room’s window onto the beauty of the Gog Magog hills seemed to taunt me. I would spend hours standing at the window staring out at people going about their business. Nine floors up I might as well have been in a plane. When I was given the option to walk to my biopsy instead of a wheelchair I jumped at the chance, and when I was finally discharged I had a new appreciation for the cold English weather as I stood thoroughly underdressed outside the hospital.

Every day deserves your attention. The looming shadow of exams is returning again. Libraries will be full to capacity. Your health balance does not go away, so take a walk, meet friends, go out and live.

I sit in the X-ray waiting room at peace. My hands do not shake.



MOBY WELLS



▲ ALEX LEVY

In praise of slow travel

Reflecting on the past summer's wanderings, *Alex Levy* considers the upsides of travelling without planes, for both the environment and growing receptiveness to experience

As I sat miserably in the corridor of the night train to Munich, head bumping gently against the walls and eyes glazed in the neon light, I began to question my life choices. And my degree. Earlier that night at Zagreb Station, a gruff ticket officer had informed me that there was “no train for Munich”. Further pleading revealed little, and I eventually found out that Deutsche Bahn were striking and so I would be deposited in Austria at 4am the following morning. I was exhausted and ill; my parents suggested I look for a hostel and a flight home the next day.

I was tempted, but couldn't stomach the embarrassment. I had told too many people that that summer, for unavoidably smug environmental reasons, I would forgo planes and their flashy convenience wherever possible. So I boarded and tried to sleep. Already displeased that the country whose culture I'd chosen to study had shut me out, things only got worse in Ljubljana, when a gang of officious German backpackers entered the compartment. I heard them complain to each other in German that I was in the wrong bed, and half an hour later they asked me to leave. Not because of my un-German disregard for the seating allocations, however. I was “coughing too much”, they said, “it was corona time after all!” And they wanted to sleep, so the corridor it was — I gath-

“

Spending a day getting somewhere is anathema to most

”

ered myself and left, muttering under my breath about vaccinations and negative lateral flows.

But night passed and I arrived in picturesque Sound-of-Music-Salzburg to see the pale light of dawn behind the mountains — the hills were alive and somehow so was I. Buying myself a fortifying pretzel,

I pressed on and by some miracle was home that evening, by way of Brussels and Frankfurt. I dozed, read my book, quietly observed people and their conversations as changing landscapes, cities, and countries flashed by my window, and I felt more than ever before that I had truly *travelled*, in a new sense of the word.

To reach Croatia from Greece I had crossed the Adriatic to Italy. Leaving by sea was the closest I came to the enchantment of Lawrence Durrell's Corfu, the lights of port towns twinkling like a necklace on the dark mass of the island, warm sea air whipping around me. I saw the island as he might have, not over the roar of airplane engines, but feeling beneath me the alien motions of the sea, a sensual reminder of the seafaring history of the place as we chugged on in the lee of Corfu and Albania.

A few days later I headed back east to Split, and instead of bumping innocuously to earth and being sped from another indistinguishable airport to the city centre, with the taste of Gatwick's Pret still on my tongue, I gathered at dawn on the deck with fellow travellers, huddled with their morning coffee and cigarettes. The ship slowed and we watched green islands slide by, dark and magical, the boat's torpor encouraging us to really take in where we were and the distance we had travelled from the blustery, wet Ancona we had left. As though rewarding us for our patience, the roofs and clock towers of Split came into view, warm and inviting in the morning light, and I descended from the ship, keenly aware that I was walking on very different ground to that I had left.

Air travel by necessity has become standardised, a fate railways have been spared. Navigating a country's rail system forces you to read signs, ask for directions, stand pensively at a departure board filled with strange names and confront your foreignness. You are inserted into the heart of a new city, shoulder to shoulder with commuters and locals. If you're travelling anywhere other than France or the Netherlands, you will have to stop off somewhere, and with even an hour or two's transit you can get an insight into

a place, a picture postcard which might just draw you back for a longer visit.

Unfortunately, trains are expensive despite ongoing efforts at subsidies, and I'm incredibly fortunate to be able to travel in this way, especially living in London. But

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I felt more than ever before that I had truly travelled

”

colleges are beginning to take into account the environmental impacts of travel when giving grants. Alongside reducing meat consumption, cutting out air travel is one of the strongest individual moves you can take to combat climate change. Less practically, the pace of life these days has become hectic to the point where spending a day getting somewhere is anathema to most; as humans we feel entitled to travel thousands of miles in a matter of hours.

Individual action can only go so far, but the changes we will have to make to our lives if we are to have any hope of avoiding irreversible climate change often come down to convenience. We cannot continue subverting the natural order of things and taking from the planet for our own ends. We must be willing to sacrifice hubris and recognise our ultimate vulnerability as humans — travelling in a more conscious and realistic way is a start. The environment alone is reason enough to consider the slower option if you are in a position to do so, but in making that ethical choice you may find the journey to be as wonderful as the destination.



▲ MELISSA IRVING

My first date addiction

To date or not to date? **Ceci Browning** discusses the power of first dates and their never-ending potential to make your life that little bit more special

I am a serial dater. There is no point in me trying to deny it because it is objectively true. Over the course of the last year, I recently calculated, I've had sixteen first dates. Of those sixteen, twelve of my dates wanted to see me again. Of those twelve, I wanted to see five again in return. Of those five, three lasted beyond a second date, sticking around for however long it took us after that to work out we weren't such a good match.

Dating — by which I mean dating to find somebody, not dating the same person over and over — is a numbers game.

The chances of a first date being successful are tiny, especially when it is with somebody you have never met before. From the number of dates I have been on, I know this. I am not oblivious to the statistics. But for this reason, because the likelihood of two strangers being well suited is so small, it makes sense to go on as many dates as you have the time and the energy for. Ten first dates instead of five first dates can only double your chances of finding somebody you like, right?

With this attitude, I am well attuned to first dates. I have a routine. Half an hour of yoga. Shower. Towel. Blow dry my hair. Matching bra and knickers. One small glass of white wine while I put makeup on. Black jeans. White blouse. The perfume in the purple bottle with the gold top. Three rings, a silver bracelet, and the necklace which says *luck*. Two pieces of Extra spearmint chewing gum (one after the other, not both together).

This, my total self-immersion into the world of dating, is something that one of my best friends cannot understand. He is in absolutely no hurry to meet somebody. He is not sleeping around and he is not getting over anyone; it is simply that he is content by himself. The desire to find another person to share all the gaps of life with, the gaps between the good stuff

where there's no excitement, no plans, just living: this hardly crosses his mind.

First dates terrify him. I've seen him go on one, only one, in the entire time I've known him. It was with somebody he already knew, yet it was the most scared I have ever seen him, sweating through his un-ironed Ralph Lauren shirt.

On a visit to his house one Christmas, we talk about exactly this: quite how opposite we really are

in our approach to relationships. It is about eleven in the morning. He stands at the kitchen counter, pouring beans into the coffee machine. I watch from the window seat as he pushes the lid down, then takes two small white cups from the overhead cupboard and places them side by side on the counter top.

I have been telling him about the guy I have just started seeing — because he knows I have always *just started seeing someone* — and all the things that might suggest this guy is either interested or not interested, all the pros and cons of pushing forward with, or stepping back from, this particular person. My friend humours me for a while as he cracks four eggs into a large frying pan and pushes four slices of brown bread under the grill, then interrupts: *Why do you go on so many dates?* I think about it for a while. Toast on the plate. Eggs on the toast. Plates on the table.

I didn't really have an answer for him. I could claim it was statistics. This was partly true. I could claim I liked meeting new people, hearing their pasts and presents and futures all squeezed into a couple of hours of conversation. This was also true. But there was more to it. The real reason was fuzzy, sort of like when

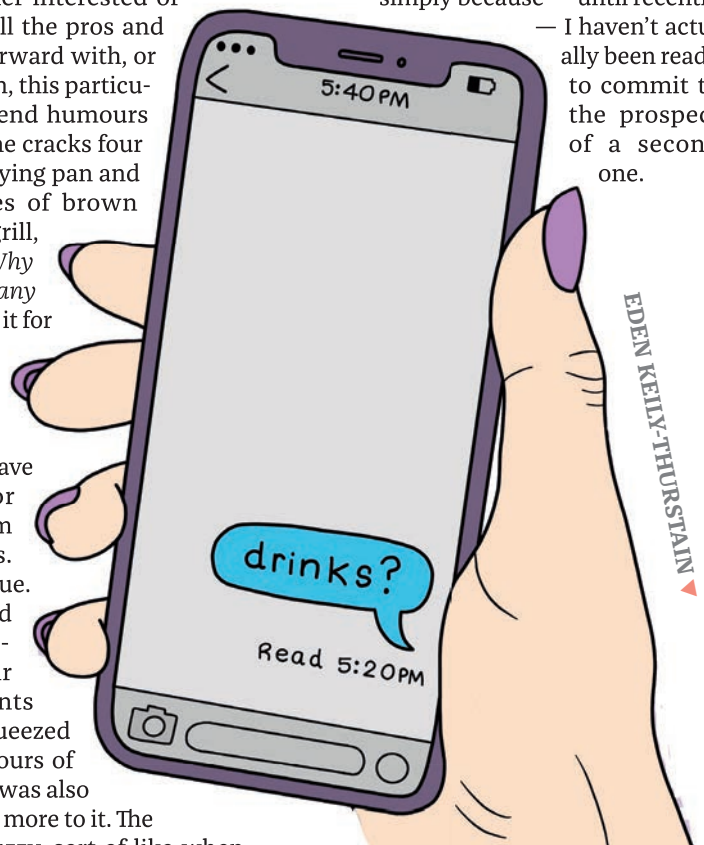
you turn the light off and your eyes adjust to being in the dark, and I couldn't really

work out what exactly it was, what the reason was that I kept trying and trying and trying, even when it meant being in a constant cycle of hurt and happiness, being a little unbalanced, all of the time.

In the last few months, I've realised that perhaps the reason I keep making myself vulnerable in this way is that I actually like first dates. In the same way that some people might refresh their lives with a new haircut or a gym membership, I am reincarnated by the act of dating. The thought that eventually, when I meet the right person, I'll never get to go on a first date ever again, troubles me. There is nothing like the feeling of being totally new to another person, feeling around for their outer edges, and trying to determine if they are the right shape to slot into your life. So in answer to my friend's question, maybe the reason I go on so many first dates, is simply because — until recently

— I haven't actually been ready to commit to the prospect of a second one.

“Ten first dates instead of five first dates can only double your chances”



Mourning the mature women's college

Natalie Abbott recalls what drew her to Lucy Cavendish and reconciles herself to the changes the college is undergoing

Like a number of mature students at Cambridge, I don't have A-Levels. Instead, at the age of 21, I undertook an 'Access to Higher Education' course at a local college. Upon researching potential universities, I discovered that the University of Cambridge accepts access courses and that the mature colleges in particular are passionate about them. I decided to apply, but it wasn't the University and its grandeur, or even the course that appealed to me — it was the ability to become a member of a mature women's college. From the moment I found the Lucy Cavendish website, I felt like I'd discovered an important secret that I wanted to keep safe. Everything I read appealed to me, but especially the idea of a small tight-knit community, almost like a sisterhood. I felt determined that this was the place that I was going to call home for the next few years, and after applying directly to Lucy, that's exactly what I did.

From the moment I arrived at Lucy, it felt like I was exactly where I was supposed to be. I loved the college atmosphere, and there really was something for everyone. I got involved with access events and the college SU, worked in the college bar, and DJed at some of the iconic Lucy bops. The makeup of the student body — with one SU rather than a J/MCR — made it easy to cross the divide between undergraduates and graduates and as a result, many of the great friends that I made were graduate students.

After an exciting first year, however,

things started to change. We were informed that the college was considering changing its entry criteria. I remember rumours flying around as to why this was being considered — the two main ones being a lack of funds and a lack of direct applications. The college held consultations about this prospect and opinions were mixed. These consultations felt like a formality for many, as it seemed the decision had already been made, but I didn't want my college to change. I believed that

I believed that Lucy had something special

Lucy had something special and I didn't want that to disappear.

The announcement was made, and the official line was that Lucy was diversifying and widening participation for more people from under-represented backgrounds. For a long time, I was really upset by this decision. Not because of the focus on those from underrepresented backgrounds, but because this could still have been a focus within the parameters of the old entry criteria. I was extremely proud to work with the LGBTQ+ and Women's Officers in my first year on a consultation about the transgender admissions policies at Lucy, and although it was a

battle, it seemed like actual progress

could be made — yet this seemed to fall to the wayside in light of the 'big announcement'. Another demographic that could have been focused on were student parents. While I have been at Lucy, there have always been student parents, but the lack of student accommodation for anyone with a partner or children seemed short-sighted to me. The size of the change also made it quite scary. It would have been more comfortable to change to just a mature college, or just a women's college, but it felt like a really big leap to make all in one go. However, the decision was made and a leap it was. The only solace I felt I had was that I would have graduated by the time the changes came into effect.

As we all know, the pandemic turned university experiences upside down. This has meant that my final year, and Lucy's final year as a mature women's college, did not take place in person. When I found this out, it felt like an anti-climactic end to my time at Cambridge. However, this was not to be the end of my Lucy journey. I applied for an MPhil course at Cambridge for 2021 entry. I did not apply directly to Lucy this time, instead hoping to be accepted to a mature college and, eventually, I was. I started to envision myself as a member of another college. And then, one day in May, I received an email offering me a scholarship. However, there was one condition: this scholarship was specific to Lucy Cavendish and to accept it, I would have to change college — back to Lucy. After some consideration, and some contemplation about the future of Lucy, I decided to accept the opportunity.

I cannot say that I have fully accepted the changes at Lucy yet, but I am starting to come to terms with them. The college seems to be working hard towards its goal of widening participation, with 60% of the incoming undergraduates coming from "backgrounds that are either disadvantaged or underrepresented at Cambridge". Despite my feelings about the decisions that were made, there is no denying the benefits that already exist because of them. As time goes on, and I see these benefits in person, I am sure that it will be easier to accept the loss of what once was.

So here I am, ready to start again at Lucy Cavendish. It will be a fresh start with a few familiar faces, and as hard as it has been to mourn the mature women's college, I am excited to be there for the start of something new.



Features Editors' picks

The Easter Term **Features Team** share the articles from the year which had the greatest impact on them, musing on the unique nature of the section

I remember reading Akhsata Kapoor's "Reading in the Margins" in my faculty library, acting out the very experience it describes, where she considers the histories of a second-hand text as it trundles through time. She democratically celebrates the varied responses to a text, where each individual voice in the margins is a window into another's approach. Our section's endeavour should be akin to this process: giving voice to observations, annotations and thus opportunities. As the article reminds me, the reconsiderations and possibilities that otherwise lie in the margins must be brought centre-stage.

— **Lewis Andrews, Senior Features Editor**

Having spent much of my life feeling somewhat out of place in whichever social setting I was in, Aleena Islam's "What's your coconut score?" strongly resonated with me. My overwhelmingly non-brown social circle at Cambridge occasionally makes me feel adrift and yet I never truly felt at ease in secondary school either, despite spending my adolescence surrounded by people that looked like me. Aleena's experience of small, everyday cultural things, which either add to or detract from her "coconut



score", wonderfully embodies the identity crisis that many of us often encounter. She encapsulates the complexity of culture and gracefully demonstrates the versatility of self-conception.

— **Tanya Singh, Deputy Features Editor**

One article which did this for me was Tabitha Chopping's "Why I curl my eyelashes before I sleep". Like Tabitha, I have dabbled in the aesthetic of empowerment. Unlike Tabitha, I never actually got around to reading the pastel pink ode to womanhood (for me: *My Body, My Home*), which taunts me with its unbroken spine as I pack and unpack it in my ritualised dressing and undressing of my Cambridge and London homes.

Tabitha's article spoke to the Hannah who bought that book: eager to learn, and angry at a world which, as the article so eloquently lays out, calls on women to view themselves through an internalised patriarchal lens.

— **Hannah Gillott, Senior Features Editor**

As a Features Editor, you routinely have to assess pieces by those brave enough to unshield such personal experiences so publicly, yet in the process sacrifice so little of yourself. Cynicism and triviality would be easy antidotes, but it wouldn't be in the spirit of Inès Magré's "On long distance loss". It resonated with me at a time I too was grieving the loss of my grandma from afar. Inès powerfully writes on the difficulty of sustaining long-distance relationships which have been darkened by sickness and ill-health. She touches on the almost mathematical practice of determining when you might next see them alive, and the corresponding calculation that you may have already hugged them for the last time. As Inès herself concedes, she offers no conclusion, but there is little purpose attributing a solution to the abstract. Features affords its writers that privilege.

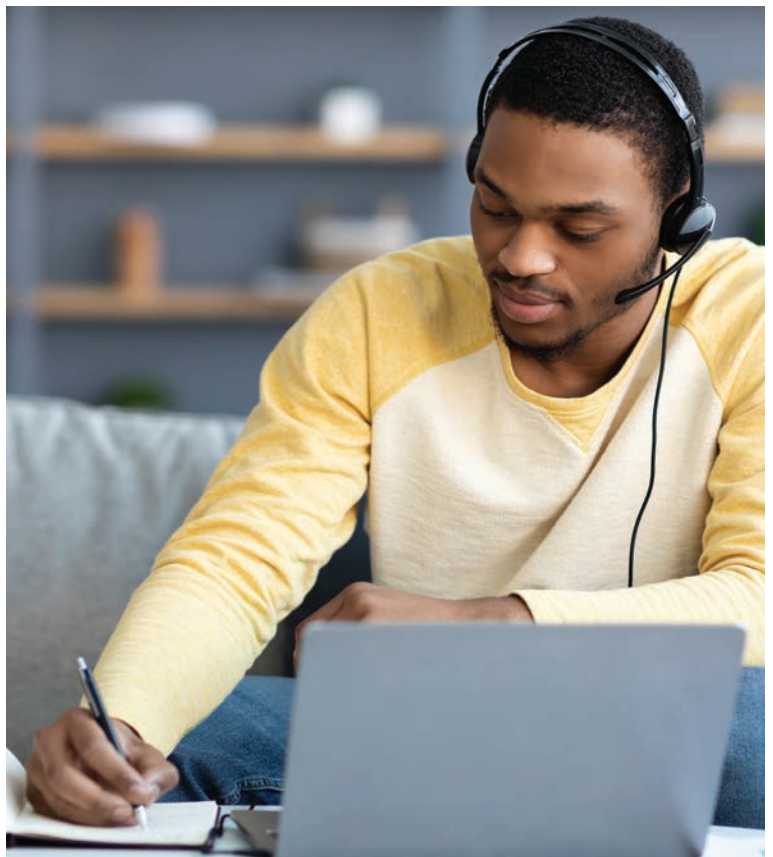
— **Erik Olsson, Deputy Features Editor**



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Opinion

May Ball or bust? *tête-à-tête*

Much like other sources of fun in this university, May Balls have come under increasing scrutiny as another apparently problematic stain on the institution. The price of the tickets? Extortionate. Dress codes? Too posh. Swingboats? Too energy intensive. And so on.

