Cherwell

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- Confidential documents leaked to Samy Medjdoub
- Direct contact between parties and panelists
- The Senior Treasurer overstepped his authority in appointing panelists

ARINA MAKARINA and GASPARD ROUFFIN

On 1st February, during a tribunal hearing, Samy Medjdoub – the former Secretary of the Oxford Union, who is currently suspended for having fabricated minutes – texted former President Israr Khan: "Donald can hear, so don't mention… that you know the panel is rigged or that I know him." Donald Jenkins is one of the three panelists of the Appellate Board, the Union's highest adjudicatory body, and was hearing two cases involving Medjdoub as a party.

Cherwell has since reviewed exclusive direct communications between Samy Medjdoub and former Union officials – including former Presidents Israr Khan and Moosa Harraj and former Treasurer Rosalie Chapman – discussing Medjdoub receiving direct advice on proceedings and feedback on submissions from Donald Jenkins, who was a member of the Appellate Board hearing cases involving him.

Medjdoub, Khan, and Chapman "categorically and unequivocally" denied the allegations, while Harraj said his denial was "complete and unequivocal". They deny any claims that they were involved in the "rigging" of the tribunals, and the existence of any private communications suggesting this. *Cherwell* has seen extensive evidence disproving their claims.

They also deny having benefited from the rulings of the Appellate Board or other Union tribunals as a result of interference. In addition to denying the allegations, Medjdoub told *Cherwell*: "At no stage did I obtain the outcome I was seeking." Medjdoub remains suspended from the Union, and his political opponent, Arwa Elrayess, was reinstated in her position as President-Elect.

While the Appellate Board did not rule on the two cases involving Medjdoub, it issued a directive temporarily suspending Elrayess, and two binding interpretations that could benefit Medjdoub's future appeals.

Recent revelations have attracted criticism of the Union's democratic integrity and the transparency of its disciplinary processes.

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Rival protests over Iran war at Carfax

MERCEDES HAAS, ARCHIE JOHNSTON, and STANLEY SMITH

An altercation broke out between rival protesters at Carfax Tower on Tuesday evening over military escalation in Iran. A protest against US-Israel attacks on Iran was organised jointly by the Oxford branches of Stop the War (OSTW) and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (OCND), and was supported by Oxford Students Palestine Solidarity (OSPS), a group representing students at schools and universities across Oxford.

Anti-war activists set up a small stall by 5.30pm, soon joined by other protesters. Speaking to *Cherwell*, a protester said that he had turned out because he was "outraged by this latest adventurism by Trump".

Organisers from OSTW chanted slogans including: "From the belly of the beast, hands off the Middle East." Posters at the stall read: "Stop the war on Iran", and "oppose US and Israeli imperialism".

A small group of counter-protesters also soon arrived, carrying the 'lion and sun' Iranian flag, a symbol of support for the Iranian monarchy, which was ousted in 1979 by the Iranian revolution. A counter-protester told *Cherwell*: "For decades, Iranians tried to get rid of this regime, with many momentum [sic.]… we tried many ways, and we couldn't. Except war, what would be our solution?"

She expressed support for the US-Israel offensive, saying: "Myself, I do not like to see my city, my lovely Tehran,

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Oxford University faces backlash over use of gagging order in sexual harassment case

GASPARD ROUFFIN

The University of Oxford has recently dropped its request for anonymity in an employment tribunal over a sexual harassment case. The University had been granted an anonymity order which prevented the media from reporting on the case to protect the University's reputation and the identity of several of its employees.

The order related to allegations of sexual harassment made by a female academic against Professor Soumitra Dutta, the former Dean of the Saïd Business School. It was reported that, after the academic went to Dutta for help regarding a rape complaint, Dutta propositioned her. He allegedly said: "I feel very attracted to you. Can something happen between us?" Dutta denied making the comment.

Dutta resigned in August following a five-month investigation by the University, which upheld three allegations that he sexually harassed a female academic. The University of Oxford stated that Dutta "stepped down as dean of Saïd Business School and has now left the University".

Anonymity orders prohibit the discussion or publication of the identity of individuals or organisations involved in legal proceedings. The University was also subject to significant criticism from media organisations over the order, which had been considered a "gross breach of the principles of open justice" and part of a "deeply concerning trend towards secrecy".

This follows a series of cases where the University has failed to protect its staff and students following allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault. A recent UCU report seen by *Cherwell* described the University as "slow to act and reluctant to be transparent, particularly when allegations involve prominent men with institutional prestige or donor connections", and regretted that investigations often kept "outcomes confidential, allowing individuals to move on with unblemished reputations".

An Oxford academic, who prefers to remain anonymous, told *Cherwell*: "That the University applied for an anonymity order that protected its own reputation and that of at least one senior academic who had been found guilty of sexual harassment is incredibly concerning. That it did so against the wishes of the claimant is even worse because it amounts to gagging the victim, and the Higher Education Bill forbids imposing silence on victims of sexual harassment."

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Rival protests over Iran war at Carfax

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my country, being bombed. Who loves war, actually? But if we do not have any solution… What would be our solution, tell me? If you have a peaceful solution, I would definitely appreciate that, but we tried so hard, many different ways."

One counter-protester held a sign reading: "Where were you when they massacred us weeks ago", referring to the Iranian authorities' killing of protesters in January. Protests in Iran began on 28th December last year after a steep collapse of the country's currency.

Around 6pm, an altercation broke out between the two groups. A man standing with the counter-protest approached anti-war protesters and began shouting.

Bombings in Iran began on Saturday morning with a joint US and Israeli attack on several sites in the capital city, Tehran. The bombing on Saturday 28th February killed Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. A strike on a primary school in southern Iran reportedly killed 165 people.

Iranian forces responded by launching strikes of their own against targets across the Middle East. Missiles and drones struck Israel, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Cyprus. Six US soldiers were killed in a strike on a military facility on Sunday. At least ten people have been killed by Iranian strikes in Israel.

Israel conducted airstrikes on Lebanon beginning on Monday after rocket fire from the Iran-aligned group Hezbollah, and on Tuesday announced a ground incursion into southern Lebanon.

UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has said that British armed forces in the region will not join US-Israeli offensive action in Iran but will cooperate with "defensive" strikes on Iranian missile storage depots and launchers.

OSTW organiser Teige Matthews-Palmer told *Cherwell*: "Oxford Stop the War Coalition has joined CND in calling a protest against the illegal US-Israeli war on Iran, and any UK involvement in it… We live in the long shadow of the US-UK invasion of Iraq, which, far from liberating Iraqis, killed up to 1 million people and left prolonged chaos and suffering, while a few profit enormously from trading arms and reshaping the flows of oil and profits in the Middle East. Students occupy the places where ideas, values and hopes are contested, and students have a better world to win – one that is in direct conflict with the greed and violence of our political leaders."

An OSPS spokesperson told *Cherwell:* "If we're looking for connections as oppressed people across the world from Palestine to Sudan to Congo to Kashmir and to Iran, we should fight any imperialist power that has a boot on our necks… I think Oxford students should come out to show solidarity and to demand an end to this disgusting war."

Image credit: Stanley Smith for Cherwell.

Reported sexual misconduct at OUH lead to six dismissals

BEATRIX ARNOLD

CW: Sexual harassment

New data reveals that six staff members at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (OUH) were dismissed last year on account of reported sexual misconduct, with an additional eight being disciplined. The figures, which uncover incidents of reported sexual misconduct within the organisation during the 2024/25 financial year, were obtained by means of a Freedom of Information (FOI) request sent by Sexual Abuse Compensation Advice (SACA).

The FOI disclosed that no incidents of sexual misconduct were recorded by the trust in 2022/23 or 2023/24, but that as many as eight incidents were reported during the course of the last financial year, 2024/25. The details regarding the origin of the allegations were withheld by OUH, so it is unclear whether they came from patients, staff, or members of the public.

OUH is one of the UK's largest teaching hospitals. It runs several major hospital sites across Oxford and its surrounding area, including the John Radcliffe Hospital, Churchill Hospital, and Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre in Oxford, as well as the Horton General Hospital in Banbury.