This criticism is nothing new. However, a two year hiatus has left the May Ball weakened and its critics smell blood. Criticism of prices is stronger than ever before and regulations are more stringent too. Despite this, we must not lose sight of the wood for the trees.

I can concede that May Balls are expensive and are all too often outside the reach of some students. A Kirstie Allsopp-esque “just save up” solution is not the right approach at all, but nor is getting rid of May Balls simply to avoid the possibility of someone being left out. Many colleges are now offering discounted tickets for bursary students. Jesus college, for example, offers 50% off the price

of normal tickets to bursary holders. £85 is quite steep to spend on one night, granted, but it is still eminently more affordable than the asking price. More May Balls should follow Jesus’ example, not least the expensive ones.

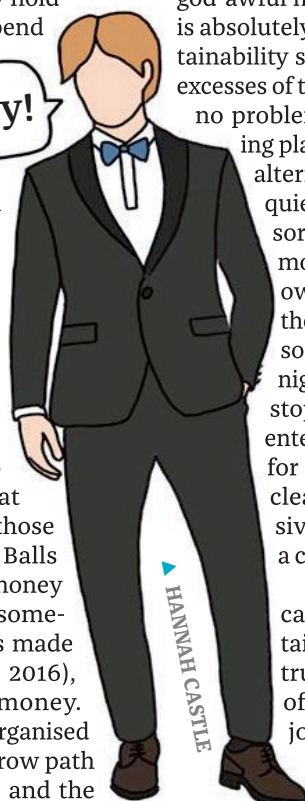
I think detractors have forgotten just how remarkable it is that colleges entrust students with hundreds of thousands of pounds to organise a piss up. And they do so because they know that only through deferring to those that know best will May Balls be any fun. Of course, the money spent has to be recouped somehow, but very little profit is made (Tit Hall lost £45,000 in 2016), guaranteeing value for money.

Like any other centrally-organised event, May Balls tread a narrow path between hedonistic excess and the

god-awful mediocrity of organised fun. It is absolutely fair for accessibility and sustainability schemes to regulate the worst excesses of the May Balls. I have absolutely no problem, for instance, with replacing plastic cutlery with compostable alternatives or ensuring there are quieter spaces for those with sensory issues. However these commonsense policies are overshadowed by ridiculous red tape, like the scheme suggesting the use of solar generators during a mostly night-time event or campaigns to stop “energy intensive” forms of entertainment. These do very little for the environment but have a clear impact on the fun. Excessive austerity threatens to turn a celebration into an ascetic trial.

If we block out the puritanical nonsense espoused by certain sections of Cambridge, the truth is that the vast majority of people enjoy, or would enjoy, May Balls. And for those that don’t, I have a radical solution: simply don’t go.

Classy!

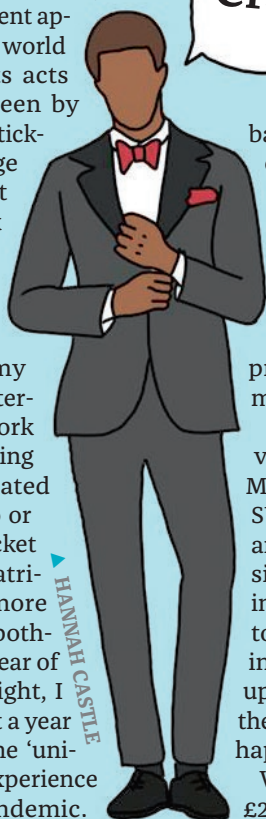


HANNAH CASTLE

A few months ago, like many, I was lured by a siren call. The spectacular ‘May Ball’, an event apparently known the world over, famous for its acts and marvels and seen by most as an essential ticket on the Cambridge calendar. So I leapt from the boat, bank card in hand because nobody had tied me to the sails.

I’d already begun to soothe my conscience, with interviews booked to work at other colleges during May Week. I calculated that if I worked two or three events that ticket price could be repatriated. But it was more than the cost that bothered me: it was the fear of missing out. One night, I thought, to resurrect a year of missing out on the ‘universal’ Cambridge experience because of the pandemic.

Crass.



HANNAH CASTLE

But it isn’t universal at all.

The current May Ball is an outdated institution. Once upon a time Cambridge’s May Balls were reserved for the elite, public schoolboys of its day. The

ball consisted of traditional dances, orchestras and formal dinners. Tickets were purchased in pairs, so taking the arm of one of these toffs was the only opportunity for most women of the era to ever see inside of a college. Through the 60s, cultural shifts saw reduced ticket prices and rejuvenated entertainment — they haven’t changed since.

Cambridge has continued to diversify demographically but the May Ball has not responded. Whilst SU-led initiatives like ‘Access-a-ball’ and ‘Sustain-a-ball’ and the expansion of ‘bursary tickets’ highlight important issues, they are testament to the inaccessibility of the events in the first place. Attempts to open up the May Ball have only illustrated their current inadequacies — and perhaps something more fundamental.

With events ranging from £95-£225, of course you’re getting your

money’s worth as you wait for the announcement of such dazzling celebrity acts like Scouting For Girls and Professor Green. Even more famous acts like Two Door Cinema Club would only cost £49 at a London-based festival this summer.

For your troubles, you’ll be kicked out of your college and made temporarily homeless for the evening. You’ll have the joy of listening to endless streams of Cambridge students looking for a personality as they hop between colleges throughout May Week. Those who genuinely think they can purchase a ticket to the world’s best parties perhaps prove the rule that Cambridge students have no common sense.

The perception of our university as out of touch isn’t helped when within the same institution, some are spending hundreds for a couple of hours while others struggle to survive. Of course, in life, people’s choices are limited financially. But in our precious bubble, we have every opportunity to equalise the cost and accessibility of these events.

So here I sit, with an Emma May Ball poster already pinned to my wall, as a blistering hypocrite with a dwindling sum in my bank account, wondering whether there are some traditions we shouldn’t have resurrected post-pandemic.

Sam Hudson

Meg Byrom



The dark side of dark academia

▲ LOTTE BRUNDLE

*Drawing back the curtain on the cult of the aesthetic, **Clementine Lussiana** argues that we should let our personality define our look - not the other way around*

Substance is out of fashion. It has been succeeded by appearance. We live in a world where images are seized, doctored and spewed over different platforms. With this hyper-fixation on how we look, how we are has fallen by the wayside.

This is embodied in a phenomenon: the aesthetic, the chronicling of looks into varied online subcultures. 'Types' of people are categorised, given highly specific qualities, and promptly romanticised by a digital audience. The categories come in a

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*Dark academia:
a visual depiction of
mystery and elitism*

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multitude of niche forms, some of which have gained more attention than others. Dark academia is a popular example: a visual depiction of mystery and elitism, of higher education, of the classics. The dark academic is brooding, sullen. They wear loafers and have ink-stained fingers. They work largely in dimly lit libraries. They enjoy muted colours, blazers, and anything even vaguely related to Donna Tartt.

There is a plethora of these aesthetics. Soft girl, cottage-core, twee... the list goes on. A wide range of looks to subscribe to, to emulate. They portray a lifestyle too: see the Tik-Tok 'it girl', who has claw clipped, green tea-d and chunky gold jewellery-d her way into our lives. Her daily routine is coveted and copied. They are a modernised, multiplied version of the clichéd American trope of high-school jocks, nerds and beauty queens. And they have blown up, the evidence being the surge in micro-trends. Because as aesthetics rise and fall in popularity, so do the clothes that go with them.

The replication of an image allows one to temporarily live an illusion. There's nothing inherently wrong with this — it's liberating, after all, to be transported to another life, or to present a handpicked version of yourself to society. Besides, everything has been done for us. We are taught how to fulfil a look by Pinterest mood boards and Tik-Tok 'step by steps'.

Yet there is something about it all that does not ring true. Surely the external should be a product of the internal? Surely our 'look' should be a representation of who we are? In a culture of replication, we are becoming increasingly hollow. Yes, a crumpled white shirt and carefully applied under-eye-shadow might make you look like a dark academic, might make people think you've spent the night at bacchic rituals or doing unspeakable things in the library. But you're not, and you haven't. Is the following of aesthetics something that is at its heart, completely artificial?

A fixation on our looks, countenance, and style has left our substance in cold neglect. The phenomenon of appearance has stifled attention towards the authentic self. The thing is, thoughts, passions, fears — they can't be chronicled. They can't be packaged neatly into containers, as clothes or makeup looks can. They're too messy, too volatile. They shift and grow. They are frightening and overwhelming and visceral. There is nothing 'aesthetic' about that.

Like almost every other modern phenomenon, this is down to social media. After all, online we are depicted visually, far more so than we are in person; in person, your 'look' is influenced by how you act, what you say. But online, how you look is everything. How you look is who you are. Because what else can it be based on? The quality of your captions?

The obsession of categorising the external arises from the modern fixation on image. It makes sense — if how we look is who we are, then it doesn't matter so much

what we feel like inside. We can simply assign ourselves to a subgroup by picking a category — an aesthetic. It is easier to copy than to be. To be, in a world where one's own appearance is constantly undermined by the photo-shopped, distorted beauty that we numbly double-click, is terrifying.

I know. The importance of appearance is not exclusive to our generation. Perhaps it has always been more valued than substance, and perhaps looks, countenance, and style have always been more impactful than thoughts and passion. The difference is, now we have tangible ways of measuring the quality of someone's look, and whole platforms dedicated to it. Our world is image-riddled, over-saturated with posts, stories, Zoom calls. We don't just accommodate this phenomenon, we feed it. And, worse, any movement that diverts from the replication of an image, any blind attempt to be ourselves is futile. An impossibility when every move

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*But online, how you
look is everything.
How you look is who
you are*

”

categorises you further is a subconscious step towards a pre-curated aesthetic.

But we're only categorised if we subscribe to this culture. There is hope, so long as we shatter, not glass ceilings, but the borders of photos that dominate our feed. If we acknowledge that the phenomenon of the 'aesthetic' is a reflection of a society with skewed priorities. And when it becomes more popular to have read Donna Tartt than to *look* like the kind of person who reads Donna Tartt — that's when we win.

C Sunday is underwhelming and overrated

For [Lotte Brundle](#), the pressure to celebrate C Sunday encapsulates the FOMO felt amongst Cambridge students

What is up with the fuss over C Sunday? No, really. Because, let's be honest, Caesarian Sunday (commonly known to students as C Sunday) is basically just a drunken group of students taking drugs in a field at 2pm: in other words, pretty unremarkable. And yet, it's talked up to be this enormous, unmissable event. An event which, if you do miss, or are fool enough to attend not to your fully inebriated capacity, you will end up feeling sorely disappointed. Or, so I was informed by numerous fellow students as I worked the Sunday brunch

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*Jesus Green had become
the site of hedonistic
indulgence*
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shift yesterday.

“You *have* to come!” a first year told me sincerely with wide doe eyes as I doled out their hash-browns and baked beans. So, not to be a miserable party pooper, I did.

Having missed out in first year, despite feeling entirely burnt out after an intense first week back at uni, I went down to the C Sunday celebrations on Jesus Green. Why did I go out, when in probability I should've snuggled down in bed and enjoyed some R&R instead, or even (and now here's a novel thought) got stuck into some good old fashioned exam revision instead? Because I could not escape the FOMO.

Fear of missing out seems to me to go hand in hand with socialising in Cambridge. In fact, I'd go as far as to say for many students here fear is something that defines them; that pushes them; that

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makes them get out of bed in the morning and get on a freezing cold lake to push a boat through the water with nothing more than a couple of wooden sticks for help, while the rest of us sleep soundly in our college-mandated single beds. The reason people in Cambridge work so hard, I believe, is because they are afraid. Afraid of not being good enough, not being smart enough: of not being *worthy*. So, when a social event is proposed, as many weekly here are, this fear ignites.

What if I *miss out*?

“
Fear of missing out
seems to me to go
hand in hand with
socialising in
Cambridge
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Many Cambridge students are frequently so weather-beaten by the academic and financial pressures of studying here, and frankly the often-bleak mental health that comes along with it, that they determine not to miss out. On the contrary they go all in.

It seems nothing is ‘too much’ on C Sunday. Usually a picturesque picnic postcard, when I arrived Jesus Green had become the site of hedonistic indulgence and, shock horror, day-drinking.

The C Sunday celebrations were a smorgasbord of inebriated students. Vomiting, pissing, and sweating: the event was a who’s-who of unpleasant bodily functions. As I watched in dismay as teenagers publicly snogged the living daylight out of one another all before lunchtime, I can only describe the scene as somewhat feral. After a week of what felt like being ground down by the peppermill of overdue assignments, my sober tired eyes saw the scene in a way they would not have done had I had a few more drinks. Don’t get me wrong, a couple of beers in and I’m sure I

would have been as lively as everyone else (minus the snogging, hopefully) — and, a lot of people genuinely looked like they were having a good time. The problem was, as it always is at this university, is that having a good time is always irrefutably defined by excess.

For me, the pressure to go to every ball, attend every dinner and dance every club night away is simply too much. My social battery is limited, and the university culture here drains it like nothing else.

So, when I beheld the festivities of C Sunday it’s no surprise that I focused in on the vomit covered grass, the sweaty crowd of barely known acquaintances, and the people openly pissing on the footpath.

A fully rested me would’ve, I’m sure, seen things quite differently and delighted at the chance to turn acquaintances into friends, merrily avoided the puddles of puke, and gaily high-fived the public urinals. It is because the Cambridge lifestyle takes so much emotional energy each and every day that otherwise enjoyable experiences like this can easily become tedious.

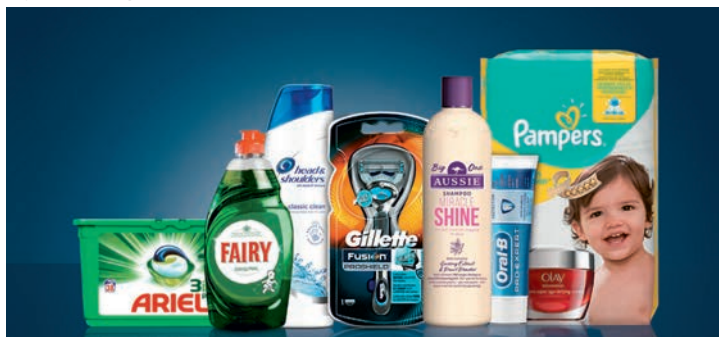
Perhaps, if we all did less, socialising could become more manageable here. Instead of feeling like we have to do everything, while feeling nothing, we could focus in on fewer meaningful interactions, and enjoy them to our full capacity.

Maybe it is only me that feels this

way, but if I know anything about the people that apply to Cambridge, I’m sure I know too well that this is not the case. People here always want more: that one final internship that will furnish their already eye boggling LinkedIn profile; the crowning jewel of their budding acting career as they take again to the stage of the ADC Theatre mere weeks before their final dissertation is due; that one last push to get them that all-important first-class degree.

We want it all. And will go to whatever lengths it takes to get it- whatever it is: success, acceptance, perhaps ultimately a feeling of contentment.

After all, I know these things, as I, as much as the next person, harbour the all-consuming, heart-breaking fear of missing out.



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Hot Tub Richard is the hero Cambridge needs

*Revelations of a contraband hot tub in a student's room should inspire us to fight for freedom against our college overlords, argues **Sam Rubinstein***



My room in college brings me tremendous joy. In the evening the sun sets over the Bridge of Sighs, and when I wish to procrastinate from work I can distract myself for hours watching the Cam flow by. Punting tourists, I have discovered, fall into the water much more often than you might think, so my concentration is occasionally punctured by the sound of splashing and cries for help. A friend of mine pointed out that Virginia Woolf's Jacob Flanders, while a student at Trinity, lived where I do now, in "Neville's Court, at the top". "Reaching his door", Woolf writes in *Jacob's Room*, "one went in a little out of breath". I know the feeling — but a spot of strenuous exercise, walking up three flights of stairs, is a small price to pay for stunning views and wooden beams. I've always wanted a room with beams.

I love my room, but it isn't really *mine*. Like the O2 Arena, the Cambridge Science Park, and the Suffolk town of Felixstowe, it belongs to Trinity College, Cambridge, one of the wealthiest landlords in the UK, who squat like Smaug atop their money-pile.

Even during term-time, I am constantly reminded of who my room *really* belongs to, my residency being subject to all manner of conditions. Some of these are fair: the College should, after all, strive to be a communal environment in which everyone is safe and happy. Some, however, seem pointless and arbitrary. Leafing through

my "Accommodation Handbook", I find a litany of rules and restrictions, most of which are not supplied with any explicit justification. "Students must NOT bring any furniture into College", it says, capital letters condescendingly driving home the point — and thus we are condemned to shabby chairs and lumpy sofas. "Large screen TVs are", for some reason, "also not permitted".