A spokesperson for OUH told *Cherwell*: "We take any incidents of sexual misconduct incredibly seriously. Everyone in our organisation has the right to work in a safe, respectful culture, free of abuse, harassment, bullying, or other inappropriate behaviour."

They attributed the stark increase in reported sexual misconduct and dismissals in 2024/25 to "staff feeling supported to recognise sexual harassment and to raise concerns through our continuing work to raise awareness and improve sexual safety".

Regarding the next steps, the OUH spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "We are currently in the process of identifying any gaps in how we support our staff and, most importantly, how we can address these. We are working closely with key stakeholders both within and outside OUH to develop our approaches and provide the best possible support."

SACA emphasised the widespread nature of sexual misconduct in the UK's medical industry, beyond individual NHS trusts such as OUH. In the report, they cited recent analysis of Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) decisions, which found that nearly a quarter of all the tribunal cases heard within a single year involved sexual misconduct, with over half of those cases involving sexual assault allegations. Among the cases where misconduct was proven, 65% resulted in doctors being erased from the medical register, while 35% led only to suspension.

Oxford Union cancels Namal Rajapaksa event after backlash

MERCEDES HAAS

The Oxford Union cancelled a planned speaking event with Sri Lankan MP Namal Rajapaksa on Sunday 22nd February, following backlash from Tamil student groups and campaigners. The Cambridge Union cancelled Rajapaksa's scheduled visit several days prior.

Rajapaksa, the son of former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, is a controversial figure due to his close association with a government accused by human rights organisations of overseeing alleged war crimes and widespread abuses.

Rajapaksa had been scheduled to address the Oxford Union on 23rd February, with a corresponding event in Cambridge. The cancellations come after criticism from Tamil societies at multiple UK universities.

In statements circulated on Instagram, Tamil student groups said that to host Rajapaksa was to ignore "the deliberate bombing of civilian 'No-Fire Zones' and hospitals", "the systemic sexual violence used as a weapon of war", and "the enforced disappearances of tens of thousands". They also cited "the ongoing militarised occupation of Tamil lands and the erasure of our cultural memory".

The allegations refer to the final stages of Sri Lanka's 26-year civil war, which ended in 2009 with the military defeat of the Liberation of Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), when government forces under the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa were accused by the UN and international rights groups of committing serious violations against civilians in regions in the country where Tamils primarily reside.

Rajapaksa, the son of former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, was described by campaigners as "a staunch defender of this genocidal apparatus". The statement from the Tamil Youth Organisation UK (TYOUK) claimed that inviting him "grants legitimacy to a regime that has consistently denied justice and accountability" and "sends a devastating message to Tamil survivors and victims' families".

In a statement confirming the cancellation, the Oxford Union President Katherine Yang told *Cherwell*: "A core part of the Union's purpose is enabling direct, open questioning from students. In this case, a significant number of the students most closely connected to the subject matter communicated that they did not feel safe asking questions openly. While alternative formats (such as submitting questions indirectly) were considered... I felt that the inability of those most affected to participate directly undermined the substance of the forum. An event where key stakeholders cannot engage on equal footing does not produce the kind of robust debate the Union is intended to facilitate."

In a statement issued by its Communications Representative, the Cambridge Union confirmed that it had cancelled the event after "urgent and serious discussions". A spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "At the present moment, we don't believe it's possible to have a balanced and open discussion on this subject, and thus our Standing Committee made the decision to cancel this event. We would like to assert in the strongest possible terms that none of our events are endorsements of, or uncritical platforms for, any speaker or their beliefs, actions, or record."

This is not the first time the Oxford Union has withdrawn an invitation to a member of the Rajapaksa family. In 2010, the Union sparked major controversy by cancelling an invitation to then-Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the last minute, after his arrival in the UK and amid anticipated protests from British Tamil activists.

Coverage at the time noted that the Union cited security concerns and the "sheer scale of the expected protests" in withdrawing the event. This drew critical reactions from Sri Lankan officials and students. The Oxford Sri Lankan Society denounced the Union's decision as "highly unbecoming", arguing it had agreed to detailed arrangements. Sri Lankan ministers condemned the move as a "scar on the Oxford Union and the British government", and demonstrations took place in Colombo in response.

Prior to that a controversy arose in 2008 ahead of a scheduled appearance by Mahinda Rajapaksa, when students and campaigners urged the Union to scrutinise his human rights records. Critics at the time pointed to reports from the US State Department, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch.

UKIP leader Nick Tenconi stages Cornmarket Street border control debate

CHERWELL NEWS

Nick Tenconi, leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and Chief Operating Officer of Turning Point UK, visited Oxford on 26th February to take part in a public street debate on Cornmarket Street titled 'Britain needs border control. Prove me wrong'.

The event, organised by Turning Point UK's Oxford branch, drew a crowd of students, shoppers, and passersby in the city centre.

Tenconi, who has led UKIP since February last year, framed the visit as part of a broader campus strategy. Tenconi told *Cherwell*: "Turning Point UK will go to any city where there is suspected Marxist far-left indoctrination aimed at our university students, and will be there to provide them with a conservative outlet, debate platform, and support network by setting up Turning Point UK chapters to challenge Marxist indoctrination on our campuses."

He described the debate as "absolutely fantastic" and thanked Oxford students for engaging.

Turning Point UK is an offshoot of Turning Point USA, an organisation founded by right-wing activists Charlie Kirk and Bill Montgomery in 2012, which aims to promote right-wing politics in schools and universities. The format of the event in Oxford invited members of the public to step forward and argue against Tenconi's position that Britain needs stronger border control.

One woman who did so was critical of the set-up of the event. She told *Cherwell*: "It was mostly just a personal attack and then he'd criticise me for doing some sort of bad behaviour and debate and then do it himself." She went on to say that "this isn't proper debate", arguing that the event was being held to create clips for social media that would only display "the best bits to show how great he is", and that there would be "no actual depiction of debate". She stated that she had not heard of Tenconi before the event.

During his exchanges with members of the public, Tenconi criticised what he characterised as "open borders" sentiment in British politics, calling it "crazy" and arguing that the political mainstream had failed to respond to public concerns about migration. He claimed that undocumented immigrants "threaten" women's safety and framed stricter border controls as essential to protecting the public.

Tenconi further claimed that there had been two disruptions during the event. He described those involved as "far-left militias who dress in black bloc" and said police had arrived of their own accord.

When asked by *Cherwell* whether such disruptions were common, Tenconi replied: "Yes, yes, yes." He added that counter-protesters often attempt to mobilise against his appearances. He characterised critics as "indoctrinated" and argued that illegal immigration amounted to "cultural suicide", while also describing what he saw as a broader ideological shift towards what he called an "anti-masculine" and "anti-logical position".

UKIP faced scrutiny last month following an attempt to rebrand the party with a new emblem that critics said bore a resemblance to the Iron Cross, a symbol associated with the German military and later the Nazi regime. The party denied this, saying the symbol was intended to reflect Christian heritage. The symbol remains in use by the party.

Image credit: Archie Johnston for Cherwell.

Arabic manuscript collection donated to St John's College Library

ANGELINA WU

St John's College Library has received a significant donation of Arabic-script manuscripts, along with early printed and lithographed books from Professor Julia Bray, who is an Emeritus Research Fellow in Arabic. Known as the Bray, Ferrard, McDonald Collection for the Study of Arabic-script Books, the collection includes 17 manuscripts as well as printed and artists' books in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Urdu.

The collection reflects the book culture of the historic Islamic world, from the 15th to 20th centuries. The items include student copies, devotional texts, and popular editions that bear marks of use, annotation, and ownership and were produced cheaply in vast numbers.

The core of the collection was acquired in the 1960s in Istanbul by Michael McDonald and Chris Ferrard, while they were students at the University of Edinburgh, benefiting from Turkey's 1920s language reform, which left a generation unable to read Arabic script and rendered such books of no value to their owners.