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We should be able to
do as we please in the
rooms that we pay for
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The pandemic restricted everyone's liberty, and most colleges saw fit to restrict our liberty in their petty fiefdoms more doggedly than even the government. It seems like most people I know got "deaned" at least once last year, for such heinous crimes as hosting friends in their rooms. But, on the flipside, the fact that bedders were no longer coming into our rooms afforded some students an opportunity to break college rules away from the watchful gaze of our landlords.

A friend of mine at Trinity smuggled

one of those contraband "large screen TVs" into his room, and a PlayStation to boot, which, when he succumbed to COVID, doubtless made his days in isolation pass by quicker. Someone else I know adopted a kitten for company. Most infamously, a chemistry student, dubbed "Richard" (not his real name), kept a hot-tub in his room for a year without his College knowing.

Some were shocked by Richard's antics when they were revealed last week — but what really was the scandal? A student, an adult, purchased a hot tub with his own money (£200, quite the bargain), and moved it into his own room. I am sure his quality of life improved immensely. As far as I can tell, the hot tub did nobody harm, except perhaps the group of freshers who reported "leaving with rashes, having sat in water full of everyone's bodily fluids for hours" (the exact nature of these "bodily fluids" remains unclear). I'd be tempted to take inspiration from our hot tub hero, though I doubt I'd be able to manoeuvre one up my staircase, and it wouldn't chime with the cottagecore aesthetic anyway.

The photo that graced last week's front-page shows eight students relaxing in Richard's hot tub. I imagine them grinning as they luxuriate in their bubbles, and each others' bodily fluids — though their faces had to be blurred out, so that they wouldn't get caught, and so Richard wouldn't land in trouble. How sad it is, that they must have their fun in secret.

I support a very simple principle: that we should be able to do as we please in the rooms that we pay for. Something interesting pertaining to this has recently happened at Caius. Much attention has been spent, and much ink spilled, on the College Council's controversial decision to take down the progress flag, which customarily flies during LGBT+ History month. But whatever the merits and demerits of this decision, it was intended, according to the College's statement, to "complement a recent amendment to Regulation 22 to support freedom of individual expression", allowing "the display of any legal flag, poster, or similar, by students in their rooms and windows, including outward-facing ones". This is a triumph for students' freedom of speech, and I hope other colleges will follow suit.

I long for the day when Richard will be able to relish his hot tub without fear of reprisal from his College landlord, perhaps with a flag of his choosing fluttering outside his window, showing off his happy face to the world, with a sparkle in his eye, and knowing that he is free.

Interviews

‘Iran used the hostages as bargaining chips’

Marion Willingham speaks to Richard Ratcliffe about disentangling his family life from global politics



Increasingly, “my view is pretty simple: It’s a game of chess between two states. We get to see part of it — part of it we don’t get to see — but it’s not personal.” This is Richard Ratcliffe’s take on the almost six-year-long detainment of his wife Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe in Iran. For Richard, of course, not to mention their seven-year-old daughter Gabriella, Nazanin’s detainment couldn’t be more personal.

Nazanin is one of a number of British-Iranian citizens whose safe return to the UK is dependent on the British government paying a £400 million debt which it has owed to Iran since the 1970s. “Typically ransom means getting money that’s not yours, whereas this is Iran’s money — there’s no ambiguity around it,” Richard explains. This was determined in a court of international arbitration and is acknowledged by numerous high-ranking MPs, including Boris Johnson. “The government will sometimes try to claim the moral high ground,” Richard says. “We can’t be seen to encourage hostage-taking, so we can’t pay it. Well, with respect, you not paying it is what’s provoking that.”

I ask Richard if he thinks the debt and the hostages are being used for bargaining power in the nuclear talks between western powers and Iran: “I think ... yes,” he says. “International politics operates at many levels. We were taken following the signing of the nuclear deal. That

would have been partly because relations were thawing — because all these pots of money were coming back — and actually, partly because the Revolutionary Guard were worried about losing control, so were asserting their power. You move on five years, Trump comes in, tries to rip it all up, and now we’ve got the Biden administration cautiously seeing whether they can revive the nuclear talks — with the UK and Europe generally wanting that to happen. I think it’s arguable that Iran has used all the hostages as bargaining chips in relation to that enterprise — nuclear peace, which for them, is about ending sanctions and getting their money back.”

Richard laments the entanglement of individuals like Nazanin in such complex international affairs, hinting at the British-Iranian-American prisoner swap last year, which was reported to have broken down hours before its completion. “It’s quite an unpalatable transaction, to say: ‘OK have your money back, so we can have this person,’ but it’s quite simple, whereas a much more complicated multilateral deal means there are more stakeholders with their own priorities, so I think it’s made more complicated.” Not only is it more complicated, but “dangerous”. “At the moment we’ve had a different worry, in that the nuclear talks might get somewhere, they might not. They might all fall apart. And actually, if they fall apart, it could shift from talking to each other to shouting and threatening to throw stones at each other. In which case, we won’t worry about being a chess piece — we’ll worry about being a human shield.”

The biggest obstacle faced by Richard

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*It’s a game of chess
between two states*
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and the other families is the murkiness surrounding either governments’ intentions. Last year Richard’s MP was told she wasn’t allowed to mention the debt in parliament. “All of us are looking at a shadow plane — we see part of it, and part we don’t. We’re trying to make sense of it. It’s groping around in the dark half the time.” As a result, when I ask what Richard’s next steps are, he offers: “I don’t know” would be the official line, and probably the private one. We’ve got a series of sessions with other families in the next

few weeks where we’ll talk through where we think things have got to in Vienna [where the nuclear talks are taking place] and what makes sense to try and do over the next few months, but I’ve got no idea.”

What’s more, Richard has been campaigning for Nazanin’s return for a very long time. He has staged two hunger strikes, first at the Embassy of Iran, and then at the UK Foreign Office. His petition has over 3.7 million signatures. “We’ve been going for a long time. That’s attritional, both in terms of our energy and ability to campaign creatively, but also in terms of people’s compassion, interest and attention. There’s only so many times you can go on television and say: ‘Nazanin’s really sad to be in prison.’ Something like a hunger strike is fairly extreme; you can’t keep doing them because, again, they lose their currency. And also “I have to say,” Richard laughs, as a middle-aged man I can’t keep doing them, it’s quite hard.”

A sense of the campaign’s emotional impact of such a lengthy and uncertain campaign emerges when I mention the recent release of British Council employee Aras Amiri. “It’s great news for Aras and her family,” Richard says, “but it’s definitely double-edged for Nazanin, because Aras and Nazanin were in the cells together, they were good pals. She’s from North London as well — she’s quite similar. She went back on holiday for a week and got picked up, but she got picked up after Nazanin. And you kind of think there should be a queue, right? We’ve done longer, so we should go first — but that’s not how it works. So it’s been a bit tough for Nazanin.” There is also a hint at the burden on Richard himself, as he adds: “Her family stayed a lot quieter, but we can’t go back now.”

We return to the metaphorical chess game. “On that chessboard, we’re probably one of the back row pieces, we’ll stay until later. We’re seeing the pawns being moved around. Being a back row piece keeps you safer, but it also means there’s more inertia on what happens.” It is clear Richard is desperate for the relevant authorities in both Britain and Iran to put an end to this inertia, saying: “There’s absolutely a moral hazard issue around how you challenge and disincentivise hostage-taking, but I don’t think doing nothing and waiting for the other side to be reasonable — which is essentially UK policy — does anything other than put more of a burden on the families.”

This article was published before Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe’s release on Wednesday 16 March after six years of detention in Iran.

‘It was a choice between going to Ukraine or for part of my identity’

*Nikolai Nizalov left the cloisters of St Catz for the frontline. **Rosie Smart-Knight** asks why and what we can do to help*

I called Nikolai Nizalov on a Sunday afternoon from my bedroom, not entirely sure what to expect from our conversation. I definitely didn’t anticipate being greeted by the familiar sounds of domestic activity. Nikolai was, he later explained, back in the United Kingdom for a week organising supplies, finding a car, and fundraising for his unit.

When asked if there was any direction he wanted the article to take, Nikolai responded: “My fundraiser, because it’s my unit that I’m raising money for.”

Nikolai, a first-year biology student at St Catharine’s College left for his childhood home, Ukraine, during Lent term. He drove supplies such as tourniquets, body armour, and helmets from the UK to the Ukrainian-Polish border. He told me his personal best was 19 hours and 20 minutes for the over 1,000 mile trip, which he has made three times now.

I asked Nikolai if the decision to return to Ukraine was a difficult one. He’d known for several weeks before the

tion [with] yourself, asking what you would do if stuff actually happened.”

It wasn’t a difficult decision. “It would either mean that I would have to completely cut out that part of me that is

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The reality of the war... is far worse than the UK media is willing to show

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Ukrainian, or do what I have to do. Then I’ll be able to look my friends in the eye when I see them after the war.”

He shared that both friends and family are currently fighting the Russian invasion. His uncle is a surgeon in Kyiv, who he has been able to stay in regular contact with.

Nikolai is currently training with a small volunteer drone unit of nine multi-role fighters. For his unit, Nikolai says he’s a “medic/drone-pilot/driver,” and is thankful he has found somewhere that he is “really useful.” He has completed a condensed medical course, equipping him to deal with scenarios he’s likely to encounter, and is in the process of training to be a drone pilot.

His unit has the capacity to operate ten heavy-lifting drones, all of which can carry humanitarian cargo like donor blood and medication into areas that are closed to aid efforts, such as the besieged city

The first-year student is continuing his studies remotely

NIKOLAI
NIZALOV

of Mariupol.

However, currently the unit has only built two drones due to funding restraints. Nikolai explained that, to fully equip the unit, they have to raise £150,000. Each drone costs around £6,000, not including thermal vision, and each unit has to provide their own armour, uniform, and weaponry.

Nikolai has yet to shoot a gun, and will have to equip himself and train with one before the unit is sent on an active mission.

“
When I bought myself equipment I maxed out my overdraft

”

conflict officially began that, if anything were to happen, he would go to help.

“You do have to have that conversa-



een rgetting



"The most direct way of helping is donations and fundraisers, whether its sharing mine or asking other people to donate to it. NATO is dragging its feet, and unless you have a plane, donations mean we can buy necessary items and parts to assemble needed equipment."

So far Nikolai has managed to raise £6,000 for his unit.

Some of his unit, like Nikolai, are university students in their early twenties. Nikolai, who matriculated in 2020, said he is working to ensure he doesn't have to intermit again, and plans to take his exams from a safe location.

St Catharine's have been supportive of his decision to continue his studies remotely alongside his duties in Ukraine. The college Master, Professor Mark Welland, called him after

learning of his decision, to offer advice based on his own military experience.

Nikolai has also applied to the University for emergency funding.

"When the war started I emptied my bank account. When I had to buy myself protective equipment, I maxed out my overdraft."

For Nikolai and his unit, their first active mission is in just two weeks, putting pressure on the unit to raise enough money for the protective equipment as well as the drones essential to their operations and effectiveness.

The unit doesn't know where they will be sent, or what they will be required to do. "We're only getting deployed in two weeks, and these days things change in terms of hours, not weeks."

At the moment, a day for the members of the unit can start as early as 7 a.m. before finishing at 10 p.m., be -



ing filled with drone construction and training, fundraising, or liaising with logistic networks that Nikolai has assembled.

Nikolai tells me that the reality of the war, while shocking to all those following the news, is far worse than the UK media is willing to show. "Some Ukrainian outlets show videos of children dying."

"It's fair enough that the UK public doesn't want to see that on daytime television, but it's also what is happening. It's

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The College master
advised me based on his
own military experience
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a bit disconnected from normal UK life."

Returning to the UK, Nikolai told me, is very weird, but that he hasn't had time to process how different Cambridge and the UK are, being stuck "very much in work mode."

For me, it felt so alien to be interviewing someone my own age about the situation so matter-of-factly. However, for Nikolai, this has been his reality for the past month and a half. At the end of this week he will be returning to Ukraine with a car loaded with essential supplies and equipment, and I shall be returning to Cambridge with books and plants in tow.



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“All young Russians want to leave”

Juliette Guéron-Gabrielle talks to a student who fled Russia following the invasion of Ukraine

Tom* recently left Russia. He is a former MML student, now working for a “large, but non-Russian energy company” in Russia. His company specialises in renewables. Up until a few days ago, he was living and working in Saint Petersburg, vacationing in the Black Forest, and relaxing in the public baths with his Russian colleagues or British friends living in Russia.

Tom is so fond of Russia that, during the pandemic, he stayed in the country despite his department asking its students to come back. “I thought I would stay in Russia for a very long time,” he tells me. “But to stay in Russia now, is to be tainted. Not to speak up, is to be complicit with the bombing of maternity wards or children or with whatever else Putin decides.”

Tom found out about the invasion on Telegram, the encrypted messaging app that’s being used to share information among Ukrainians. He saw “pictures of mushroom clouds on the various Telegrams channels [he] was subscribed to, pictures of things on fire, of explosions.

“When my friend picked up the phone, I said, half-jokingly: ‘Well, mate, I assume the invasion has started.’ And then the cheery British disposition, the banter stopped. Because you appreciate that what has happened is so unbelievably awful. I’m very British, I suppose, in the sense that I don’t show my emotions very much. But I was on the verge of tears, thinking of the sheer stupidity of the invasion.”

Tom took the day off. When he returned to the office, the security guard greeted him with a cheery: ‘We’re outside Kiev!’ Tom didn’t know what to answer. “In the office itself, the invasion wasn’t something people were acknowledging. But all my meetings were cancelled, because the upper-management had to draft a strategy to answer the sanctions.”

Tom stayed in Russia for ten days following the invasion of Ukraine. When the Ukrainian envoy to the peace negotiations in Belarus mentioned that Rus-

sia might implement martial law, he decided to leave the country. “Martial law means foreigners can be detained in camps. I have a British passport, and Britain is on the list of unfriendly countries. So that is when I decided to leave.”

He tried to find a flight out. He needed to go via ‘Arab countries, or former soviet bloc countries’, given that the European space was closed. Eventually, he managed to book a ‘horrendously expensive’ flight to Istanbul. In Istanbul, he found hotels packed with both Russians and Ukrainians.

The flight to Istanbul reminded him of the flight of “the Whites”, the Russian nationalists that lost the Russian civil war against “the Reds” after the 1917 communist Revolution.

In Istanbul, he dined with two Russian friends he knew, both members of the opposition, both having previously been detained by the Russian state and beaten up by the police. “That is a quite common experience in Russia.”

He said he felt a tiny spark of disappointment witnessing them leave. “They were telling me that they could organise from outside Russia. They could collect money, spread information. I think that, if any change is ever going to happen in Russia, it is going to be because of this war. This war is the biggest tactical blunder Putin has ever made. So people should organise from the inside.”

“My plan is to go back as soon as I can,” he tells me. I ask him if that means he will go back regardless of the situation in Ukraine. “Well, I’ll go back when the peace is signed,” he specifies. He believes that the war will be over soon, because Russia will run out of money. “But I could be wrong – it could go on forever

He says the full impact of the sanctions will be felt in a few weeks. “Supermarkets are going to empty.” As a result of the sanctions, his bank account is frozen. He says he will probably lose his job, because his company relies on the importation of parts from abroad to build wind turbines in Russia.

“The pieces come from Siemens in Germany, or other similar Western companies, so, unless my company finds a loophole in the sanctions, it will have to stop its activities.”

I ask him if he heard people discussing the war before he left. He tells me that people have no idea that their country is at war. “When I called my landlady to say I was leaving, she didn’t understand why. I had to tell her it was because of the war, but she didn’t understand.”

When I ask him if he used the word “war”, he says he has fun finding ways around it – so, no, he didn’t actually use the word. “I say ‘recent developments in our brother country Ukraine’ or ‘the special operation in Donbas’ or stuff like that.”

He didn’t expect a war to break out. “They didn’t ramp out the propaganda efforts in the lead up to the invasion. We all expected they would say they found a nuclear weapon in Ukraine, or whatever, and then announce an invasion – but they didn’t prepare the Russians for the idea of war.”

“They must have expected that Ukraine would fall in three or four days. They would not have to make a big deal out of it. They could have called the ‘end of the special operation’ rapidly, without making too many waves.”

I ask Tom about the crackdown on social media apps. “The censorship is bad, but it’s not that bad. My ex-girlfriend, for instance, is not very techy, but she knows how to use a VPN, so she has access to foreign news. And we can talk by Telegram.”

I asks him if his ex-girlfriend wants to leave. “Of course she wants to leave,” he answers. “But she doesn’t have enough money. All young people want to leave. Over 50% of Russian people under 30 want to leave. And that percentage is only going to increase. Young people want to leave, go west, get more money and freedom.”

An hour and a bit later, when the interview ends, the night has fallen. The café is almost empty. Tom goes back to the Cambridge college he is staying at for the moment – uncertain of what to do next, or where to go.

**the name has been changed for anonymity purposes*

Pint-pulling with Caitlyn Jenner and making Stormzy cheese sandwiches:

Eleanor Mann speaks to the Union's barman

I didn't wait long before Sam came bustling into the bar.

Always the host with the most, he offers me a refreshment before eventually sitting down himself, though his eagerness to keep his guest content never leaves during our conversation.

Sam Heap became head barman of the Cambridge Union's bar, The Orator, seven years ago. His passion for his job is instantly obvious. "Having run some pretty rough places, coming here is the promised land," he tells me. "It's mega stressful at times, particularly with a new business, but I love my job. You're never bored."

Bartending runs in the family. His grandparents ran the Four Saint Georges for thirty years, his parents the Pantons Arms in the nineties and his grandma was even a librarian at the Union in the sixties.

Heap's experience has held him in good stead for his current role. "Coming in here, you need that all-rounder experience; one minute you're a showman, next minute you're a bouncer, next minute you're a counsellor, then the next minute you're sorting out Robert de Niro's pork loin."

Beyond working the bar ordinarily, Sam greets the Union's guests, helping them relax before they go into the chamber with a specially made cocktail (or mocktail in the case of Jeremy Corbyn) and serving them dinner — sometimes consoling them afterwards

with another drink following a tough debate.

Some of the cocktails Sam has crafted for his celebrity guests are the work of a creative genius. He tells me of Bernie Sanders' 'Burn, Baby, Burn,' cocktail, and AJ Tracey's 'Lime and Direct' which was presented to him in a box containing dry ice. The signed box remains behind the bar, where Heap tells me they "keep as much memorabilia as possible."

"Your Jeremy Corbyns and Theresa Mays" will have mocktails, while other guests have stranger requests. Jordan Peterson, Sam recalls, ate three steaks, whilst Stormzy had lots of grilled cheese sandwiches and Bill Gates had Tracker bars and a Diet Coke. Oliver Stone, a film director, who arrived late, had a double shot Americano with two shots of espresso on the side; "just to perk him up a bit before he went into the Chamber."

Mark Hamill, Sam's favourite speaker so far (he's a massive *Star Wars* fan), "only had an English Breakfast with milk on the side," as he had to rush off to film *The Last Jedi*.

Guests are treated to other Union traditions, such as rubbing out the message of the last Union speaker and writing their own message on the chalkboard in the bar. Katie Price, rather unsurprisingly, wrote something "wildly inappropriate". "She was everything you'd expect her to be", recalling that he made her a Pink Chambord apple cocktail: 'The Pricey'. Martin Lewis's blackboard message, on the other hand, strayed from his usual financial pearls of wisdom, advising instead: "If it's brown, flush it down, if it's yellow, let it mellow."

Sam also holds pint-pulling competitions with his guests, a skill which has produced mixed results. "Caitlyn Jenner was the worst", drawing last with the Prince of Liechtenstein, while Kevin Rudd, the former Australian Prime Minister, pulled the perfect pint. It "couldn't have been better."

The constant excite-

ment and variety of events Sam oversees, from weddings to Union balls, are clearly something he thrives on. Yet it must be hard to switch off from the job at the end of a long day?

"I'm a bit of a workaholic", Sam admits. "It's more of a lifestyle than a job really, and you have to want to do it...I'm constantly checking in, and I do struggle to sort of let go a little bit. If you're trying to get perfection, then you have to work at it a little bit as well. With the current staffing crisis, we're working hard towards

it." He jokes that he'll be working five days a week soon.

Spending nearly everyday behind the bar next door to the Cambridge Union, one of the world's oldest continuous debating societies, Sam has had many interesting encounters. But he is extremely discreet about the less enjoyable experiences: "It's running bars...you're selling alcohol, there's going to be times when people have had too much before they came here."

Does he have views on the Union itself? He admits that "we haven't got time to get involved in major union politics", but he does notice when the Union presidency changes hands. "I get a new boss every three months, and usually they're 19 to 24 years old", he chuckles. "My blood pressure is at a constant high, but I've

never had a bad one. They've all been very very good to me, and good for the Society as well."

The Union and its high profile guests is certainly the bar's USP. But Heap also sees the bar as bridging the divide between town and gown. "If you're a tourist or member of the general public, the University is quite an out-there thing...the separation

between town and gown is quite large. They can't just walk into a college or college bar — we're the closest thing they can possibly get to that."

Sam's pride for his job leaves me with the rare satisfaction of having met someone who genuinely loves what they do. "Everyday is a different story", he remarks as he returns to thinking up cocktails for the next star who comes to his bar.



ILLUSTRATIONS
BY MELISSA
IRVING



▶ SAM HEAP



▼ GAGE SKIDMORE

Peterson's bad biology

Nieve Brydges explains how Jordan Peterson uses dodgy science to prop up his beliefs

What comes to mind when we think about science? For many, it's green vials in chemistry labs, white lab coats and goggles, and memories of botched biology practicals in which various organs and organisms are at the mercy of 16-year-olds with scalpels. Filled with heady confidence (and, let's be honest, likely unsafe levels of chemicals) and perched on those wooden stools, we prepared to dissect, label, and explain away everything men had encountered.

An exercise at once liberatory and restrictive, the natural world is reduced to a series of truisms as hearts, plants, gills, and stomata alike are splayed out in black and white, bearing labels. When people feel confused, it can be philosophy grounded in this biology that reassures. If testosterone and aggression go to 'men' just as pollen to 'bee' and oxygen to 'red blood cell', then certain men can feel assured of their place in the social ladder — or at least in their ability to climb it.

For those of you already acquainted with Peterson's flirtations with evolutionary psychology, I can only apologise; for those that have escaped his explanations, here's a summary: Peterson's logic follows that natural hierarchies within lobster communities can serve as a pre-cultural prototype for some aspects of human behaviour. Male lobsters use aggression to ensure access to scarce resources. More aggressive lobsters have more serotonin, and thus the lobsters that lose fights are framed as 'depressed'. The logic follows that if, as a human male, you're feeling down in

the dumps, then the 'natural' solution is to assert social dominance. "Stand up straight with your shoulders back" is an oft-quoted platitude related to an assertion of power and masculinity. Essentially, it's all on you, bucko.

The short answer to this is that all species can arguably be traced back to the elusive last universal common ancestor, and the last time I checked, we weren't instigating a return to nature by emulating the mating patterns of seahorses or dancing rituals of bees. The lobster is one creature out of trillions — all of which are distantly related to the first lifeforms on Earth.

So why does Peterson's logic prove so persuasive? With a bestseller book and YouTube videos garnering millions of views, the man has struck a nerve. I think the power of Peterson's argument comes in part from his misleading explanation (or innocent misunderstanding) of the phylogenetic tree. When Peterson

“Humans and lobsters have nothing to do with one another”

asserts that human beings “divulged” from lobsters, he implies that humans have evolved from lobsters which could explain similar behaviour, which is simply untrue. Vertebrates (which would, 500

million years later, include homo sapiens) diverged from invertebrates (which would, 150 million years later, include lobsters) approximately 500 million years ago. Human and lobster populations have since had absolutely nothing to do with each other since then, humans have been too busy coming up with stuff like the free market (or defending ourselves from the free market) whilst lobsters have been scuttling around the seafloor. Given that we eat them, our relationship is hardly intimate.

Peterson's narrative of human-lobster similarities is no more than a narcissistic construction of the world in his image. Peterson and his fans alike would do well to heed the advice of anthropologist, De Waal who states: “humanity's know-thyself mission can be understood only in the context of the stained glasses through which they stare in nature's mirror”.

Evolution is not directional. Evolutionary adaptations result from random genetic changes which happen to be advantageous — this is how we end up with the weird and wonderful biodiversity seen in the natural world. There is no perfect adaptation and no such thing as a species perfectly adapted to its environment because environments are ever-changing. You might get caked in sweat dancing in

“Peterson's narrative is no more than a narcissistic construction of the world in his image”

Rumboogie, but on frosty winter mornings, you turn up to lectures with a runny nose and your hands half blue: there is a range of temperatures humans can be exposed to, not some absolute optimal value.

Accordingly, lobster hierarchies have developed to deal with resource scarcity at the bottom of the ocean through male aggression and dominance, but there are multiple suitable adaptations within any given environment — cooperation and egalitarianism may work just as well — studies of human social organisation point to both egalitarianism and hierarchy in past populations.

This framework wrongly places the blame for structural issues on the shoulders of individuals. When isolation and social disruption are the biggest predictors of mental health disorders, it is crucial that we stand up straight with our shoulders back but only for the sake of being a good place to cry on when our friends are in need.

To boost or not to boost?

Muzammil Arif Jabbar considers the pros and cons of booster vaccines

Published 23rd November 2021

On 23rd August 2021, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom called for a two-month moratorium on COVID booster vaccines, believing that vaccine doses should be saved for less developed countries. Largely symbolic and lacking legal enforceability, the call was but a plea from a leader who has seen his calls for greater equitability in vaccine distribution being ignored. Various countries such as Israel and the United States have already begun administering booster doses, while many others plan to do so in the near future. After a long two years living with a pandemic, and just as the initial vaccines seemed to provide a path to normality, we tackle a burning question: to boost or not to boost.

Let's start by introducing the concept of a booster. A booster shot, such as for Hepatitis B, is an additional dose of vaccine administered some time after the initial immunisation, designed to trigger the body's immune response once again and further strengthen it, either because the initial dosage was insufficient or immunity has waned. Most COVID vaccines administered today are either mRNA vaccines (such as Pfizer's and Moderna's), which provide your body with the instructions to manufacture harmless parts of the virus, and vector vaccines, (such as AstraZeneca's) which delivers similar harmless viral parts, 'ready-made', into your body. In both cases, the body mounts an immune response against these viral parts and develops long term immunity in terms of antibodies and memory T-cells circulating in the blood, ready to deal with any COVID virus which attempts to infect cells in the body.

So, to boost or not to boost? The answer lies in balancing the pros and cons. Both are certainly present — there is the

benefit of a third exposure to the viral antigen, and there are, of course, risks, as with any vaccine. Data seems to suggest

a fall of 14% (to 74%) after 5-6 months for Pfizer and 10% (to 67%) for AstraZeneca. Pfizer restores to 95% upon a booster. However, older and immunocompromised individuals have weaker immune systems; both their initial and subsequent immunity is expected to be less. The mRNA vaccines seem to cause, in rare instances, inflammation of the pericardium around the heart and, with AstraZeneca, unusual blood clots with low platelet counts. This, and the opportunity cost of not giving the

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What we see here is a clash between the interests of nation-states and the global collective
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vaccine to the rest of the world who needs it, is why most countries still seem hesitant on giving a booster to the rest of the population. Unsurprisingly, data is limited for immunocompromised individuals since they received their initial doses later — we will only know for certain if their immunity wanes significantly in time to come. For now, it seems that the benefit *does* outweigh the cost in older individuals and the immunocompromised, but the jury is still out on the rest of the population.

Science and medicine aside, there is yet an important aspect to this discussion — i.e. the equitability or fairness of administering third doses in certain countries while others have yet to even get first doses to many of their people. The scientists agree — the marginal benefit of a first dose far outweighs that of a third one. However, it is

not science that is the issue but politics. What we see here is a clash between the interests of nation-states and the global collective. So long as governments see a benefit in booster shots nationally, it is more politically expedient for them to oppose donating vaccines to the global community.

The solution to a political problem

should also be political — perhaps it's not so much about competing for a fixed supply, but other issues such as distribution, manpower, public trust in vaccine efficacy or incentivising greater production by relaxing patent laws. That, however, is a discussion for another day.

Yet another plausible scenario is that we see an annually seasonal shot to handle new variants that emerge, such as the flu vaccine, which differs year on year to reflect the prevailing variants. Given that the rate of mutation of COVID seems to be less than the flu, it is too early to say for sure. Moreover, a one-size-fits-all approach may not work. With our current hindsight, close monitoring of potentially 'vaccine busting' variants would allow their spread to be contained to a single locality, and vaccines specific to these variants may be administered to individuals living there.

As cliché as it may seem, we won't know what we need until we have more data. A wide range of factors can affect whether we need the booster, including the composition of variants in an area, the prevalence of COVID and number of vulnerable individuals, and last but certainly not least — the elephant in the

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The benefit to a nation may or may not be greater than the cost
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room — the cost of purchasing and administering the vaccine. With vaccines, we see a clash of individual and collective interests; the benefit to a nation may or may not be greater than the cost. The WHO Director-General's call for a moratorium on boosters certainly has the backing of science — in that despite the benefits of boosters for individuals, shots are far better off administered to the currently unvaccinated; whether he has the political power to convince wealthy countries of this fact is another question altogether.

Sport

How racial abuse of Black players has tainted the way I watch football

Damola Odeyemi explains how racism against Black players has altered his viewing experience

As adoring supporters returned to the Premier League last weekend, watching matches in empty stadiums will hopefully be an affair that football fans never have to relive. Although increased fan participation is hailed as the missing piece that breathes life back into the football viewing experience, I can't help but be somewhat sceptical about this, as my experience of watching the game has changed, and not for the better.

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, and the FA and Premier League paying more attention to racial abuse that players of colour have to endure, there continue to be fans that boo when players take the knee at the start of a match. As a football fan myself, this reality leaves a sour taste in the mouth, and was especially the case during the Euros. Knowing that so-called England fans would boo their own players before the kick of a ball for their stance against discrimination takes quite a bit away from the excitement that international football should offer.

For most Black players, pre-match abuse is only the least of their problems. It's what happens after the full-time whistle, when they are at home with their families and on social media, that grabs the headlines. The quantity and predictability of this abuse is shocking, yet I didn't notice how much it had affected me and the way I watch the sport until May this year, with the Europa league final between Manchester United and Villarreal.

Being an Arsenal fan, I wasn't particularly taking sides — I just wished to enjoy the game and be sucked into the narrative of the 'David and Goliath' matchup. Full-time came and there was nothing to separate the two teams at 1-1. Going into extra time, it was during that half hour that I noticed in myself a growing level of unease. The penalty shootout was inevitable and excruciating, but for reasons that it shouldn't have been.

Villarreal went first, so United would always be chasing the score. Marcus Rashford took United's fourth penalty and, I have to say, I wanted him to score, not for the club nor to win the match, simply for himself. He coolly slotted it into the left

side netting — relief. United's sixth taker was the Brazilian, Fred, and was the first to take a sudden-death penalty. My feelings of unease and anxiety rose even more. They peaked when it got to the eighteenth penalty of the shootout, to be taken by Axel Tuanzebe.

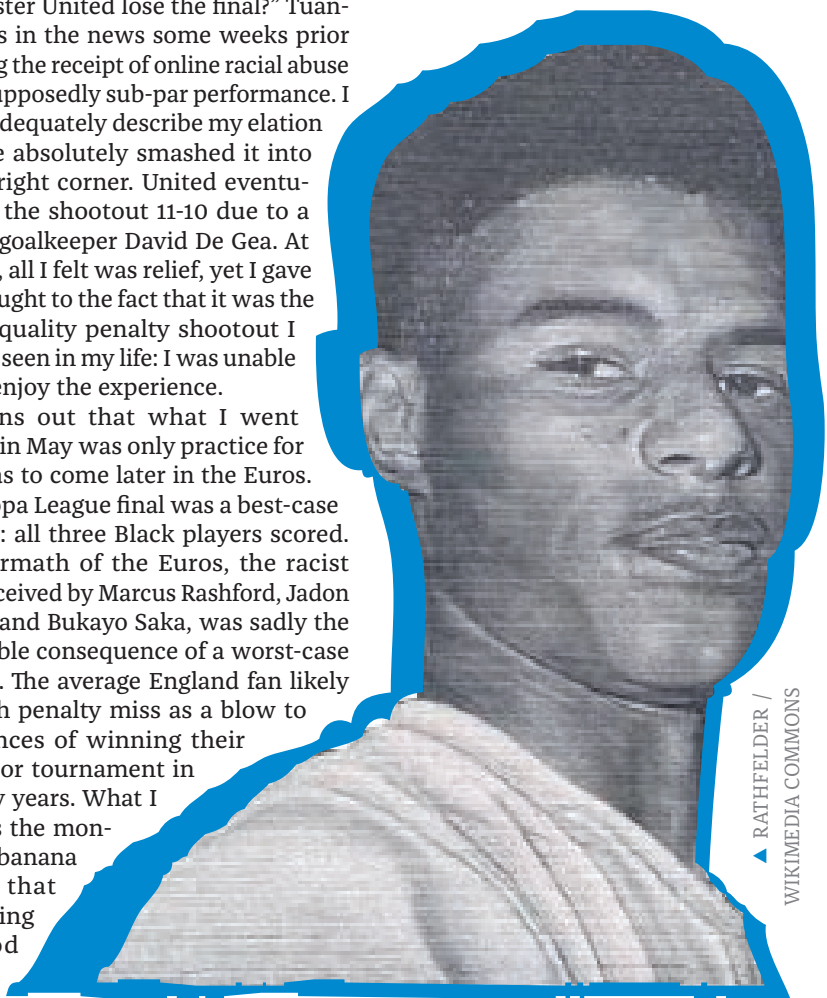
“
One kick decides a
[Black] player's fate
”

It was the first moment that I thought: “how much online abuse will this Black man receive if he misses this penalty and Manchester United lose the final?” Tuanzebe was in the news some weeks prior regarding the receipt of online racial abuse after a supposedly sub-par performance. I cannot adequately describe my elation when he absolutely smashed it into the top-right corner. United eventually lost the shootout 11-10 due to a miss by goalkeeper David De Gea. At the time, all I felt was relief, yet I gave little thought to the fact that it was the highest quality penalty shootout I had ever seen in my life: I was unable to fully enjoy the experience.

It turns out that what I went through in May was only practice for what was to come later in the Euros. The Europa League final was a best-case scenario: all three Black players scored. The aftermath of the Euros, the racist abuse received by Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho, and Bukayo Saka, was sadly the predictable consequence of a worst-case scenario. The average England fan likely saw each penalty miss as a blow to the chances of winning their first major tournament in over fifty years. What I saw was the mon-key and banana emojis that were going to flood their

DMs the day after and likely for weeks to come.

Penalties are no doubt the area of my viewing experience that's most affected by the events of the last four months. One kick decides a player's fate — hailed as a hero, or subject to abhorrent abuse. But this general anxiety for the fate of players of colour has seeped into all areas of the game and taints the way I watch it. As the new season has begun and fans are back in stadiums, it certainly is exciting to think about the great things that we will see in the coming year. However, at the back of my mind I know that it's only a matter of time before online racist abuse towards footballers becomes a headline again, and I don't think that feeling of dread will ever leave me. It's only ever one bad performance away, or one missed penalty.



▲ RATHFELDER /
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Top five sporting moments this year

Liam Kline shares Cambridge's best sporting moments of this academic year

1 A record-breaking victory in the 76th Women's Boat Race

The Light Blues stormed to a record-breaking win over Oxford back in April, marking their fifth consecutive victory. Some bold coxing from Jasper Parish grabbed the headlines, but the entire crew put on a gritty performance to secure the silverware.