The manuscripts they purchased are predominantly Arabic grammar textbooks, produced over several centuries in the Ottoman Empire for Turkish students in a higher-education system that required Arabic to access standard theological and philosophical works, alongside other subjects and a small number of Persian manuscripts. Additional printed and artists' books were later acquired by Professor Julia Bray during her student years.

Students join protest outside re-opened Campsfield House

MERCEDES HAAS, ARCHIE JOHNSTON, and NED REMINGTON

Students from the University of Oxford society Student Action For Refugees (STAR) joined a protest outside Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) in Kidlington, Oxfordshire on 28th February, calling for its closure.

The protest, comprising around 40 people, was divided into two groups: one demonstrating on the road outside the Campsfield House site, and one standing just outside the IRC gates on the site grounds. Protesters held banners reading 'Immigration detention: what a cruel invention', and chanted "shame on you" at police arriving at the scene.

Passing cars were heard honking their horns in support of protesters standing on the side of the road. As the demonstration wore on, the second group returned to the road following pressure from police officers.

The protest was organised by the Coalition to Close Campsfield (CCC). A CCC spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "Campsfield has a long history of resistance from detainees and local people, including faith groups, trade unions and students. We do not accept detention as a normal or necessary part of the asylum system."

A protester at the scene told *Cherwell*: "I'm here standing in solidarity with the detainees inside Campsfield House. We want everyone inside to know that they are not alone – that we will continue to show up for them. And for those of us outside on the street, we want the community to know that Campsfield has reopened and that they should come stand with us."

The campaigners also called for the UK government to scrap its "One-In-One-Out" asylum agreement with France. Under the deal, one asylum seeker is permitted to travel legally to the UK in exchange for one person, typically someone who arrived via boat, being forcibly returned to France.

The site is managed on behalf of the Home Office by the private company Mitie, which also manages IRCs at Heathrow and Dungavel in South Lanarkshire, Scotland. Mitie is the largest provider of immigration detention management for the Home Office, with responsibility for over 1650 detainees. Mitie first took over management of Campsfield in 2011, and received a new contract to manage the reopened site in 2025.

A spokesperson for Oxford STAR told *Cherwell*: "Detention is an inhumane way of treating those seeking safety and shelter from persecution, yet the Labour government has chosen to double down on this policy, even offering the license to run Campsfield to the same contractors, Mitie, as last time."

A Mitie spokesperson told *Cherwell*: "Our colleagues are committed to upholding the highest standards of dignity, safety, and respect for those in our care. At Campsfield, our experienced team is focused on creating a safe and supportive environment for all."

The Home Office has been approached for comment.

Image credit: Mercedes Haas for Cherwell.

Lord Hague awards eight recipients with honorary degrees

ALICE RUBLI

Eight honorary degrees were conferred by William Hague, Chancellor of Oxford, at a Special Honorary Degree Ceremony on 24th February. Among the recipients were presenter of the 'The Rest is History' podcast Dr Dominic Sandbrook; writer and conservationist Isabella Tree; and award-winning journalist Christina Lamb.

The other honorands were lawyer and former Principal of St Hugh's College, Lady Elish Angiolini; former US Secretary of State, John Kerry; President of Magdalen College, Dinah Rose; Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor Irene Tracey; and political scientist and, broadcaster, Professor Sir John Curtice.

Following the ceremony, which took place in the Sheldonian Theatre, the honorands processed under the Bridge of Sighs and along New College Lane.

Speaking one year on from the start of his Chancellorship, Hague said: "I am delighted to honour eight exceptional individuals today, whose achievements and dedication to their respective fields has been a personal inspiration to me."

Having announced nine honorands last year, eight of the degrees were awarded today, with one to be conferred at the next Encaenia, a ceremony which takes place every year in the ninth week of Trinity term. The event, which follows a similar format to Encaenia, is a Special Honorary Degree Ceremony which marks the start of Hague's Chancellorship and allows him to nominate "distinguished individuals" to receive honorary degrees.

Dominic Sandbrook has authored several books, as well as written and produced documentary series, and presents 'The Rest is History' podcast with fellow historian Tom Holland. He told *Cherwell* about his fond memories of Oxford and his tutors "who inspired my love of history and literature, and I've been very fortunate that through my books and podcasts, I've been able to share my passions with readers and listeners all over the world".

Professor Sir John Curtice told *Cherwell* of his gratitude for having an environment "in which I was able to lay the foundations for the career I have had the privilege to pursue as an academic student of and commentator on public opinion and politics". Curtice's honorary degree reflects the achievements of his work as a political scientist, having become known for his interpretation of polls and survey data.

He told *Cherwell*: "Today's recognition of my work via the award of an honorary degree is well beyond the hopes and aspirations I had during that formative time in the dreaming spires – and consequently is much treasured."

Christina Lamb is Chief Foreign Correspondent for The Sunday Times and a *Cherwell* alum. She told *Cherwell* about the thrill of "being awarded an Oxford honorary doctor of letters [sic]". She said: "It's the most wonderful privilege and I haven't really stopped smiling. To me it's recognition of all those many people round the world who have bravely told their stories at a time when sometimes it can seem no one is listening."

Dinah Rose walked alongside Isabella Tree during the procession. She told *Cherwell* she was "utterly delighted to have been nominated for an honorary doctorate by the Chancellor. It is a great privilege to represent Lord Hague's own college, Magdalen, in this way". Rose is particularly interested in areas of law including human rights and civil liberties, and has appeared before several courts and major jurisdictions over the years.

The honorands followed behind the Chancellor and processed along Queen's Lane and High Street to arrive at Magdalen College for a formal, celebratory lunch.

Image credit: Polina Kim for Cherwell.

NEWS SHORTS

Lamb & Flag sets up writing group

Lamb & Flag, the pub renowned for its links with J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, has established its own writers group – The Writing Well. The group meets every Sunday between 11am and 1pm. Kate Oldfield, from the group, said: "Everyone is welcome, whatever level you believe yourself to be and whatever you are writing."

'Unbearably difficult': Beloved brown bear removed from Museum

The fluffy brown bear that greets visitors to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History has been retired from display after eight years. The bear has been "stroked and hugged" by over one million visitors in her time at the museum. She is being removed over concerns that she is looking rather "thread-bear", but the museum has reassured that bear hugs are still available from the museum's black bear.

Great minds drink alike

We may continually lose the Boat Race, but Oxford students showed their drinking prowess in the recent Varsity blind wine tasting contest, beating Cambridge. Cambridge pulled ahead on white wines, but was ultimately defeated when Oxford did much better with the red wines. The winning team is invited to Champagne Pol Roger's headquarters in Épernay.

Study shows playing Tetris can reduce trauma memories

Oxford researchers have helped show that Tetris-based treatment can reduce intrusive memories of trauma within a month. The treatment was also effective at reducing symptoms of PTSD. According to the World Health Organisation, psychological trauma affects seven out of ten people during their lifetime.

CROSS CAMPUS

Fancy nine months' pay to disappear?

The University of Bristol has invited Humanities and Modern Languages academics to "voluntarily" quit, offering nine months' pay to those who make themselves redundant. The University and College Union says the scheme amounts to a "managed decline" of non-STEM subjects, driven by brutal surplus targets and falling overseas fees.

Pentagon say adieu

Yale University will lose two military graduate fellowships after the Department of Defense abruptly cut ties with elite universities. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the programs "undermine American values", branding Ivy League campuses "woke". Yale said it is scrambling to support affected students, while critics warn the move ditches top-tier research and strategic training.

Exeter College announces new scholarship for refugees

ALICE RUBLI

Exeter College announced the creation of the Oxford-Exeter-Sandys Scholarship on 11th February and is preparing to welcome its first recipient in the upcoming academic year. The new award is part of the University of Oxford's Academic Futures programme, an initiative designed to increase diversity and access within graduate education.

The scholarship has been made possible through a substantial donation from the Sandys Charitable Trust. This contribution secured 2:1 matched funding via the University's Graduate Endowment Matched Scholarship (GEMS) scheme, significantly increasing the financial support available for future scholars

The Sandys Charitable Trust was created through the estate of Richard Michael Oliver, 7th Baron Sandys. Lord Sandys and his wife were longstanding advocates for refugee support initiatives, dedicating much of their lives to humanitarian causes.