2 Lightweight Boat Races bring clean sweep for Cambridge

Two weeks prior to the Boat Race, Cambridge enjoyed their first taste of victory on the Tideway with its Lightweight crews. Both the men's and women's boats raced to resounding wins over the Dark Blues, which included the latter posting a new time record on the Championship Course.

3

A pukka double win on the ice

In the hype-fest that was the Varsity Ice Hockey held this year at the Cambridge Ice Arena, the Light Blues coasted to victory in both the men's and women's games. Standout performances from Martin Limback-Stokin and Jennifer Marsh extended Cambridge's undefeated streak to four years in a row.



TOM BULLIVANT



DIK NG

4

A spirited day of Varsity Rugby at Twickenham

In their long-awaited return to the Cabbage Patch, the Light Blue women recorded the fixture's first-ever stalemate at 10-10 after a late try from Vianney Gomezgil Yaspik, meaning that the title

stayed in Cambridge for the fifth year in a row. Although the men's side fell to defeat against a strong Oxford outfit, the 14-man group battled back from 21-0 down to make it 21-17 at the death.



MATT IMPEY

DIK NG



5

A PU record, title win, and promotion: what a season for the Netball Blues

Cambridge's first-team squad blitzed their BUCS division with a perfect ten consecutive victories. Clodagh Bottomley's sharp-shooting complemented Fenna Agnew's tenacity on the defensive end, forming part of an impressive team that edged out fellow title contenders Nottingham on numerous occasions.

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Fast, fearless, and female: the reality of rowing for CUBC



MIKE TAYLOR

Ceci Browning talks to Women's President Bronya Sykes and seasoned rower Sarah Portsmouth on their respective experiences in Cambridge rowing

Sarah Portsmouth is wearing a necklace with a small silver pendant in the shape of an oar. This is the first thing I notice when I meet her, along with Cambridge University Boat Club Women's President Bronya Sykes, to discuss what it is like to represent Cambridge as a female rower. Perhaps this is because she is so tall, and my eye-line meets with her collarbone, but it seems suddenly significant. Even when she is not rowing, Portsmouth carries her sport with her.

Last April, the Cambridge women crossed the line in sixteen minutes and twenty-seven seconds to win the Boat Race against Oxford. After the 2020 Race being cancelled due to Covid, it was a major comeback. Both Sykes and Portsmouth had been selected for the crew that had been supposed to race. "What was that like?" I ask. "What did it feel like to win after two years of training?"

"You can see it in my reaction," Portsmouth replies, "it definitely took quite a while to set in." Sykes agrees: "People had said 'it's Ely, you know it really well, it's home water', but I didn't realise we had crossed the finish line. You can see in the video, we keep rowing because none of us have realised that we've done it, that's it, we've won. I think you don't quite believe it when it happens."

The 2021 race was very different from Boat Races that had come before. It was on home turf in Ely and hosted without spectators because of Covid restrictions. Sykes believes that this changed the spirit of the race: "From the moment we woke up that morning we were just having a great time. We obviously were so lucky that in the middle of a pandemic we were able to do that, so I think that's what we were focusing on: the fact that

we just enjoyed spending so much time together, doing something that we loved.

Talking to Portsmouth and Sykes, one of the things I'm most interested in is whether the merge of CUBC and Cambridge University Women's Boat Club (CU-WBC) into one club has made any practical difference, namely whether the women

“
When we actually
start rowing, that's
when I truly leave
things behind
”

are beginning to receive the same admiration and respect as the men always have.

Portsmouth assures me the change is as good in reality as on paper: "It's changed a lot of things. In the years that we've been here, I think the men's and women's teams have slowly been becoming more integrated, up to this year where it's the best it's ever been."

"What the women's side has to be careful of," she adds, "is that it isn't just subsumed within the structures the men have in place." Portsmouth continues: "It's really important as well that we don't lose the traditions from the women's side. There are lots of things that are unique to the women's squad that we love and we don't want to lose in the process of the merge."

"Everybody is so supportive of one another. I certainly feel that I can walk into the boat club and if I need help I could ask

absolutely anybody. People are incredibly friendly, open, willing, and supportive.

Such procedures highlight the institutional rigour of the squad, and the space that the light blue women have carved out for themselves, but CUBC is not always a slick, well-oiled machine. The people in the club are real people with fears and anxieties just like the rest of the student body, and so occasional inter-crew arguments are inevitable. "The buzzword this year has been communication," Sykes says. Portsmouth laughs, raises her eyebrows: "Issues arise when people disagree about something but they don't communicate it. What's important is keeping open dialogue and feedback."

Other times, problems originate outside the Goldie boathouse. Both Sykes and Portsmouth are finalists and feel academic stress more acutely than in previous years. "Sometimes it is tough," Portsmouth admits, "it's so intense for so long. It feels like a lot of pressure."

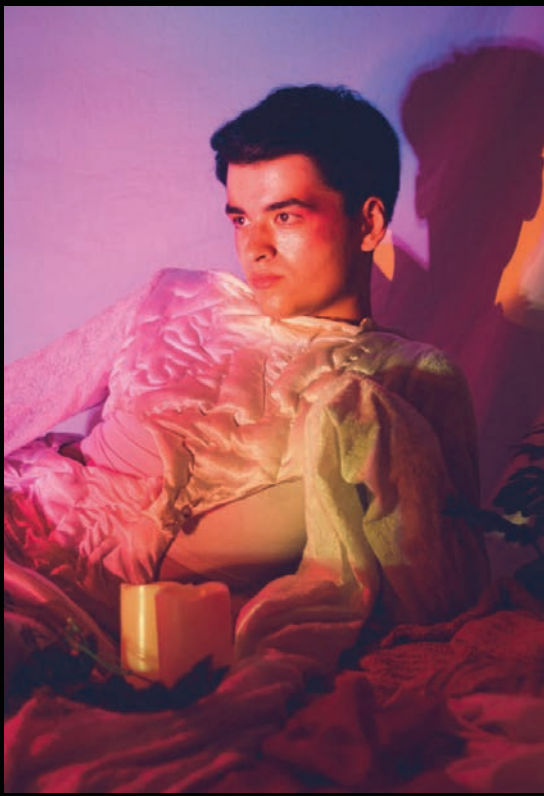
Nevertheless, more often than not, rowing is a relief for the pair. "You come to the boathouse door weighed down by all this other stuff that's going on and you have a bit of a meltdown. But then you're surrounded by all these people that are so supportive, that you love hanging out with, and doing something you love. It resets you. It gets you back on track," Sykes explains. Portsmouth nods in agreement: "When we actually start rowing, that's when I truly leave things behind. There's no room in your head to think about anything else. It's quite meditative."

If there's one thing to take from these two young female athletes, it is that the sporting world is wide open. As Sykes so aptly put it: "there's nothing I feel like I can't do or I've been stopped from doing as a woman."

Vulture

Seeing
me
through
seeing
you





Fantasy



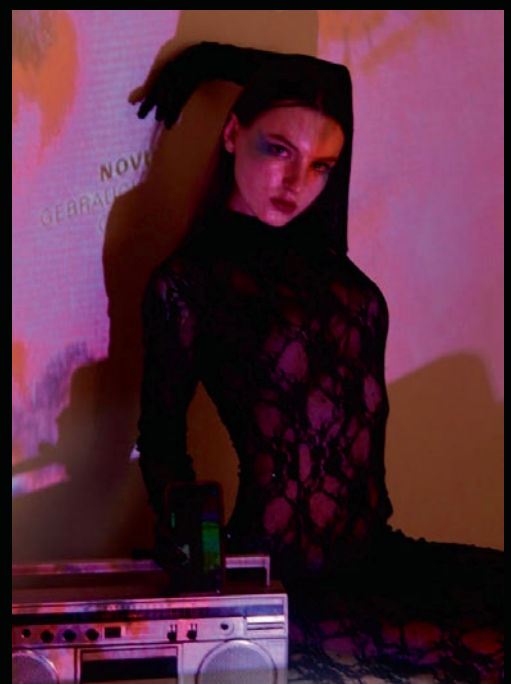
Nightmare



Seeing me through seeing you



Varsity's Creative Lead Lily Maguire & Varsity's Creative Team explore the journey from a surreal and atomized life to worlds opening, fusing and overlapping. During the pandemic, falsely fixed norms were proven to be constructs as individuals were segregated into separate worlds, constructing fantasies and nightmares within the walls of our bedrooms. Varsity constructed sets exploring fantasy, nightmare, childhood, surveillance, sorrow, entrapment and slump, playing with how sight was distorted and only cyber connections possible in the lockdowns. Yet boundaries have blurred this year, inaugurating an epoch of self-discovery; individuals understand themselves through experiencing a hybrid society, reconstructing the self as we reconstruct the world. They are seeing themselves through finally seeing others... *seeing me through seeing you.*





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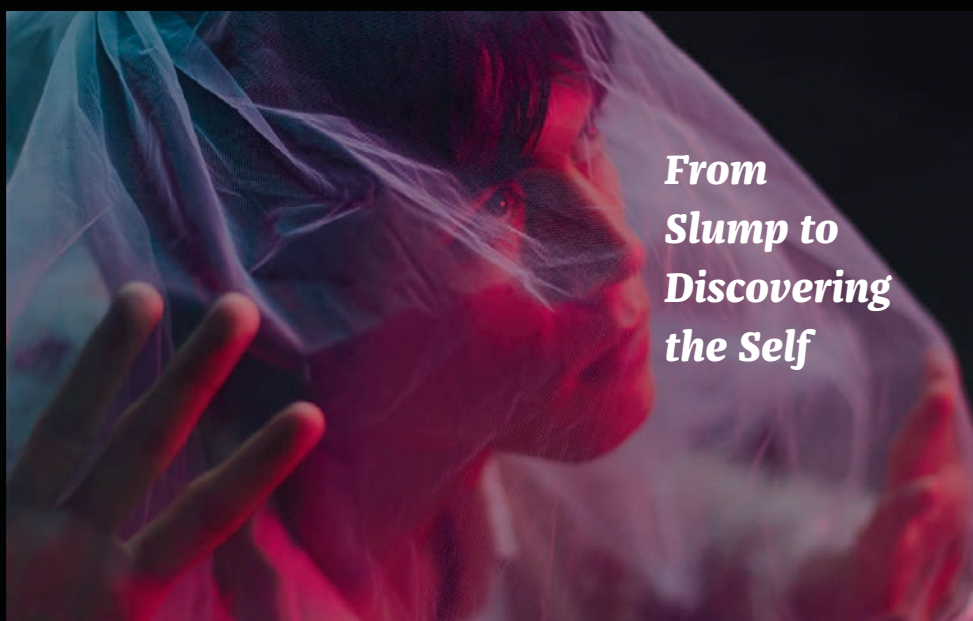
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From Slump to Discovering the Self



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Lifestyle

A Cambridge dinky door date tour

Lotte Brundle and Josh Osman's guide to finding and enjoying the city's teeniest public art. To be enjoyed with a pal, a partner, a parent or a pet!

1 If you don't think Revs is an ideal date location (and you'd be right) worry not, because this dinky date is nearby. Keep your eyes peeled for a tentacular sculpture — if that's your thing — with an intriguing political twist...



2 The next stop on your scavenger hunting date could be combined with lunch or a snack. Not a clear enough clue? This door is nearby to some graduating students. With a magical twist, this door is not one to be missed.



4 Blast off to Bill's, if you're still hungry, or shoot off to one of the wonderful independent boutiques, including the street's signature plant store! You'll be sure to find this door nearby, among much 'greenery'.



3 The next tiny treasure trove isn't far away! You'll need the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to find it. If you're in the market for an art or craft you won't have far to walk.

5 Finally, round out your trip by heading to Parker's Piece. Between the many cyclists and picnic goers an infinitesimal door is hiding. This 'reality checkpoint' is the perfect way to round out your day, as well as a busy Cambridge exam term. Make sure you look out for the other doors which are hidden around town!



Reclaiming food after heartbreak

Charmaine Au-Yeung wonders who gets custody of the babka...

Content Note: Brief discussion of disordered eating and breakups.

Phone the doctor when your foodie child doesn't want to eat. When I was sick — like, really ill with fevers that sent me into another plane of existence — mom would know that when I lost my appetite, it was time to take me to hospital. She calls me wai sik mao: her gluttonous cat. I've never had a problem with feeding myself, even on days at university where I sat in bed staring at a wall, working through the throbbing pangs of the worst hangovers, or contemplating friendships lost, or wondering how on earth my fresher's flu ever got this bad.

Food has always been an integral part of my life. It is how I socialise and how I destress. Really, I can't imagine life without it — that's most of the reason why I've always been self-catered throughout my student life. I think it comes from my upbringing; it's a trope that Asian parents don't say 'I love you', but they'll cut fruit up for you every evening. They'll carve apples meticulously until they resemble swans, hearts, and any other whimsical object that is decidedly not a fruit.

In that same mode, it became so easy for me to express love for my friends by whipping up bibimbaps, Buddha bowls, and eight-course Lunar New Year meals. I'm at my happiest when I'm in a kitchen, preparing a complex, multi-course meal for a whole day. But simply eating food is not enough — in my spare time, I watch and read about people making

“
When we're in the kitchen together, it's like we're doing a little dance, and everything is in sync
”

food. It's little surprise, then, that when friendships turn into something more, food obviously becomes the primary way I express love.

My ex loves to cook and bake. One of the first things I made for them was a bloomer, with the best ear I've ever actually scored on a loaf of bread. Afterwards, they surprised me with babka on my doorstep, a gesture that touched me so deeply be-

cause nobody bakes for me. Over time, I introduced them to cabbage, spices rubbed between the leaves, and roasted in an oven until it blisters and crackles. I taught them the best way to make scrambled eggs, and the joys of putting chilli oil on everything. In return, they taught me to enjoy marmite; that the secret to any risotto is constant stirring and a mountain of cheese and butter; and that Tangfastics are actually quite nice. They gave me the courage to run a bagel

“
This is me, reclaiming our foods, enjoying them again, because damn — we made tasty food
”

micro-bakery over the summer, after I finished my undergraduate degree and had time to kill. Heck, we even had a little tradition going, making filled bagels whenever we went munro-bagging. When we're in the kitchen together, it's like we're doing a little dance, and everything is in sync.

After we broke up, I cried spreading marmite onto my toast. It had been a few days since we parted, and I felt sad and empty the way that you do when such a big part of your life is gone. Worst of all, nothing looked appetising. I ate out of necessity. All I could stomach the day after we broke up was half a frittata; I was hungry, so I ate, but I wasn't really enjoying it, so I stopped. I could probably make a better frittata, anyway, at home. In fact, I had definitely made one in the last year, back when I was with—

Eating had formed such an integral part of my life with them that the idea of eating alone, let alone eating our meals, felt incomprehensible. A few months later, my appetite is back, and the pain and sadness has subsided. When I step into the kitchen, I put on good music, I sing, and sometimes I make our meals. This is me, reclaiming our foods, enjoying them again, because damn — we made tasty food. It would be criminal if I never got to eat it again. I look back with gratitude for all they taught me. The foods they shared have become part of my life. In that way, this is small consolation. I'll always carry part of their love in the things that I do.



AskVulture: How do I face Mimaansa Ghildiyal is here to alone in worrying about what

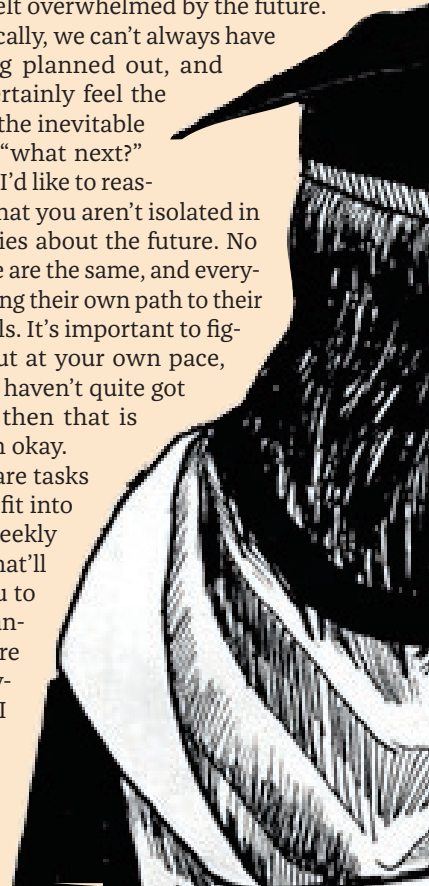
You've probably heard this before, but I'll tell you again anyway ... it's very normal to feel overwhelmed and uncertain about your future. Being a student at Cambridge sits hand-in-hand with constant deadlines and busyness; it's common that you might not have had much time to think too deeply about what your next steps might be. On the flip side, there will be many people who do have something figured out, and we love that for them ... but I'll get to that later.

For now, I'd like to point out that not knowing which exact career path to pick or which internship to apply for is okay. Rather than ignoring it altogether, being a little nervous but actively thinking about what you'd like to do after university is a favourable attitude to have! You're in a position to be proactive.

Whichever stage you're at, it'll always be too easy to compare yourself to others. Our university is filled with high achievers, many of whom have their short- and long-term goals pretty much figured out. I want to remind you that it's important not to compare yourself to those around you. Although it may seem like everyone knows exactly what they'd like to do, it's useful to remember that you probably just haven't seen the moments where they too have felt overwhelmed by the future.

Realistically, we can't always have everything planned out, and we can certainly feel the weight of the inevitable question: “what next?” Therefore, I'd like to reassure you that you aren't isolated in your worries about the future. No two people are the same, and everyone is paving their own path to their future goals. It's important to figure this out at your own pace, and if you haven't quite got there yet then that is very much okay.