The Oxford-Exeter-Sandys Scholarship is intended for graduate students who have refugee status or lived experience of displacement, including those with partial or temporary refugee status, and those under humanitarian protection. It provides comprehensive financial support, covering full University tuition fees and college fees, as well as a maintenance grant for the entirety of the recipient's course.

Announcing the scholarship, the University said that, while eligibility is not restricted to a single discipline, preference may be given to applicants for DPhil studies in International Development or Migration Studies. Particular consideration will be given to research proposals that demonstrate clear relevance and practical benefit to refugees and displaced communities.

The scholarship was developed through collaboration between Exeter College, the Refugee Studies Centre, and the University's central funding team. A spokesperson from Exeter College told *Cherwell*: "Once admitted to Exeter College, scholars will become full members of our academic community. The College will work with each refugee scholar as an individual to support their success at Oxford. We are proud to contribute to this important initiative and look forward to welcoming scholars to Exeter."

A spokesperson for the Refugee Studies Centre told *Cherwell*: "We aim to reach as wide an audience as possible with information about this scholarship. We will promote the scholarship widely through our networks and through the Refugee-Led Research Hub, which is based at the Refugee Studies Centre.

"The Hub supports individuals with lived experience of forced displacement to become leaders in humanitarian response, forced migration, human rights, and other areas of interest identified by affiliates. They do so by delivering academic programming to a cohort of students who have been affected by displacement, supporting access to graduate degrees (including through help with applications) and professional development opportunities."

Professor Tom Scott-Smith, Director of the Refugee Studies Centre, said: "This scholarship represents an important commitment both to widening access to postgraduate research and to advancing rigorous scholarship on forced displacement.

"By combining full financial support with a clear academic focus, it will enable outstanding doctoral researchers from a wide range of backgrounds to undertake research that deepens our understanding of the issues surrounding refugees and forced migration. We are profoundly grateful to the Sandys Charitable Trust for making this possible."

Oxford University faces backlash over use of gagging order in sexual harassment case

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The University of Oxford did not respond to *Cherwell*'s request for comment.

Criticism of University leadership

The University previously faced internal pressures from academics and students over its use of anonymity orders and restricted reporting orders in legal cases. The University's leadership was criticised for acting against principles of "freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and academic freedom".

An academic told *Cherwell*: "Congregation should have a public debate about what our policy ought to be regarding applying for anonymity orders. The University shouldn't be allowed to have blanket permission to hide under [a] veil of anonymity. It means that Congregation, which is supposed to be the sovereign body of the university, can't know who we are suing, who is suing us, why, how much money we are spending in lawsuits, and how [we are] behaving in court, what is being done in our name."

Congregation is the governing body of the University, composed primarily of academic staff. There have been concerns raised regarding senior University figures' approach to transparency in the context of legal proceedings, in particular Chancellor William Hague and Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey.

A source with knowledge of the matter previously told *Cherwell*: "The Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor have serious questions to answer about the type of university they are running, whether it is one that protects its own students and staff, or its reputation."

Improvements to policies

Cherwell understands that Tracey has instructed a legal panel to improve its harassment and bullying procedures. In a meeting in February, the Registrar of the University, Professor Gill Aitken, and legal experts were asked to make recommendations on improving data sharing and procedures regarding bullying and harassment.

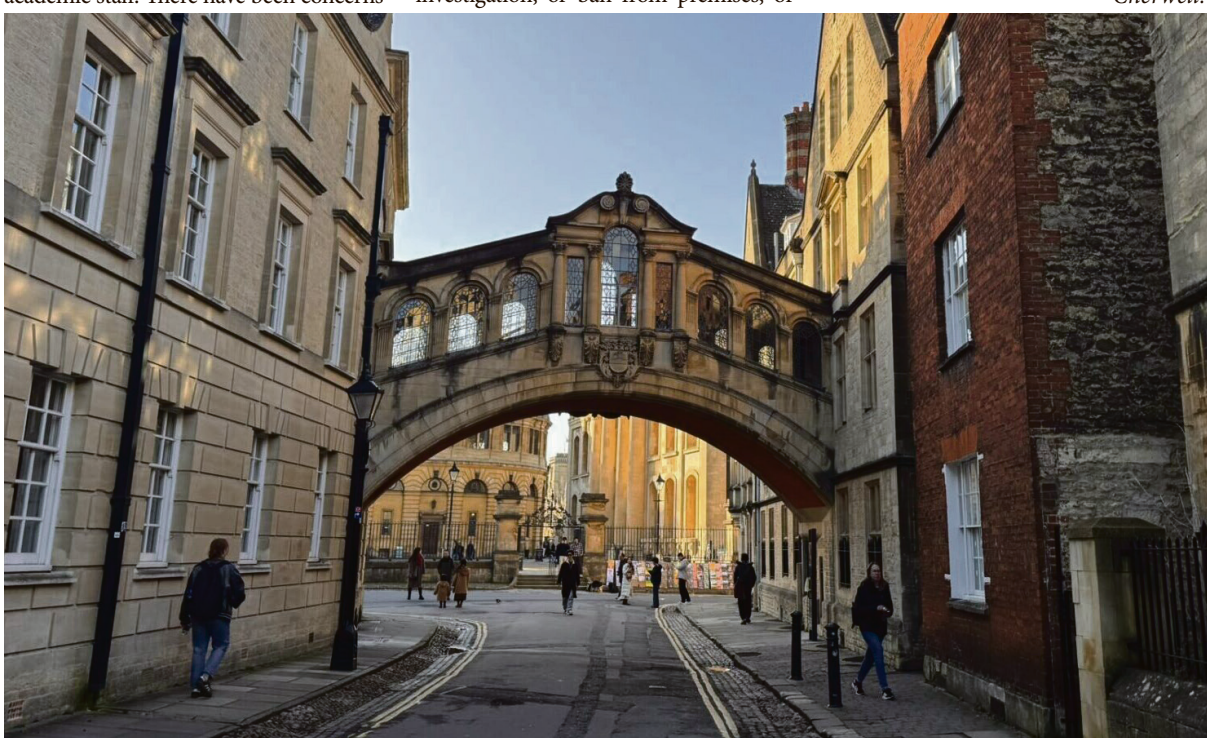
An academic told *Cherwell*: "It's also obvious that we need to improve our policies around sexual harassment. That the University is still protecting an emeritus professor who has been accused of rape without him facing any internal investigation, or ban from premises, or stripping of his title shows how deeply we are failing to keep students and staff safe.

"The reputation of powerful senior academics is still being prioritised over the safety of staff and students. What the University should do is take this opportunity to reform and be at the forefront of best practices instead of holding on to opaque and sexist practices that are causing serious and unnecessary harm to people, especially women."

Cherwell has previously reported that the University did not suspend an emeritus professor at the Saïd Business School who was investigated for rape by Thames Valley Police. *Cherwell* understands that the professor does not currently face any restrictions regarding access to central University premises or to his college, something students have expressed "serious concerns" about.

Anna Bull, the founder of the 1752 Group, an advocacy group addressing sexual misconduct in higher education, said that she "very much doubt[s] that Oxford consulting existing staff on improvements is likely to lead to sufficient change. Business as usual isn't going to lead to the shifts that are needed here".

Image credit: Gaspard Rouffin for Cherwell.



Corpus Christi College unveils its first female portrait

LUCY POLLOCK

Corpus Christi College recently unveiled the first portrait of a woman to hang in its hall since the College's foundation in 1517. The portrait, which depicts the College's President, Professor Helen Moore, is also Corpus Christi's first portrait painted by a woman.

Professor Moore became the College's first female President in 2018, shortly after its 500th anniversary. Corpus Christi began admitting women as graduate students in 1974, and started admitting women undergraduates in 1979. Moore became a Fellow in English at Corpus Christi in 1996.

Professor Moore told *Cherwell*: "Being painted by an artist of Miriam Escofet's standing was a great privilege and an experience I will never forget. Corpus was eager to enhance the visual diversity of the Hall as our most public space, and the portrait was designed with its final setting in mind."

Miriam Escofet is a Spanish painter and graduate of Brighton School of Art. Her previous work has been selected for the BP Portrait Award exhibitions in 2009, 2010, and 2012 as well as the Royal Society of Portrait Painters' annual exhibition. In 2020, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office commissioned Escofet to paint a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II.

Escofet told *Cherwell*: "It feels like a huge honour and very special to be the first woman artist to paint the first female portrait to hang in the Hall since the College was founded. Not only the first female portrait, but a portrait of the first woman President of the College. There is a lovely symmetry to that.

"I truly believe in the power of art to shape our imaginations and sense of reality, so I hope that this portrait, in its own very modest way, will act as an ambassador for the achievements of women and be inspiring in some way."

Discussing the process of painting Professor Moore, Escofet told *Cherwell*: "It is always a compliment and an honour to be chosen to paint someone who is so eminent in their field; they invariably show a curiosity and respect for the creative process, which is very conducive to a good outcome. The time spent with someone during sittings gives me a vital insight into their personality, which is always a key component of a portrait."

Image credit: Miriam Escofet, with permission.

Oxford and Liverpool universities join forces in landmark partnership

LILY GAGE

The University of Oxford has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the University of Liverpool, Oxfordshire County Council, and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, aiming to tackle global challenges, boost the national economy, and accelerate innovation.

Oxford University told *Cherwell* that the partnership between these two world-famous cities will provide "a coherent UK pathway from research and company creation through to scale up, industrialisation, and global market growth, supporting the national industry to drive forward economic growth and productivity for the UK".

The MoU was signed on 19th February at a special partnership event held at the Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities by Professor Irene Tracey, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford; Professor Tim Jones, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool; Steve Rotheram, Mayor of Liverpool; and Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of the Oxfordshire County Council. The event recognised the history of engagement and collaboration across key areas of research and innovation by Oxford and Liverpool.

The collaboration, which has yet to be given an official name, aims to create opportunities for the UK to tackle global issues related to climate change and health, whilst strengthening existing collaboration in chemistry and materials science research. Key research priorities include vaccination development, infection prevention and control, neurosciences, and women's health.

Oxford University told *Cherwell* that the partnership also aims to "advance entrepreneurship and knowledge exchange through shared events, programmes, and the co-development of student- and academic-led venture creation activities".

"The partnership will support firms, talent, intellectual property, and investment to be retained and grown domestically, while attracting additional domestic and international investment… this supports delivery of the UK Industrial Strategy and national growth mission."

In a press release, Tracey stated: "This partnership signals a new era for yet deeper collaboration between our two vibrant cities. By connecting the outstanding research, innovation and talent in our regions, we can support companies tackling the greatest challenges of our time to start, stay and scale-up in the UK."

Jones added that the signing of the MoU reflects the University of Liverpool's commitment "to tackle global challenges through research, innovation and partnerships in key areas such as materials discovery, infection resilience and therapeutics innovation".

Rotherham said: "I've set a clear ambition for the Liverpool City Region to invest 5% of our GVA (Gross Value Added) into research and development by 2030", adding that "this partnership with Oxford is the next step on that journey".

"By linking two places with world-class brands, we can back British innovation, attract investment, and make sure that great ideas don't drift overseas but are developed, scaled and rooted here in the UK." He also stated that this collaboration "will deliver benefits far beyond Liverpool or Oxford – showing what's possible when regions come together".

INVESTIGATIONS

‘Connivery’ and ‘cheating’: Former officials interfered with Union tribunals

Continued from Page 1

The tribunals have been described by a former Returning Officer who prefers to stay anonymous as “the most unfair thing [they have] seen happen at the institution”. In reference to Medjdoub stating in public that he had obtained documents from an Appellate Board panelist “illicitly”, a former Returning Officer told *Cherwell*: “This is the sort of connivery and cheating that cannot be happening.”

The tribunals in question were ruling on a series of cases related to the Trinity term 2026 election, where Arwa Elrayess was elected President with 757 first preferences, by a margin of around 155 votes over Liza Barkova. Subsequently, several allegations of electoral malpractice were raised to the Election Tribunal, some of which were further appealed to the Appellate Board.

The Senior Treasurer

Last November, Peter Petkoff, the Senior Treasurer, while not explicitly against the Union rules, acted against standard practice in constituting the Michaelmas 2025 Appellate Board. The Senior Treasurer is “responsible for oversight of the Union’s finances and staff”, and is usually a senior academic at the University.

In an email exchange seen by *Cherwell*, Petkoff wrote to Chris Mentis Cravaris, the Returning Officer – an elected role with oversight of elections and who also acts as the clerk of the Appellate Board. In the email, Petkoff directly put forward three names to sit on the panel and asked Mentis Cravaris to constitute it. The Returning Officer immediately expressed his concerns in an email response to Petkoff.

Several senior officials familiar with the Union’s rules explained that the standard practice is not for the Senior Treasurer to directly put forward names, but rather for the Returning Officer to constitute a shortlist based on 200-300 initial contacts, before referring them to the Senior Officers. They expressed concerns regarding the irregularity of Petkoff’s conduct, citing worries that it undermined the shared appointment mechanism.

Petkoff responded to Mentis Cravaris’ concerns with what was described to *Cherwell* as a “conversation ending tone”, first stating that the “composition of the Board is settled and should not require further discussion”, and in a further email “Once again please CONSTITUTE the [Appellate Board]!”.

Mentis Cravaris further raised concerns after speaking with Iftikhar Malik, the Senior Librarian, who indicated that he was unaware of the names Petkoff had put forward. *Cherwell* understands that, under Rule 33(f)(v), it is standard practice for both “Senior Officers” to approve the composition of the Appellate Board.

In previous correspondence seen by *Cherwell*, Petkoff had implied Malik’s consent to the proceedings, using formulations such as “The Senior Officers have formally determined the composition [of the AB]”. Petkoff ultimately responded with a four-word email: “Please proceed as requested”.

In response to *Cherwell*’s request for comment, Petkoff denied any wrongdoing, and claimed that these allegations are “wrong and removed from reality”.

Petkoff is an Associate Professor of Law at Regent’s Park College. Four sources familiar with the situation told *Cherwell* that Petkoff enjoys a close personal relationship with Israr Khan. Petkoff assumed his role in June 2025, a few months after the end of Khan’s presidency. A current Union officer described Petkoff’s conduct as “wildly unprofessional for someone who is an academic at the University”.

An unusual appointment

Of the three names put forward by Petkoff, two were eventually selected to sit on the Appellate Board, one of whom was Donald Jenkins. Several sources close to the matter have raised concerns about the professional backgrounds of the two panel members nominated by Petkoff, and about the fact that neither has previously held elected officer roles in the Oxford Union.

Donald Jenkins’ most senior position at the Union was as a member of the Standing Committee, which a former Returning Officer described as “a bit of a low position in this context”. *Cherwell* understands that Appellate Board members are usually former elected Presidents, Librarians, Treasurers, or Secretaries.

> *“A Union officer described Petkoff’s conduct as “wildly unprofessional for someone who is an academic at the University”*

A former Returning Officer with knowledge of the composition of the Appellate Board told *Cherwell* that the second person proposed by Petkoff was a “very weird name” given that she was an ordinary Oxford Union member who had never been elected to a formal role, and that she has no professional legal expertise.

In private communications with Harraj, Medjdoub wrote: “If we can only have two people it should be Donald Jenkins [and the second person].” The third name initially proposed by Petkoff was ultimately replaced by Stephen Rubin KC, a senior lawyer. He was privately described by a former Returning Officer as “the most qualified person we’ve ever had [on a panel]”.

Inconsistencies in the email addresses used to contact the panelists proposed by Petkoff were also noted by a senior Union Officer with access to the internal membership database. Indeed, the contact details for Donald Jenkins sent by Petkoff to the Returning Officer appear different to the ones listed in the Union database.

For the second person proposed by Petkoff, the Senior Officer confirmed that her contact details were not listed in the Union database. It is therefore unclear how Petkoff would have been able to contact Jenkins and the second person without having had prior contact through an intermediary and outside of the standard Union procedure.