There are tasks you can fit into your weekly routine that'll help you to start planning future endeavours. I recommend creating a small list of the



See the future?

to reassure you that you're not
happens next

aspects you're particularly worried or unsure about. By writing this all out, you can then set yourself some tasks which might help you work out what to do next. I've always found it helpful to share my thoughts with people; they often have knowledge and suggestions on useful areas that I might not have been aware of before! Remember that you can always reach out to college or faculty staff for guidance as well.

You could try allocating regular one- or two-hour time slots to give yourself a dedicated space to research internship programmes/jobs/whatever it is that you might want to learn more about. Sticking to a routine like this will help provide some structure to your plans and hopefully allow you to feel like you've got a better grip on the direction in which you might be headed!

Although I've been advising you on how you can try to feel more in control, the most important thing that you can take away from all of this is that you certainly don't need to have every next step and future activity planned out. I know it's scary not knowing what happens next, but I can tell you that not over-planning means that you've allowed yourself the chance to be spontaneous, and the flexibility to change your mind! If you set aside some time to think about and explore what you might like to do, then I can assure you that you'll start to feel prepared very soon!

Good luck!



FLORENCE BROCKMAN



Who nose when this will end?

Benny Soran comes to terms with the jarring effects of long COVID

Content Note: Brief mention of anxiety and disordered eating

Imagine the worst smell you've ever smelt. Now multiply that by 20, add 5, and then multiply that number by 100. That's the smell that I've been living with since I caught COVID-19. After catching a relatively mild case last July, I thought that following my infection, I would be able to move freely through the world, protected by my miracle-of-modern-medicine cocktail, with a dash of natural immunity. How wrong I was.

Three weeks after my isolation I started noticing pungent smells that reeked of rotten meat: sickly sweet with notes of metal. Deodorant smelled like decaying flesh, coffee smelled like battery acid, eggs like rotting carcass. I began to look for answers online. Having spent hours scrolling, looking for anything that resembled my symptoms, I found my answer in a niche Facebook group: Abscent Parosmia and Phantosmia Support.

Parosmia refers to a disorder in which taste and smell become distorted. Recent research has suggested that there could be a link between certain odour molecules and the receptors in the nose. If this sounds vague, it's because it is; scientists do not understand the condition fully. The frustration and uncertainty regarding any conclusive evidence towards what I was experiencing led me to seek answers for myself.

Our sense of smell is vitally important, and having now lost mine, I've come to

understand it is under-appreciated. Smell plays a key part in our perception of hazardous environments, relationships, and overall wellbeing.

This condition also has long-term ramifications for myself and others' safety. Last term, one of my housemates left her oven pizza in for too long, leading to the kitchen filling with thick smoke. I was seated in the living room, absent-mindedly doing some work. My housemate rushed in, flabbergasted that I was unable to smell the smoke. I also find myself quadruple-checking to ensure I haven't left the

gas on.

However, what affects me the most is the impact this has had on my day-to-day life. During the worst parts of my parosmia, the thought of eating would fill me with anxiety as I was incapable of eating more than just plain bread, yoghurt, and refrigerated vegetables. No longer was food something to be enjoyed with friends and family. The simple joy of meandering down Mill Road, greeted by intoxicating aromas, has been stolen from me.

But it's not all theft. My housemates have humoured me by opening our windows and doors when cooking to allow smells to dissipate. As the time I spend going out to eat or drink has dwindled, my housemates and I have begun to host more at our house, whipping up foods I find palatable.

I know I have a long way to go in my recovery. But some days, I stumble across a food that smells a bit like it's supposed to. And that is what encourages me to take a bite.

“Deodorant smelled like decaying flesh, coffee smelled like battery acid”

“The thought of eating would fill me with anxiety”

Theatre

Top shows of the year

Compiled by **Sophie Macdonald**, **Tom Howlett**, **Sara Sioufi**, and **Famke Veenstra-Ashmore**

My Dad Wears a Dress ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A one woman show performed by Maria Telnikoff about her relationship with her father, who is a trans woman. Giving it 5 stars, reviewer Macsen Brown lauds Telnikoff's performance and her "ability to switch so suddenly in tone and character [...] eliciting some thunderous laughter from a thoroughly entertained audience."

Life before the line ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

When revision is disrupted by a terrorist attack alarm, four Jewish students are forced to consider what lines they are willing to cross. Set in Manchester 2016, during the rise of anti-semitism, the play explores the effects of living in politically

charged times. Jasmine Charles, rating it 4.5 stars, described it as "distressing at times, and refreshingly real, the play managed to pay homage to Jewish traditions and culture while being an honest look at the community."

Slaughterhouse Blues ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Charlie Butler gives 4.5 stars in her review; consisting of around eighteen bizarre sketches, *Slaughterhouse Blues* satirically considers how we consume, market, and judge food. She summarises the production as "a familiar situation becoming increasingly surreal and twisted, with an incredible proportion ending in the murder/cannibalisation of one, if not all of the characters."

Animal Farm ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

This particular production of *Animal Farm* combines cinema and theatre. It adds a Brechtian appeal that highlights Orwell's novel as emblematic of twentieth-century European politics. Giving it an outstanding 5 star rating, Lewis Andrews argues that "it lets the original text speak for itself, bringing the story vividly to life, and letting the audience draw their own comparisons to modern-day governmental hypocrisy."

The Son ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Son is an uncomfortable, nuanced presentation of depression which resonated deeply with audiences. The audience is placed in the position of the parents, forced to watch as the eponymous son struggles to communicate, connect and deal with his mental health, whilst you are incapable of reaching him. It gets 5 stars from Tom Howlett, who suggests it "is a play about pain, about love and about sacrifice but, most of all, it is about tension or strain."

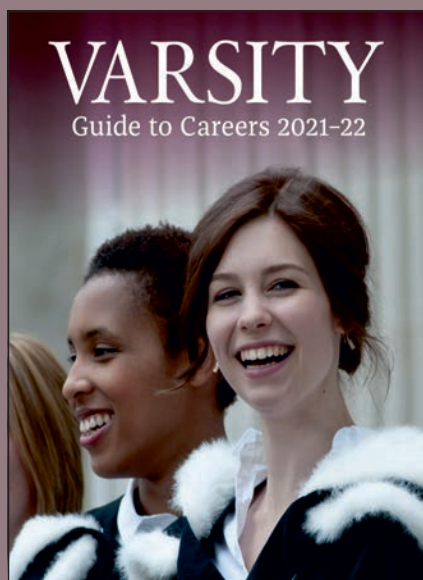
The Student Union ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Union is a satire mocking the Machiavellian machinations that we all imagine are at the heart of Student Union's bizarre bureaucracy. This character-driven comedy sought to strike at the heart of what is wrong with university politics and prick the pomposity of all who are part of it. It get a 4.5 rating from Lent Editor-in-Chief Emaan Ullah, who recounts "backstabbing, blackmail and malicious libel [which] all grace the stage in equal measure."

Much Ado About Nothing ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Much Ado About Nothing is Shakespeare's best romcom. Beatrice and Benedict's torturous yet amusing will-they-wont-they relationship is juxtaposed with the sickeningly besotted Claudio and Hero with myriad twists and turns. Jasmine Charles, giving it 4.5 stars, praised it as it "encapsulated a collective, creative cultural perspective from members of the BME community, making it inclusive and enjoyable."

The Varsity Guide to Careers 2021/2022



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In defence of GCSE drama

Lent Theatre Editor **Bethan Holloway-Strong** considers what we can learn from our Year 11 selves in this reflective and resonant opinion piece

Content Note: Brief mentions of kidnapping, abuse, and addiction in theatrical productions.

The words 'GCSE drama' can evoke a visceral response. Memories of half-baked devised pieces linger in the recesses of the brain, causing a wave of grimaces every time the drama classrooms of Year 11 are brought to mind. 'Devising drama' makes up 40% of the AQA Drama GCSE, and generating a full theatrical performance can seem a mammoth task. For many students, GCSE Drama is their first introduction to theatre engaging with 'real world' concepts. Often, this is their theatrical debut. So why are there so many seemingly universal similarities across students' devised pieces? And why, too, is there often such deep embarrassment associated with these first forays into performance?

Firstly, a confession: I didn't actually complete any GCSEs. My dramatic education came in the form of Australian Speech and Drama exams and the dreaded American middle school drama programme (think prepubescent *Glee*, but somehow with more singing). My first encounter with the GCSE drama stereotype was through Lewis Brown's TikTok videos early last year. The trappings of adolescent devised theatre were immediately familiar to me: the disjointed snatches of dialogue desperate to be 'meaningful' and 'deep', the repetitive, symbolic movements, the often disturbing subject matter. It seemed

that teenage me was doing a similar thing in Australia and America as students were doing in the UK.

I remember how, in assigned groups of three, we devised pieces about truly dark topics, most of which we had never experienced ourselves. We played students on a year abroad who were kidnapped and unable to return home, a woman abused by her husband, and a mother struggling with addiction. Across the world, it seems like students are all drawing from a common, troublingly dark well. But why?

The similarities between these pieces could be explained by teachers coaching their students to perform well in their exams, but such dark topics seem unlikely to be encouraged by teachers. Brown's TikTok comments are filled with ex-GCSE Drama students comparing their experiences, puzzling over why they all chose such similar, disturbing topics.

Students seemed fixated on portraying the 'dark realities' of life: from teenagers facing bullying and body image issues to larger, more violent obstacles in adulthood. This isn't a new phenomenon. Teenagers are undeniably excited by the prospect of engaging with more 'grown-up' issues as they mature, and facing dark topics in art gives them a vehicle for navigating the treacherous waters of adolescence. According to the Mental Health Foundation, 20% of adolescents may experience mental health issues, and 70% of these adolescents have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age. Students may be

aiming for the 'shock factor' of disturbing topics to achieve an A*, but they are actually going a long way towards learning about emotional responses to trauma and artistic outlets for their emotions.

In Year 11, we perhaps did not realise the gravity of what we were exploring. We were still coming to terms with the sometimes troubling reality of the adult world, and the dark topics we explored were not necessarily the healthiest route for our development. Now that I've grown up, I would be much more mindful of how

“
It's easy to lose sight of
the enormity of the
creative process
”

I represent traumatic experiences on stage, both for the sake of the audience and for my own mental health.

But theatre's natural role as a medium for expression cannot be denied. It makes sense that children are utilising it to process new, intimidating experiences. The physicality of performance and the self-motivational devising process lend themselves perfectly to the new independence of adolescence. So even as they appear to produce similar scenes, GCSE students are actually going a long way to exploring their individual place in an unfamiliar world.

I think we all need to cut ourselves more slack as creatives. In my time reviewing theatre in Cambridge, I've heard unyielding perfectionism from casts and production teams alike. Actors berate themselves over stumbled words unnoticeable to the audience, and a lighting malfunction can send a stage manager into hysterics.

It's easy to lose sight of the enormity of the creative process. Producing student theatre is a massive achievement in itself, especially alongside the demands of a degree. One role of art is, after all, to understand ourselves and make meaningful connections with others. So instead of berating your first steps into the spotlight, perhaps it's time to give your teenage self a hug and thank them.

You wouldn't be where you are now without their help.



▼ VALENTINA MAJOLO

Fashion

The Cambridge student starter pack

Anna Chan, Dioni Ellinikaki and Eva Morris present a handbook of Cambridge student fashion stereotypes and how to spot them

The Mathmo

It seems far too easy to typecast the mathmo. We are all familiar with the usual clueless dress sense made for hibernating in their rooms to do example sheets all day. However, as a former mathmo, Eva has a soft spot for the subject and its attire — with a little perspective it can be looked upon anew. The uniform for the mathmo is cargo shorts come summer and plain jeans in winter, a graphic tee and a zip up hoody or block colour jumper to start. This is not all too different from the latest utilitarian trend: every garment has its own use and purpose, with layers and pockets everywhere. Colours are muted, with the exception of the graphic tee providing a central statement piece, perhaps akin to the trends of 90s print tees. Mathmo style needs to be rehabilitated and celebrated as minimalistic and utilitarian, simply yet effectively done. A well dressed mathmo knows the virtue of the basics done well.

with stories of where they got them or the adventures they embarked on in them told with a happy-go-lucky charm. You can always spot them from a mile off because they all seem to have some secret to the world that the rest of us haven't quite caught onto yet. Perhaps letting loose — both in the fit of their clothes, and with their choice of colours — is the real key to freedom. Perhaps it is the joy of adorning their bodies with stories from around the world. Or maybe it's something more mundane.

a knit jumper, others patterned mesh tops and velvet vests. Scarves can be skinny and multicoloured, or pastel and blanket-like. Patterns can be mixed, or left alone to shine. This depends on individual style, but also how big of an essay crisis they're in.

The Finalist

Finally, the finalist. Their snazzy fits from first year are nowhere to be found. There's no need to impress — they know the place, they basically own it. And after all, a stylish outfit is temporary but final grades are forever. They are easy to spot either at your local college library or on Sidgwick Site on a good day. They are always drinking out of the quintessential emotional support water bottle and wearing a hoodie and sweatpants, or if they are feeling fancy, jeans. Accessories include a big scarf that is probably the size of their whole body and headphones to block any potential distractions. In terms of shoes, they are wearing their trusted trainers or boots that will keep their feet warm. However, there are some rare exceptions of finalists that despite all the stress manage to maintain a strong fashion sense and stay put together. They want to prove themselves and have some control over their rather stressful life. You will catch them wearing a long grey or black coat with jeans and colourful jewellery,

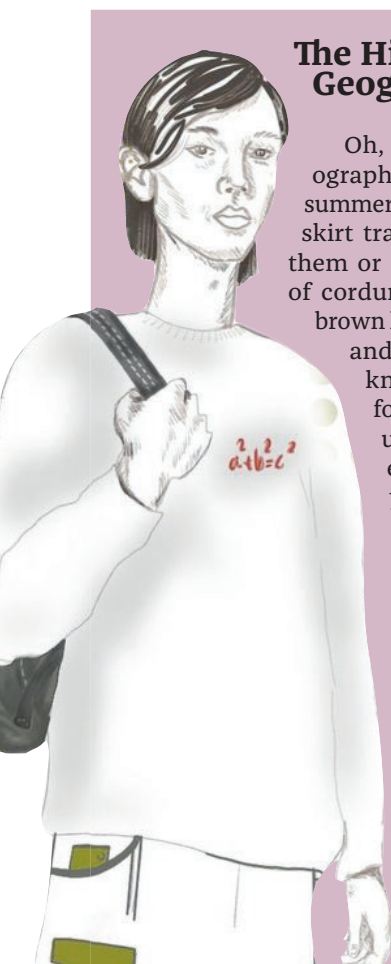
The Sidgwick Dweller

Seen hiking in from the Backs, traipsing into the Seeley, trudging up the stairs of the Squire, and spilling into the cafe, the Sidgwick dweller has to dress to handle diverse terrain and temperatures. And it's all done with incredible style. A long coat to express being learned, being an *adult* who can *read*. A big scarf, because temperatures drop to chillingly low in the Seeley. The Arc fills up quickly, too, and before you know it you'll be freezing out on the benches if not layered properly. A tote bag, for all the *books* for these *adults* who *read* (in reality, though, it's got the two essentials: laptop and laptop charger). Hats are optional, but the more random the better (beanies are child's play, instead there's thrifted newsboy caps and colourful berets). Underneath these long coats, with layers shed in tantalising reveals when at their seats, outfits are freaked to different levels. Some prefer classic jeans and

The Hippie Geographer

Oh, to be a geography student in summer. A long flowy skirt trailing behind them or a trusty pair of corduroy trousers, brown leather shoes, and definitely a knit cardigan for good measure. Wherever they go you can hear the rustle of bangles and clinking jewellery.

Every garment they got either in charity shops or thrifting while on travels to who knows where,



DANIELLE JUMP ▲

Why are you up at 4am? Cassie's wrestle with the male gaze

Mercy Brewer analyses the struggles addressed in HBO's Euphoria of dressing to please

Content Note: Brief mention of addiction

At some point, unfortunately, many of us can admit to trying to 'change ourselves' to impress a boy. HBO's *Euphoria* has solidified the newest rising stars in Hollywood and is making serious waves in the fashion world: dresses sell out online moments after they appear onscreen, and Season 1's perfectly-smudged glittery eyes are now an instantly recognisable makeup statement. Sydney Sweeney, whose character Cassie we see vying for the attention of her best friend Maddy's abusive ex-boyfriend, Nate, is the embodiment of the desire to change ourselves. Perhaps one of the reasons we relate to her so much.

It's no secret that American high schoolers wearing Marc Jacobs, Miu Miu and Prada is a stretch from the norm. The relatability of the show can only go so far, but these wardrobe choices are done for a reason. Waking up at 4am to undergo an eye-wateringly rigorous morning skincare routine makes no difference to Nate blanking Cassie in the school corridors. After a painful montage of endless hairstyle, makeup and outfit changes, we get a moment to breathe as Nate finally glances down at Cassie one morning. For a moment, we're relieved alongside her — until we see what's really happened: Cassie is wearing the same outfit as Maddy. What does Maddy have that Cassie doesn't? Why does a beautiful girl such as Cassie continue determinedly to humiliate herself for a slight glance in a hallway from a boy who would be best suited in a prison cell? And most importantly, why does she justify this to herself in the mirror as if putting time into herself?

Pastels and typically feminine silhouettes are crucial to Cassie's trademark girl-next-door look, but these wardrobe choices lack the individuality of other characters' more eye-catching and memorable looks. Cassie hardly ever makes statements with her clothes. This is done for a purpose. What she wants most is to be loved, even in the most superficial of ways. By opting for toned-down and tra-

ditionally feminine looks, she's digestible and watered-down enough to be able to be seen on any man's arm and not outshine him. Expressing very little of her own personality in her clothing means that she can transform into whatever version of herself the guy wants. As Sydney Sweeney puts it, in the series of transformations Cassie undergoes for Nate, she becomes, "all these other characters that [she] thought Nate wanted." Frantically trying to get Nate's attention is, in Cassie's mind, a demonstration of love and sacrifice.