Cherwell has seen evidence in private communications between the Michaelmas term 2025 President Moosa Harraj, and the Secretary Samy Medjdoub, indicating that they supported Petkoff’s deviation from standard practice.

Harraj described the Senior Librarian Malik as “being useless” for “not letting the names go through”, referring to the people suggested by Petkoff. Medjdoub responded by saying: “These names have to sit. They have all agreed to expel everyone on [the other] side from the society on the most bs [bullshit] grounds.”

Medjdoub denies the existence of this correspondence, telling *Cherwell* that he “did not send this message”, while Harraj says these allegations are “completely false”.

A ‘biased’ panelist

Cherwell has seen comprehensive evidence that Donald Jenkins, one of the three ruling members of the Appellate Board, was engaging in direct external communication with Samy Medjdoub, including cases where Medjdoub was a party, without the knowledge of other parties. Several senior Union officers have since privately mised concerns regarding the impartiality of the Appellate Board.

In private communications with Israr Khan, Alex Sproule, and Rosalie Chapman seen by *Cherwell*, Medjdoub makes over 20 references to exchanges between himself and Jenkins over a four-month period during which Appellate Board proceedings were ongoing. These exchanges took the form of phone calls and text messages, at times occurring daily.

A former Returning Officer, who wishes to remain anonymous, told *Cherwell* that during an “ongoing case”, it would be “entirely inappropriate” for “the panellists [to] be communicating with the complainants”. Medjdoub categorically denies the existence of this communication, and told *Cherwell*: “I have never had any contact with Donald Jenkins.”

Jenkins told *Cherwell*: “I strongly dispute the allegations about my conduct and regard them as unproven”. He added: “It is regrettable that criticism has been directed at the first disciplinary body which has tried, in a serious, principled and impartial way, to address the manifest and systemic problems in the Society’s electoral machinery.”

Furthermore, Jenkins did not disclose any conflicts of interests when he sat on the panels with cases concerning Medjdoub. The former Returning Officer told *Cherwell* that they would have generally expected the panelist to be “very forthcoming about declaring [a conflict of interest] themselves”, and to “offer to recuse” to be “replaced with someone else”.

On 1st February, during an online hearing of an Election Tribunal – a panel below the Appellate Board on which Jenkins did not sit – Jenkins covertly listened in to the Zoom with the help of Medjdoub. Several officials with knowledge of Union rules told *Cherwell* that they would not expect panelists from higher panels to listen into lower tribunals.

Medjdoub told Harraj that “Donald [is listening] in on call [sic.]”, and also texted former President Israr Kham: “Donald can hear, so don’t mention… that you know the panel is rigged or that I know him.”

Medjdoub said he “was not in contact with Donald Jenkins” on 1st February and denied that Jenkins was listening in. Medjdoub, Khan, and Harraj deny having any such communication.

A former Returning Officer emphasised to *Cherwell* that the decisions of the Appellate Board “cannot be challenged”. Reflecting on the transparency of the tribunals, they told *Cherwell*: “Members serving on the board must therefore hold themselves to the highest standard. It is a basic requirement of natural justice that every panellist should be free of bias, actual or apparent.

> *“Medjdoub makes over 20 references to exchanges between himself and Jenkins while Appellate Board proceedings were ongoing*

“The entire process depends on trust. A panellist communicating directly with a party unhappy about the outcome of the election is simply unthinkable. It undermines confidence in the system and puts all candidates at risk of grave injustice.”

‘Feedback’ from the panelist

The communications between Medjdoub and Jenkins also suggest that Jenkins was involved in providing feedback and directly writing submissions to Union tribunals on behalf of Medjdoub. On 15th December, Medjdoub texted Moosa Harraj that he would share his Notice of Appeal with Jenkins “informally” to “get feedback” before submitting. The expectation is that submissions to the tribunal are independently prepared by the parties or their representatives, and are usually not shared with panelists prior to formal submission.

On 22nd January, Medjdoub messaged Alexander Sproule, then Deputy Returning Officer. He forwarded a 700-word long text beginning with “Samy, A few thoughts on your latest Response to the No Case to Answer”. Medjdoub immediately followed up, sending “from jenkins”. Sproule responded: “I love how he gives suggestions and then just writes it for us.”

Jenkins also directly contributed to the drafting of at least seven separate submissions by Medjdoub to the Appellate Board and other tribunals. On 8th January, Jenkins was involved in the preparation of a Notice of Appeal sent to the Appellate Board by Medjdoub and seen by *Cherwell*. On that day, Sproule sent a first draft of the Notice accompanied by the message “send this to jenkins but tell him it’s really jumbled and we could use his help straightening out the argument”.

Shortly after, Medjdoub sent two links in his chat with Sproule, followed by the message “from donald jenkins”, to which Sproule responded “Wait I didn’t realize he [Jenkins] wrote it for us”. Jenkins was also involved in the drafting of two additional documents submitted to the Appellate Board that day, as confirmed by a private message sent by Medjdoub and seen by *Cherwell*: “Donald just needs ideas he said he will write it up for the other two”.

Cherwell has seen evidence that Jenkins also drafted a Submission of No Case to Answer for Medjdoub on 18th January, and that he drafted “most” of a Rebuttal on 20th January after having also provided feedback on the document.

Medjdoub claims that this is “false”, that he “did not send those messages”, and that he “denies entirely” that Jenkins was involved in the drafting of documents that he submitted to the Appellate Board. Sproule also denies this, and stated that he had “no knowledge of or connection to Donald Jenkins”.

Leaked documents

On at least four occasions, Medjdoub found himself in possession of information or documents that were confidential and that were only supposed to be circulated between the three panelists, including Jenkins, Mentis Cravaris (RO), and Jake Dibden (Deputy RO). This happened while Medjdoub was in frequent communication with Jenkins.

One such instance concerned an internal direction issued by the Appellate Board on February 4th – titled “AB-11” – which was only circulated between the panelists, the RO, and the DRO. Dibden and Mentis Cravaris received reports AB-11 “appears to have been disclosed without authorisation to Samy Medjdoub”.

They shared concerns that there was “indirect or direct contact outside of proper channels”, with information of private conversations between Jenkins and the DRO reaching Medjdoub “within hours”.

In a WhatsApp conversation seen by *Cherwell*, Medjdoub claimed to have “got this in a way that is super illegal” – an apparent colloquial reference to having obtained the document through improper channels. He added that if it was found that he was in possession of this document, “they will expel me over this”.

The RO and DRO immediately informed Jenkins that they believed “AB-11 has been leaked to third parties”. Jenkins offered the explanation that the RO email inbox had been “hacked”, but a check conducted by the Union IT services “confirmed no compromise”, disproving this theory.

On another occasion, on 25th January, Medjdoub sent to Israr Khan an internal deliberation note with the mention “INTERNAL – FOR THE APPELLATE BOARD ONLY” in the header. Medjdoub shared this document with Khan three hours after having sent to Khan “On phone with Donald important”.

A few days later, Medjdoub shared with Khan and Harraj one more document with the same mention “INTERNAL – FOR THE APPELLATE BOARD ONLY” in the header, regarding the same appeal. Medjdoub followed up with the words: “Don’t share.”

Khan and Harraj denied ever being in possession of any such documents or knowing about their existence. Medjdoub denied ever speaking to Jenkins, and he said he “did not share any such document with Israr Khan or with anyone else”.

Image credits: Gaspard Rouffin for Cherwell.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

OPINION

Caledonian Society misses the 'Reel' point

ANONYMOUS SCOTTISH STUDENT

During my first week in Oxford, I stumbled upon a Scottish third year in the college bar. This was startling; I'd only come across one or two students from north of Newcastle so far, and none of them any older or wiser than I was. I quickly took advantage of the opportunity to ask what societies I should join at the Freshers' fair the following day.

"Anything but CalSoc", he said, referring to Oxford's Caledonian Society. "They're not actually Scottish. Closest they get is owning an estate up there."