These wardrobe choices hint towards her character development — or rather, lack thereof. Cassie is still wearing the same baby pinks and blues as last season, and still falling in love with every guy she dates — even when they mistreat and degrade her. As she has sacrificed her personality in her clothes

for the men she loves, there is no character to watch develop, just inner turmoil and vulnerability. Maddy, however, descends into darker colours this season as she navigates being newly single and figuring out what she truly wants for herself. She's got a sharper, harder edge. A scene showing Nate being rushed to hospital, with both Maddy and Cassie on either side, interestingly focuses on their shoes. Cassie trips over her playful kitten heels, Maddy strides confidently in gladiators. It's

pretty clear that what Cassie is lacking, both in her wardrobe choices and within herself, is this confidence. Knowing who you are and what you want, and how you want to present yourself to the world.

Parallels between the women aside, perhaps the worst thing about Cassie's alarm blaring at 4:00 am is the fact that "she loved how much time she was putting into herself." Responses from audiences, alongside TikTok hysteria, have been cringing at Cassie's morning routine, partly because of how painfully relatable it must be — the hold the male gaze has over our lives is much easier to succumb to than fight against, especially when it's marketed as self-care.

Face masks, jade rollers and shaving can be packaged to us as self-care, making us feel good, but it's actually where capitalism and patriarchy collaborate to make money out of a constant desire for self-improvement.

The male gaze is profitable. As PopSugar found out, Cassie's entire morning routine consists of around £445 worth of products). Patriarchy will not collapse if we all stop shaving our legs. But when it tells us that to win the ultimate reward of a man, we must do all these things, then that's a problem, and one that is presented well in *Euphoria*: "She loved the ritual, the attention to detail, the anxiety and excitement she felt in her stomach. Even if Nate pretended not to notice her, it was her way of telling him that she was his". *Euphoria* is full of a range of addictions, and Cassie getting high on male validation is just one of them.

So what do we take away from this? Don't do drugs, kids.

“Patriarchy will not collapse if we all stop shaving our legs”

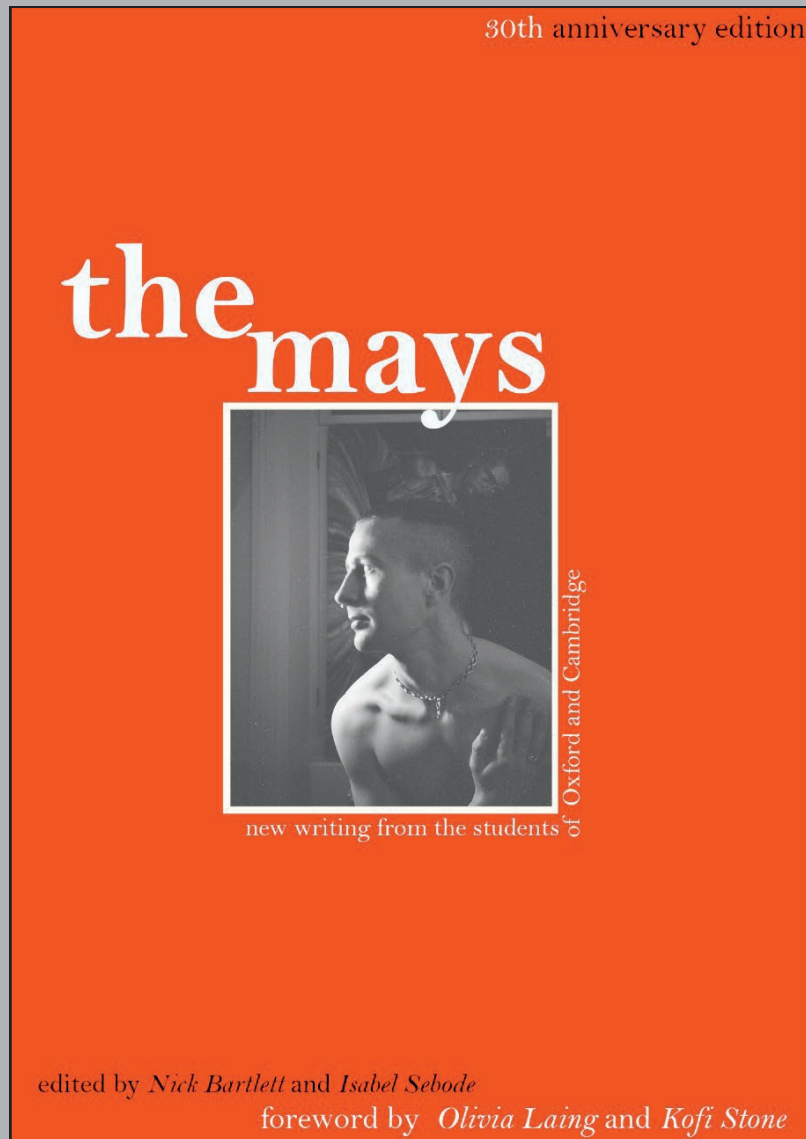
“What she wants most is to be loved, even in the most superficial of ways”



▲ EDDY CHEN / HBO (WITH PERMISSION FOR VARSITY)

the mays 30

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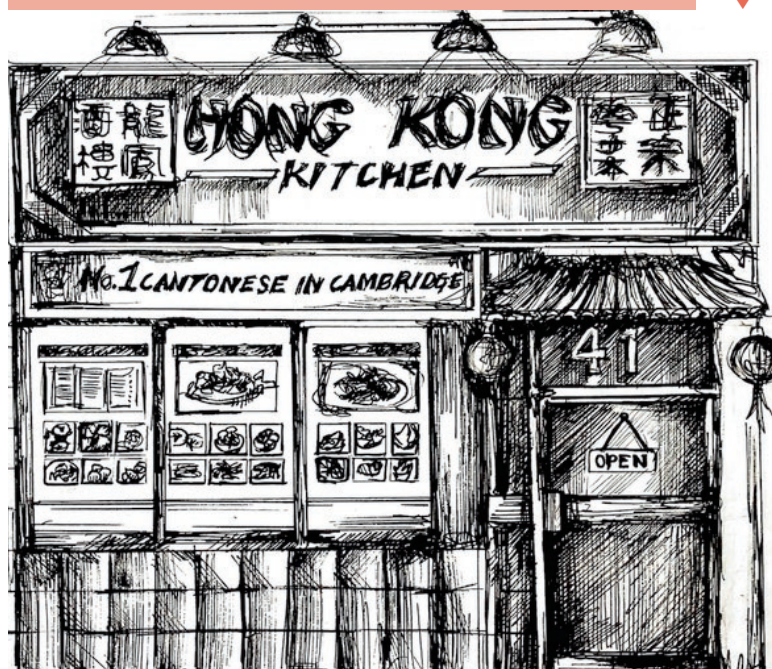
Fricatives

Content Note: sexually explicit language

Eric Yip

To speak English properly, Mrs. Lee said, you must learn the difference between three and free. Three men escaped from Alcatraz in a rubber raft and drowned on their way to Angel Island. Hear the difference? Try this: you fought your way into existence. Better. Look at this picture. Fresh yellow grains beaten till their seeds spill. That's threshing. That's submission. You must learn to submit before you can learn. You must be given a voice before you can speak. Nobody wants to listen to a spectacled boy with a Hong Kong accent. You will have to leave this city, these dark furrows stuffed full with ancestral bones. Know that death is thorough. You will speak of bruised bodies skinnier than yours, force the pen past batons and blood, call it fresh material for writing. Now they're paying attention. You're lucky enough to care about how the tongue moves, the seven types of fricatives, the articulatory function of teeth sans survival. You will receive a good education abroad and make your parents proud. You will take a stranger's cock in your mouth in the piss-slick stall of that dingy Cantonese restaurant you love and taste where you came from, what you were made of all along. Put some work into it, he growls. C'mon, give me some bite. Your mother visits one October, tells you how everyone speaks differently here, more proper. You smile, nod, bring her to your favourite restaurant, order dim sum in English. They're releasing the students arrested five years ago. Just a tad more soy sauce please, thank you. The television replays yesterday on repeat. The teapots are refilled. You spoon served rice into your mouth, this perfect rice. Steamed, perfect, white.

FLO BROCKMAN



Introspection (extract)

Sarah Crockford

introit

The smell of daisies on your breath
and warm silence on my chest,
I paused in laughter.
The tip-toed dreams not kept safe,
shelved among the rubble,
leave me untethered.
You turn seconds into hours,
violence into minutes,
and I breathe at your desire.
There is no virtue in patience.
I've learnt to wait no longer
than the time I chose to waste.

Break a butterfly

Famke Veenstra-Ashmore

I want to see how you might break
a butterfly on its back

press its wings into pages which crave
your story, which call

for you peel off its scales like petals.
A measured voice that

inscribes those glossy lights as if
born from hand -

we're sat on the edge of the grate,
those iron bars bending,

and layered, a path we never
travelled now reformed.

We share whispers and a soot mirage:
two empty cans

rattle with our voices, a chiming arrangement,
ourselves as hands,

our feet in lines, meet eyes, roaming in circles:
become pretty

thoughts streamlined, pretty thoughts on
an amber string

against a white board, strung along.
Say I want to be

your pretty thoughts fettering your neck
and ankles.

Art from the gut



Nicola Medicoff shares her visual art project which details her life with Crohn's disease

Content Note: This article contains discussion of chronic illness and pain, weight loss, food/appetite, and blood and gore.

When I first conceived this art project about my disease at the start of Lent term, the damaging symptoms associated with the condition were a distant memory. I could only hazily recall the mind-numbing pain I'd felt in my gut aged 13, and so I created an abstracted, self-indulgent version of my relationship with Crohn's. If I'm honest with myself the condition was more of a vehicle to convey something visually striking, rather than having any specific emotional value to me. I'd recently gone down a Francis Bacon rabbit hole, and so my diseased guts felt like a convenient way of emulating the

blood and gore of his paintings. I fashioned these tentacle-like sculptures out of clay, adding little suckers to represent my formerly ulcerated insides. I didn't really care that my art hadn't come from a place of intense personal feeling, because to me it looked good.

But by some bizarre coincidence, the symptoms I first felt almost a decade ago started creeping back. At first I barely noticed it: a faint murmur of my stomach at meals, a loss of appetite, an extra dose of fatigue. All of these signals could be explained away by a huge workload and the dubious offerings of an overworked, underpaid college kitchen, and it was easier for me to ignore them. But my attention-seeking intestines became more insistent: my body started refusing solid food and I looked spectral, having lost around five

kilos. Making tentacled sculptures turned from an idle distraction from my looming dissertation to a means of relief, a means of catharsis: moulding the wet clay into strange, undulating shapes allowed me to channel the growling pain in the pit of my stomach. My room turned into an uninhabitable nest of reddened, proliferating creatures as I sat, hunched, late into the night, fingers caked.

From there I devised a photo series in which the gut sculptures would be laced around a rich banquet of food — at first imperceptible amongst the spilling grapes and pomegranates. I took inspiration from late 17th Dutch still life paintings filled with their unpeeled lemons and shining goblets and rumpled tablecloths. There was something delightfully menacing about their stillness, about their quiet symbol-

ism. The point of this set-up was to convey a kind of reversal, a strangling of the food which I felt was strangling me every time I attempted to eat.

The return of Crohn's elicited a strained relationship with food where its enticing appearance felt deceptive: I craved something I knew would cause me pain. I also wanted to display the hiddenness of the condition. If you looked at me today all you'd notice is I look a little gaunt, a bit on the thin side. But inside it's a different

“

There was something delightfully menacing about their stillness

”

picture: I'm bleeding, I have ulcers, I do not look pretty... My wonderful photographer Fin Scott captured this feeling of innate monstrosity by creating a set in which the sculptures were emerging from my head, Medusa-like.

When I was first diagnosed with Crohn's I did feel like a monster: I'd go to great lengths to conceal from anyone that I had the disease. As a fully fledged teen I found it socially crippling having to suck pow-

dered food out of a straw like an infant for weeks on end, and answering hospital questionnaires which would ask things like: 'Do you worry about ever finding a girlfriend or boyfriend?' I was relieved when the disease drifted into the fringes of my life and never really wanted to discuss it again. But now I think it's something really worth sharing because it's a life-long disease that few people know about despite the fact that Crohn's and its sister Colitis affect over 500,000 people in the

UK and is increasing among young adults. I'd frankly rather have a healthy gut and less creative inspiration, but hopefully this series will raise awareness about a condition that is under-diagnosed and often misunderstood.

Creative Director and model:

Nicola Medicoff

Photographer: Fin Scott

Creative Assistants:

Sam DeMarco and Anna Chandler de Waal



Film & TV

Nadia Sorabji Stewart, Catrin Osborne, Sophia Till & Katie Kasperson take you along the red carpet of cinematic costume design

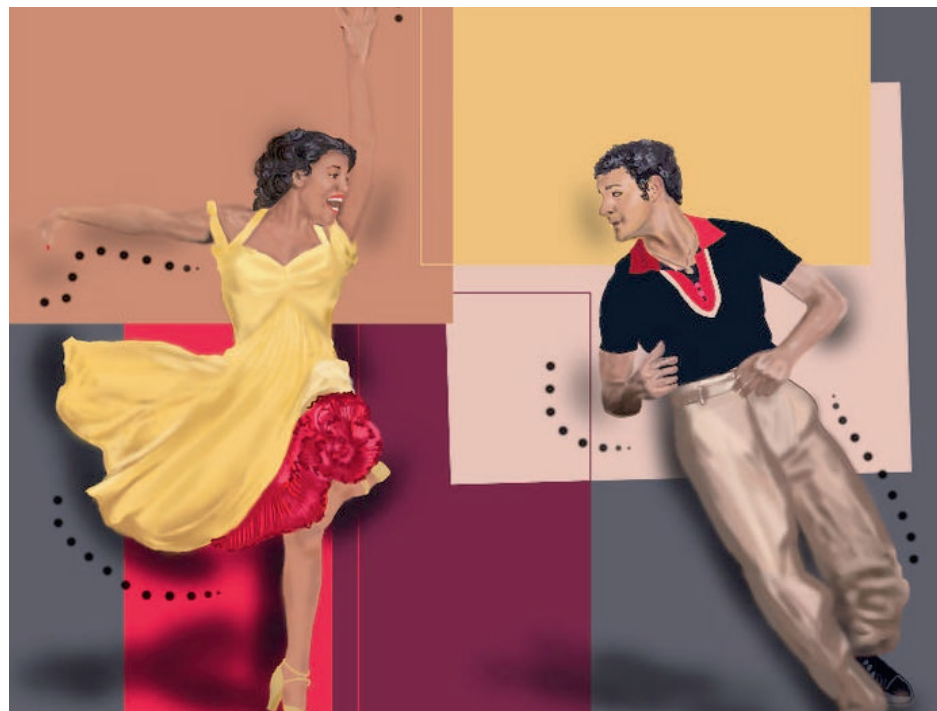
Since the dawn of Hollywood, fashion and film have been intricately intertwined. Outrageous outfits and creative costumes will add symbolism and visual splendour to any piece of cinema. In turn, the big screen's best clothing has influenced shoppers across the globe. From Afrofuturistic tribal designs to Shakespearean characters decked in designer clothing, these films are a feast for the eyes.

Black Panther (2018)

Ruth E. Carter's costumes perfectly encompass Black Panther's pressing theme of Afrofuturism. Throughout the film's creation, Carter diligently studied and incorporated traditional pieces from across the continent. No scene embodies this as much as T'Challa's initiation ceremony into his regal role, when Wakanda's tribes line the cliffs of Warrior Falls; each character is adorned with purposefully chosen African clothing such as Basotho blankets and a Maasai headdress. To promote the MCU's brand of superheroes, Carter balanced traditionalism with cutting-edge fashion design, such as 3D printing and interweaving the fictional metal of vibranium into myriad costumes. An ensemble that captures this is when a River Tribe elder (Isaach de Bankolé) wears a modern suit by Ghanaian-British designer Oswald Boateng paired with an African lip plate. By balancing African tradition with current Black couture, Carter's costumes are essential to promoting the film's message.

Romeo + Juliet (1996)

Take a closer look at Baz Luhrmann's reimagining of William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. You'll notice that it's not all gangsters and glitterati running around fair Verona — well, Venice Beach — but that there are some pretty ostentatious outfits knocking about too. For this, we can thank Australian costume designer Kym Barrett, a contemporary of Luhrmann's wife and two-time Academy Award-winning costumer, Catherine Martin. Initially joining the couple as a wardrobe assistant in Luhrmann's *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), Barrett shared the director's radical vision, as Head of Wardrobe, as they dared to take on — or rather take-over — Shakespeare's classic romance. From the simple Hawaiian shirt worn by Romeo in the film's opening scenes, to Tybalt adorned



with devil horns at the Capulet Ball. From Mercutio's sparkling lingerie set, to Juliet's more modest angel wings. Collaborating with the likes of Prada, Yves Saint Laurent and Dolce & Gabbana, Barrett brings Luhrmann's screenplay to life, marking his film not only in cinema history, but in fashion history too.

West Side Story (2021)

There is one word that can describe Paul Tazewell's designs in Spielberg's remake of the 1961 classic: bursting. The characters burst out of their costumes and the costumes burst off the screen. One might imagine that the best dressed would be the character who presents the most obvious sex appeal, Anita, in her lemon dress lined with blood-red frills. This outfit is present in the film's most exuberant and carefree number, America, where Tazewell has snuck in an homage to the past, with an ensemble dancer dressed in the famous lilac frock Anita wore in 1961. Respectful of history, he is not shackled by it. He confidently reverses the colour scheme that represented the warring gangs in 1961, yellow and purple. Now, the latter wear rusty copper waistcoats and it is the former who stroll the streets in a darker palette. Their muscles almost burst out of torn, oil-stained vests. One has the impression that youthful energy might explode at any moment from those fabric confines.

The Incredibles (2004, 2018)

On the surface, it may seem there is little to appreciate in Ralph Egleston and Deanna Marsigliese's costume designs for the 2004 and 2018 iterations of *The Incredibles*, at least beyond those incredible (pun-intended) form fitting suits. Yet it's unsurprising that a film that features such a sassy bite-sized fashion designer as Edna Mode would boast a wealth of fashion secrets. Were you aware that Edna is based on real-life Edith Head, eight-time Oscar winner for her 1950s styles? Egleston took inspiration from Head's mid-century forms by making the characters' pieces simple and elegant — you can almost feel Frozone's smooth periwinkle turtleneck! In animation, there is an unwritten rule that a character must not change appearance too often, lest the changes shatter the audience's suspension of disbelief. As a result, each costume must pack a punch, and this could not be more true than for the crowning jewels of the films: Edna's very own outfits. She appears in a dripping satin kimono and a squeaky black beetle suit, among others. Edna is an ode to fashion, the real heroine dressed to kill.

The Great Gatsby (2013)

Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin strike gold again in this film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*, again starring Leonardo

DiCaprio, alongside Carey Mulligan, Tobey Maguire, and Joel Edgerton. Winning an Academy Award for Best Costume Design, Martin owes many of her iconic outfits to Prada, Brooks Brothers, and Tiffany & Co. These brands alone symbolise the glitz and glam of both the film and its era. From Gatsby's pink suit to Daisy's diamonds, costumes are essential in differentiating the "old money" from the new. Tom Buchanan (Edgerton) even snidely remarks that the "man in the pink suit went to Oxford", indicating that an "Oxford man" would never sport such a non-traditional ensemble. While costume historians argue over the lack of authenticity, Martin's goal was to modernise and sexualise the roaring twenties and the characters who lived them. The costumes perfectly complement the contemporary soundtrack, featuring Lana Del Rey's 'Young and Beautiful', Beyoncé's haunting version of 'Back to Black', and Jack White's equally ethereal cover of 'Love Is Blindness'.

***Belle de Jour* (2018)**

For Luis Buñuel's 1967 film, *Belle de Jour*, the costuming works to help tell the story of a young, married bourgeois woman, who spends her days as a high-class sex worker while her husband is at work. Catherine Deneuve, who plays Séverine Serizy, is dressed head to toe in Yves Saint Laurent, the couturier responsible for her entire wardrobe. Vogue has described this film as YSL's "most outstanding contribution to cinema". Adapted from the 1928

novel by Joseph Kessel, the costumes capture the duality of the character, who is all at once prudish, erotic, seductive and alluring. The vinyl, black trench coat has now become a cult classic, making its way into mainstream fashion; we still see it on the catwalk today. Even the shoes that Deneuve wore for the film, which were part of YSL's 1965 Spring-Summer collection, were eventually named after the film. Deneuve herself says, "the character's style really owes a lot to the image that Saint Laurent created". Though, perhaps it is not only Séverine that should be thanking the Paris designer, but fashion as we know it.

***Back to the Future* (1985)**

Not many movies cover two distinct decades' worth of fashion; *Back to the Future* is a rare find in this regard. When Marty McFly time-travels from 1985 to 1955, he's wearing Nike trainers, a red puffer vest, and a pair of Levi 501s, all beneath a yellow hazmat suit. Immediately he sticks out, mistaken for a space invader during his first '50s encounter. When Marty's mother, Lorraine, meets him, she keeps calling him Calvin because Calvin Klein is "written all over [his] underwear". The film's climax occurs during the Enchantment Under the Sea school dance, where Marty's parents famously have their first kiss. Lorraine sports a strapless pastel pink dress with a '50s-style swing skirt, and George, Marty's father, wears an all-white suit with a black bow tie. Meanwhile, Marty dons a grey blazer and a burgundy tie but ac-

cidentally exposes himself as an outsider while playing 'Johnny B. Goode'. While *Back to the Future* is not about fashion per se, costuming plays an essential and often-overlooked role in the film's successful depiction of culture clash.

***Marie Antoinette* (2006)**

Sofia Coppola's ode to the controversial final Queen of France lives up to the titular heroine's reputation as the first fashionable celebrity. Each dress designed by Milena Canonero steals the scene and relays Marie Antoinette's rise from a naive Austrian princess to outlandish levels of nobility. With the protagonist's growth in confidence, we watch her wigs expand, with one even accurately featuring a model boat to celebrate France's naval power. Marie Antoinette even stayed true to the queen's "cottagecore" phase as we see Kirsten Dunst escaping to the country in a dainty white chemise. Canonero refuses to adhere to militant historical accuracy which compliments the film's tongue-in-cheek aura, also evident in the film's pop soundtrack. Amidst the anachronistic use of 'I Want Candy', we see piles of candy-coloured Manolo Blahnik shoes (with the brief glimpse of a Converse) that remind the viewer to revel in the sumptuous scenes and never take the film too seriously.

▼ DANIELLE JUMP



Tarantino: Feminist or foe?

Georgia Finucane discusses her ever-changing, complicated relationship with the iconic director's work.



CN: brief discussion of gendered violence

When I was little, my dad gathered my sister and I around the TV to show us his favourite film. Eager to see what movie he had chosen, we huddled around the screen in anticipation.

I still remember the instant confusion as the sounds of a woman's heavy panting played behind the opening shot: "Revenge is a dish best served cold" - the screen read. It was Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill*. I can also recall the sinking feeling of shock and horror a young me experienced at seeing the close-up shot of Uma Thurman's bloody, beaten face which appeared next. But as the movie went on, feelings of captivation and wonder took over. I became enraptured in witnessing the fearless Beatrix Kiddo fight relentlessly for her revenge. Ever since, the badass female characters in this film have become my superheroes. While all of my friends wanted to spend recess playing house, pretending to be mommies and daddies; I wanted to role-play a deadly assassin and fight a man named Bill.

The reason I was exposed to Quentin Tarantino at such an early age was because my father, as a huge Tarantino fan, used this director's films as parenting resources to teach my sister and me important lessons about the world. Were these films wildly inappropriate for a seven-year-old child? Absolutely. Yet, I must give my dad credit where credit is due; the female char-

acters portrayed in these films were my idols growing up and went on to become a source of strength and inspiration in my life.

In light of those childhood experiences, as a young woman, I began to consider films like *Kill Bill* and *Jackie Brown* to be quintessentially feminist, proudly declaring myself the biggest Tarantino fan in my teenage years. I have always felt a sense of awe and pride watching the director's heroines wreak havoc on-screen, as he por-

“
The badass female
characters have become
my superheroes
”

trays his female characters as equally capable of violence and brutality as the male characters that oversaturate the action-movie genre. The women in these films are potent, respected and powerful. And even when they appear vulnerable and are portrayed as powerless (as Daisy Domergue in *The Hateful Eight*, or Broomhilda von Shaft in *Django Unchained*, for example) they are never stereotypical 'victims', or clichéd damsels-in-distress. In fact, these

characters are all united by their courage and unbending determination. Still, can we really call Tarantino a 'feminist'?

Film critics have recently criticised the director's work for revelling in the violence he inflicts on women in his films. Roy Chacko (*The Guardian*) called for the director's 'cancellation' in 2019, condemning his "fondness for piling abuse on women". The director has also faced criticism for uneven gender representation in his work. In 2019, *Time Magazine* reported that only 27.7% of dialogue across all ten of Tarantino's films is spoken by women. There have also been arguments raised about the sexualisation of actresses in Tarantino's work, as the objectifying male gaze pervades his films - Margot Robbie's feet definitely deserved their own shout-out in the credits of *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood*.

Amongst all of the criticism laid against Tarantino and his productions, however, it was the statement made by Uma Thurman about the director's abuse during the filming of *Kill Bill* that shifted my perspective on not only what was once my favourite movie, but on the entire oeuvre of Tarantino himself. And so, it is an uncomfortable paradox worshipping Beatrix Kiddo as a feminist 'girlboss' on film with the knowledge that Uma Thurman suffered a grossly unjust experience of sexism and gendered violence whilst playing the role.

With all this in mind, I recently re-watched *Kill Bill* in an attempt to 'separate the art from the artist'. I desperately wanted to re-live that simpler childhood perception of a powerful woman fighting other powerful women and appreciate the movie for what it represented to me for so much of my life. And then, it hit me. The opening credits, in that archetypal, quirky Tarantino font, read: Harvey Weinstein, Executive Producer. The feeling of empowerment and strength I once gained from Tarantino's on-screen women, has faded away entirely and been replaced with a sense of guilt and shame. How can I ever reconcile my love for the women characters in the Tarantino universe with the alarming reality that Tarantino's work was harmful to so many actresses and real women?

I guess the answer is, I can't. And while there is no denying that Tarantino's films will always be great films, there is no greater heartbreak than coming to terms with the fact that your favourite artist is the bad guy and your favourite childhood film will never be the same again.

Music

Reflections on Joni Mitchell's 'Blue'

To mark its 50th anniversary, *Josh Osman* revisits the critically acclaimed album

Confessional song-writing has been at the core of some of 2021's greatest albums so far – Julien Baker's *Little Oblivions* is a heart-wrenchingly raw display of her struggles with addiction, while the title track of Billie Eilish's *Happier Than Ever* is a cathartic, rage-fuelled address to a neglectful former lover. With two other masters of the style, SZA and Taylor Swift, releasing (or re-releasing in Swift's case) songs paying tribute to Joni Mitchell this year, on the 50th anniversary of her ground-breaking album *Blue*, the influence of the legendary singer-songwriter resonates in pop more than ever before.

Critically and commercially successful even at its original release, *Blue* has often been heralded as one of the greatest albums of all time. With a striking emotional intensity bound to move any listener, Mitchell's raw, unguarded lyricism separated her from the stereotypically masculine rock music that dominated the mainstream in the early 70s.

Beginning with "All I Want", a tumultuous and emotional song about fully investing oneself into an imperfect relationship, she introduces listeners into her understanding and world of 'blue'. While it begins as a symbol of sadness here, 'blue' develops meaning as the album continues.

The next song, "My Old Man", sees Mitchell discuss dependency as she romanticises her lover, using some of her simplest yet most striking metaphors to describe the loneliness in the absence of her lover: "The bed's

too big, the frying pan's too wide." Here, 'blue' begins to grow from mere sadness into her fears of abandonment, a theme explored in much more detail in the soul-crushing "Little Green", a letter to the daughter Mitchell had given up for adoption, expressing her sorrow at the loss of a child, but no shame or regret.

"Carey" is a fine showcase of Mitchell's storytelling prowess, where she sings about travelling, and a short-lived holiday romance with an unpleasant man. On the title track, Mitchell continues to develop 'blue' further, writing of her depression and the ways in which people like

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her persevere through it. One of her most vulnerable tracks, "Blue" includes my personal favourite set of lines on the entire album: "You know I've been to sea before/ Crown and anchor me/ Or let me sail away" – so softly, and with such melancholy, she pleads to either be consumed by or freed from her depression.

Mitchell sings about how the feeling of isolation and loneliness in foreign countries gives her the 'blues' in "California", adding further depth to this motif. 'Blue' becomes not just loneliness in the absence of one person, but loneliness in the absence of comfort. On "This Flight Tonight", she tells a simpler story of growing regret, as small reminders of her boyfriend, after she leaves him behind, begin to take over, and guilt and reminiscence set in, taking over her completely.



▲ PAUL C BABIN

Before The Pogues and Merle Haggard, Mitchell's "River" was easily the most beautifully depressing Christmas song; in a time celebrating love, family and togetherness, she writes of her desire to escape from everything – from the reminders of the festive season, to the music industry, to her own faults that caused her to lose her love. Arguably her signature song, "A Case of You" is possibly one of the best break-up songs ever written, if not the best: with sarcasm and octave-leaping vocals, Mitchell sings of a dying love and her desperation to cling onto it, despite the pain.

Closing the album with a perfect blend of the cynicism and naïve optimism that seeps through the lyrics of the other songs, "The Last Time I Saw Richard" is a conversational song about the highs and lows of relationships ending with a rather bitter, bleak last impression. The cynic ends up in a superficial marriage, and Mitchell resents him for this, finishing the song by hoping that this period of 'blue' is just a phase that will pass.

Descriptions of the songs alone cannot do justice to the enchanting nature of *Blue*, where the blend of simple instrumentals, syncopation, personal lyricism and Mitchell's angelic, yet dejected voice creates something much greater and more profound than the simplicity of its name can contain. *Blue*, still powerful fifty years later, is depression, loneliness, abandonment, and fear – a monumental album that stunningly captures the kind of vulnerability and intimacy that other songwriters could only aspire to.

Getting better: Alt-J on try

Felix Asare interviews Alt-J pianist and vocalist, Gus Unger-Hamilton to discuss their new album, tour, and being a musician during the pandemic and Brexit

Four years on from their previous release 'Reduxer' — a remix album of 'Relaxer' (2017) — Alt-J are returning with their new album 'The Dream'. Gus describes it as an "armchair traveller's album", stemming from their time in London when travel was heavily restricted by the pandemic. As the title suggests, the destination is America (underpinned by the tracks 'Chicago' and 'Philadelphia') which the band almost view as their second home. Despite their longstanding relationship with the country, the album itself reflects a change in direction, which they also feel is a central aspect of their musical identity. "It's a step forward," Gus tells me, "ultimately our identity is based on being experimental and difficult to characterise, so we're hoping the album will feel quite unexpected whilst also satisfying our fans. The one thing I feel like they want from us is to keep changing and keep evolving, and I think that message is clear even from our first album: we can't stay the same, that wouldn't be Alt-J."

Discussing their musical backgrounds and how this influenced the album, Gus reveals the somewhat unexpected chemistry he has with lead singer and guitarist, Joe Newman. After meeting at Leeds University (along with drummer Thom Sonny Green) Gus describes their connection as "ex-choirboy meets boy who grew up listening to James Taylor and produces some harmony magic", having previously been a chorister at Ely Cathedral. Contrastingly, Joe's musical upbringing stemmed from his father, who was a singer-songwriter in Southampton, but the combination of styles proved to be a winning formula, resulting in the band's widespread success over the last decade — most notably winning the 2012 Mercury Prize with their debut album 'An Awesome Wave'.

'The Dream' is due to be released on

11th February, with three singles 'Get Better', 'U&ME', and 'Hard Drive Gold' already available. Released towards the end of last year, 'Get Better' offers a message of hope in response to the difficult times we have all experienced as of late. "I think this is going to be bigger than 9/11" Gus recalls telling the rest of the band with a sense of foreboding, as we hurtled towards the first lockdown in March 2020. "I think it's definitely the biggest news story we've lived through, and probably the biggest since World-War II. We'd normally shy away from current affairs in our music, but this single is very much alluding to the pandemic and frontline workers." The sentiment of a brighter future is key to the whole album, with the intention

behind this song in particular being to make people feel good again. He goes on to explain: "We really wanted to spread the message that hopefully good times are just around the corner after a really difficult two years."

The new album is coupled with an upcoming tour around the UK and then to America, which will mark the band's return after a similar tour in 2018. When I

asked about going back, Gus reflects: "It's become quite a complex thing to be a lover of America, I think we've all taken a look at the country and thought: 'What's going on here?'. Comparing this feeling in 2018 to now, Gus shares his cautious optimism at the thought of 'America post-Trump', but how, overall, he and the band are "just excited to be touring again" in the wake of the pandemic. After hearing about their complicated love affair with America, I asked for their perspective on the somewhat comparable

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ving times for musicians

team supporting us. But I think it's a massive shame that the up-and-coming bands are really going to suffer the most. When we started out all you needed was a car and enough money for petrol, so now needing a work permit and a visa, and all the other paperwork... It's going to be so damaging for the grassroots." Although this has been heavily reported in the news, Gus went on to discuss the often-overlooked impact on the crews supporting the bands, especially whilst also having to contend with the effects of the pandemic. "My crew are some of my closest friends in the world, and the impact on them has meant working on building sites, or as delivery drivers to keep a roof over their heads in some cases. You know, before all this if you booked a show in Manila, barring a hurricane or some other act of God, you knew you'd be playing in

Manila in nine months' time. Now we just have no idea."

This uncertainty has been worsened by the government's handling of the arts both in relation to Brexit, and the pandemic. When I mentioned this,

Gus replied: "I think unfortunately the government tends to take our cultural scene for granted; they're pleased to show it off and flap it around when it suits them, but then they're not really willing to help in any meaningful way. There were some provisions made available during the pandemic, but only after much noise and complaint was made by the sector." Despite this, he remains hopeful of a future return to Europe: "We will always con-

sider ourselves a European band and we love touring the EU — being in Paris one day, Berlin the next, then off to Vienna, it's very exciting, whereas parts of the UK can just feel a bit same-y. I'm just grateful that we were around in a time before Brex-

take full advantage of it."

Overall, Gus makes it clear to me that the message of 'Get Better' is central to the album, but also to the band's view of music as a whole. "In the past few years, things have completely fallen off a cliff, but I do cling to my faith that people fundamentally want to gather together, to hear music, watch music, and to have shared experiences", a part of our lives which has been radically altered for the nearly two years now.

He ends by telling me, "I really believe that getting out of your front door is where real life begins. That's why I love touring, seeing other bands and meeting new people, rather than just being stuck in the narrow tunnels of an online world. We're not ready to all just live in the metaverse yet... I hope."

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▲ HANNAH CASTLE

A photograph of the interior of the Graduate Cambridge hotel. The foreground shows a wooden reception desk with several colorful heraldic shields mounted on its side. A brass lamp and a vase of white flowers sit on the desk. In the background, a bar area with leather-upholstered stools and a well-stocked backbar is visible. The room features wooden floors, a large circular rug, and plaid fabric storage bins hanging from the ceiling.

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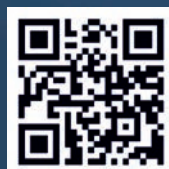


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