This was a sweeping and, I thought, probably inaccurate claim, but in those first few days – homesick, lonely, having my own accent parroted back at me during pre-drinks – I didn't struggle to believe it. While I'd hoped vaguely that I might eventually be proven wrong, I found very little evidence to the contrary. Those I met who were eager for a ticket might not have been royalty, but they were invariably English, drawn to the ball's structure and glamour. Tickets were pricey, and seemed to come on the condition of technical 'training sessions'. The society's website provided a list of dances to be learned; I only recognised two. One night in Hilary, I saw a throng of kilts and tartan sashes clustered outside the Town Hall, but as I passed, I heard only the same clipped southern accents I'd become used to in tutorials. I started to hate-watch the dance videos on their Instagram. All of this cemented in me a vehement – and, I always felt, slightly unfair – distaste for CalSoc. What was ostensibly a familiar cultural practice seemed to me somehow violated. I felt worlds away from the dances of my teenage years, where I would often wake up with mysterious injuries from an over-violent Strip the Willow.

I was interested to read Nancy Robson's recent article on reeling practice for the CalSoc ball – a fresh perspective on what has always been, for me, a very one-sided debate. Yet I was also somewhat disconcerted. The picture that emerged was of a strange fusion between English courtly balls *à la* Bridgerton and some kind of vaguely Scottish aesthetic (Robson makes a passing reference to 'Braveheart'; the CalSoc website, more egregiously, to "ancient druidic roots"). This is a difficult one to square. The histories of 'ceilidh' and 'reeling' are intertwined, and equally culturally suspect. In his thoughtful essay on the subject, Greg Ritchie notes that both are the result of a 19th century 'rediscovery' – and appropriation – of Highland culture, differing only in the use they make of a 'Scottish identity'.

But this difference is still important. Caledonian Societies remain the preserve of the English South, and of the Scottish elite, while ceilidh dancing is, for better or worse, part of Scotland's shared social history. It's taught in every school, and is the central feature of most weddings. I used to organise ceilidhs as community fundraisers. Reeling may not entirely pretend to be a ceilidh, but it does not exist in some kind of cultural vacuum. When we dress up in tartan, and (in the words of the CalSoc website), 'party as only the Scottish can', what kind of mythology are we appealing to? Why is CalSoc so English?

The answer comes in part from its connection to the glamorous "reeling circuit": mainly based in London, this is a season of black and white-tie balls held in royal venues and private member's clubs. But it's also to do with the way Scottishness features in the English cultural imagination. The practices are easily tangled up – and in England, ceilidh rarely comes out on top. She contrasts the formality of CalSoc rehearsals with her previous experience of ceilidh: in a stuffy basement, she found that ceilidh meant "descending into a hellish, slightly pagan underworld". Here, as in reeling societies across the country, ceilidh and reeling are set up as sibling practices – equal in their Scottishness, diverging only in the etiquette they demand. The CalSoc website is strict on both dress ('shorter dresses, jumpsuits, and skirts are not acceptable') and training (mathematical dance diagrams are provided).While claiming to bring 'Scotland to the South', this codification of reeling misses what makes ceilidh so appealing – its inclusivity. CalSoc co-opts, only to gatekeep.

You absolutely should feel like you're descending into the pits of hell. It will be very sweaty and you will probably be knocked over. It doesn't matter if you don't know the steps: someone else will lead the way. Ideally you should wake up with bruises. You don't have to be dressed up, you don't have to be drunk, and you absolutely do not have to be Scottish. It's meant to be an inclusive and open practice. Ceilidhs have featured in my life since childhood, and still the moment I've felt closest to the tradition was in fact in Oxford. My friends and I held an impromptu ceilidh in our living room: there was absolutely no space and no one knew what they were doing. Yet the genuine attempt to engage, the joy and lack of pomp (and black tie) was what made it so special. I don't disagree with the enthusiasm the CalSoc committee seem to demonstrate; ceilidh dancing is a wonderful practice which can absolutely improve your life. But you don't need a dance card, training sessions, or an £80 ticket to do so.

Image credit: David Allan, via Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

I was wrong. Oxford needs a 'reading' week

MORWENNA STINCHCOMBE

In passing, friends often bemoan how their partners at other universities get a week off, mid-term, to, in essence, prat around. The deified 'reading week'. I have always held my tongue: I was previously of the un-woke position that a 'reading week' would lower Oxford's standards, making us lazier, more apathetic, and if I'm quite honest about what I thought, more like them, the non-Oxbridge masses. Get out of the kitchen if you can't handle the heat, I thought. Well, sometimes life proves you very, very wrong.

This all started with a breakup, hardly a delight for anybody, but particularly ruinous for those of us who have to pop sertraline daily. Then, I was bereaved. This has, in the Oxford environment, left me having to choose between either fully processing the losses I have felt and sleeping as much as I need to, or doing an essay adequately. In short, I am too tired (sertraline, again, by the way), and I think I deserve a break.

I am not the only one: 38% of students report becoming more mentally unwell since coming to Oxford, and our workload keeps *Cherwell* articles being churned out in one way or another – apologies for adding to that pile-up, by the way. But there is no escaping the fact: our workload is intense, especially when compared to other universities. Having closely observed another Russell Group university, Oxford students are indeed working themselves to death by comparison. At this particular university, it was unusual for students to have to write 2500-word essays (which I do every two weeks), and the absence of a tutorial system meant that students could go weeks without having to elucidate their thoughts on the topic at hand. Whereas I take 24 hours to write a good-ish, passable essay, students at other Russell Group universities can get what feels like free firsts for one burst of work in an all-nighter lasting 10 hours. Oxford is just so much more intense. We should pat ourselves on the back for getting on with such hard graft most of the time, and be proud that Oxford looked at us as spotty-faced 17-year-olds and thought we'd be up to the task, but there is also a moment when it has to pause. When somebody dies. When the medication just isn't working.

It has been noted to me several times by postgraduate students that they can tell who attended Oxford for undergraduate, because those who did not tend not to understand the sort of corner-cutting they can get away with. I, four years into the system, am all too aware of the sort of pisstake I can – and ought to be able to – get away with. Students learn how tutors work as much as the other way around: we figure out that certain tutors will not tolerate much flakiness, whilst others would bend over backwards to ensure that a student does not suffer too much.

This is simply not enough, though. The work is still there, as is the guilt, and putting work off simply makes it accumulate down the line. We need a mid-term amnesty, a hiatus which most usually call a 'reading week'.

I stand by my earlier comments, though: many students do not do any actual reading during a reading week, instead taking the time to booze up, shimmy down, and visit their loved ones. This university should be canny enough to recognise that its students would not read much either, barring a few nose-to-the-grindstone grifters too good to develop a mental illness like the rest of us. We would use the time to do the essentials of living we so rarely have time for, such as getting new glasses, reading books we actually like, going to student theatre, and maybe we would return to our disciplines fresh-faced and with a joie de vivre.

As such, I am hesitant to call this a 'reading week'. It is a plain misnomer and false advertising. What I am actually calling for is a rest week, to allow us to actually enjoy being in Oxford, a city replete with good culture, company and food, installed in the middle of term. As I sit here, I have my dissertation and a Jane Austen essay eating away at my brains. Sure, it's a good distraction from my personal woes, but Freud would inform us that repressing anything, distracting ourselves, does not end well. He would maybe see it ending in rustication, as it does for approximately 4% of students. These students are in the pits, too: cut adrift from college support, sometimes having to work, and not even free from the workload as some have to pass exams to be readmitted, according to *Cherwell*. Nobody wins.

We admit the best of the best to Oxford: students who genuinely have passion for their subjects, in a manner that probably raised a few eyebrows at sixth form. This passion can be cultivated well if we just let those with it breathe once in a while, and give themselves a chance to cry, mourn, laugh, eat, or [redacted], without feeling that they need to rush back to a half-done essay. Goddamn it, let us nap!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Have an opinion on something we've published? Email editors@cherwell.org

Going green, going

Anish Vedantham's analysis of environmental strategies in a collegiate university raised an interesting point about how alumni shape college priorities ('Who owns net zero? Climate action in a collegiate university', Week 5). He discussed a concern in Oriel College that visible environmental interventions, like green walls or solar panels, would be met negatively by alumni. Of course, the only reason such a perception is relevant is because colleges invest a good deal of effort into soliciting their donations. It would be refreshing to see some flexibility from colleges on this, particularly in altering their carbon footprint. It's frustrating enough to live in a world where government policy is geared towards the over-60s, while young people languish in despair. Environmental interventions are the clearest investment in the future – all the alumni donations in the world won't make a difference if climate change destroys the world as we know it. But, of course, the donors won't be around to see that. I remember hearing of a singing society whose repertoire consisted of songs from ten years ago at the earliest. Alumni were still heavily involved in their board and exercised strong editorial control. The songs were perfect, but a concert was a time-warp. Oxford loves the ancient. Must this worship extend to preserving colleges in amber, both in structure and priorities? For once, would it be possible to centre the present, or (if we're feeling really daring) the future?

Lilly Law, *Law, Brasenose College*

THE COMMENTS SECTION

See what our readers make of our social media posts

For the unfamiliar, this is the same guy who did Nazi salutes and tried to change the UKIP logo to an Iron Cross. Turning Point UK was cofounded by Candice Owens, who gave a speech for them claiming Hitler wanted to make Germany great again. ('UKIP leader Nick Tenconi stages Cornmarket Street border control debate')

danatbrookes via *Instagram*

Great stuff. Can we get a comparative sample from Nottingham Trent please? ("Having sex with University Challenge on in the background': The Sextigation 2026')

ajfreeney via *Instagram*

JUSTICE FOR EM DASH USERS ("Curly quotation marks' and 'Americanisms': How can Oxford detect AI use?', Week 5)

alexfraserlenz via *Instagram*

Commie council here to ruin another perfectly good feature of life in the city. Covered market was nice while it lasted ('Oxford City Council publishes plans for Covered Market redevelopment', Week 5)

Aftab Mallick via *Facebook*

This ain't the only thing they've rigged ("Connivery' and 'cheating': Former officials interfered with Union tribunals', Week 5)

george.abaraonye via *Instagram*

Where was this when they invited the ex prime minister of Israel? ('Oxford Union cancels Namal Rajapaksa event after backlash', Week 5)

gabechan99 via *Instagram*

This is such an excellent piece and articulates so well my own feelings on my time at Oxford. The whole thing about 'perceived struggle' is exactly what I observed and frankly loathed too. "Solidarity was becoming substitution" is such a great line. ('Oxford's poverty porn addiction is out of control', Week 5)

hoahblumshaikh via *Instagram*

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‘Studentification’ is hollowing out Oxford

University expansion is eroding Oxford’s independent community

LEO JONES

Walking back into town from the Schwarzman Centre, I pass all kinds of places that make Oxford feel lived in rather than merely studied. A restaurant preparing for the evening’s bookings. A pub garden where conversations spill into the cold air. A community noticeboard layered with ads for yoga classes, lost cats, and open mics. The spire of a University building rises just beyond a row of independent cafés. This stretch of road is not spectacular in the same way as the RadCam or Bodleian; it’s not curated for prospectuses or postcards. But it is the palimpsestic fabric of the city – the in-between space where town and gown brush against each other. It is also a space that feels increasingly fragile.

The glass, light, and grandeur of Oxford’s many faculties and study spaces are a gleaming symbol of the University’s cultural ambition. And yet, walking amongst them, I am reminded that the future is being built quite literally on the footprint of existing communities. Every new development has had a previous tenant, a former use, a set of memories that rarely make it into planning documents.

That reminder was particularly harrowing when I stopped for a coffee in one of my favourite spots in Oxford: Common Ground. Situated on the bustling Little Clarendon Street, it is an independent space that prides itself on community arts and co-working, hosting spoken word nights, gigs, vintage clothes and record sales, and more. On any given day you might find students editing essays beside local artists planning exhibitions, while freelancers hunch over their laptops to the muffled sound of old friends catching up. It is a porous space, one where the categories of ‘student’ and ‘resident’ feel entirely irrelevant.

It was an unremarkable Tuesday. I ordered a croissant, opened my laptop, and glanced up at the noticeboard – usually a collage of DJ nights, book clubs, and invitations to group discussions about activism and advocacy. But this time, it was the bold lettering of a different poster that dominated my view. ‘OXFORD UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT’, it read, underlined. Beneath it was a planning notice for the demolition and redevelopment of Wellington Square.

The language of planning documents was plastered so awkwardly amongst those chatting, typing, and queueing for coffee. Life carried on. But here in front of me was notice of a ticking time bomb, as all this was doomed to be replaced by something new.

“Perhaps change is good?”, I thought to myself. It was natural, after all, as buildings, businesses, and initiatives come and go all the time. It was likely going to be replaced by an academic space, for the benefit of Oxford University’s students. What was wrong with that?

But Common Ground is no relic, nor a romanticised holdout against progress. It is contemporary, adaptive, responsive. Living and breathing. Why was that any less important? Any less deserving of a place in modern Oxford?

The cafe’s Instagram had more information about how they hoped to continue despite the redevelopment plans made by the University. And after seeing wide-spread discussion about how the future of Common Ground may look, I began to feel slightly better.

But as I walked down St Giles last week, unthinking, I was struck once again by these same feelings and questions. That same day, I had just discovered that the Oxfam on the corner of Pusey Street was set to be closed.

> *“When redevelopment becomes synonymous with displacement, we must ask what kind of city is being constructed alongside the University’s future*

While not the only second-hand book shop in Oxford, it was certainly a favourite amongst many of my fellow humanities students. The reason for its closing simply did not sit right with me. A charitable organisation, selling often hard-to-come-by books at an affordable price, was set to be demolished for the sake of Regent’s Park College’s desire for a Middle Common Room. This was no upgrade in the name of public benefit, it was an act of private enclosure.

Oxford is a constantly evolving institution, and its buildings inevitably reflect changing academic needs. But when redevelopment becomes synonymous with displacement, we must ask what kind of city is being constructed alongside the University’s future. As more and more city spaces are erased to make way for University spaces, we need to be thinking about the long-term consequences of this ‘studentification’.

Because what is lost is not simply square footage. It is inclusivity. It is the accidental conversations between people who would otherwise never share a table. It is the charity bookshop where a first-year can buy a dog-eared copy of a theorist they cannot quite afford new, and the cafe where a local band plays to a room that contains as many residents as undergraduates. These places are not peripheral to Oxford’s identity; they are what make it breathable.

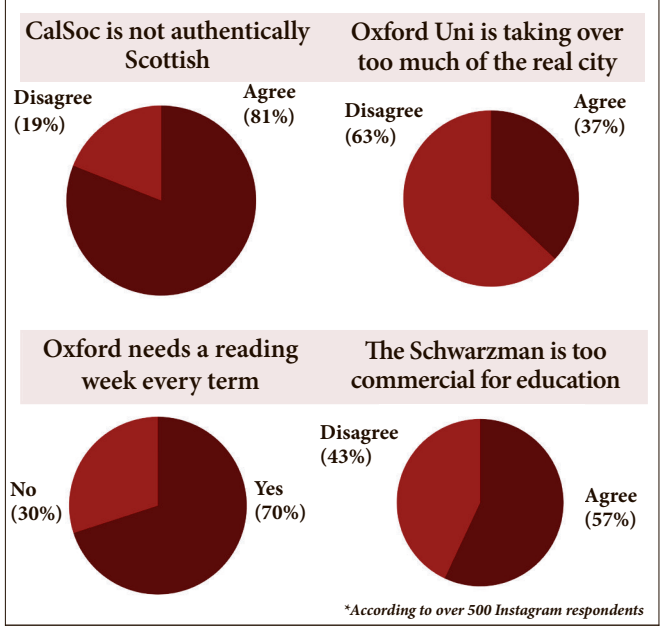
The slow consolidation of Oxford City into an ever-more enclosed, University-owned space risks narrowing the surroundings that we claim to value. A Middle Common Room may enrich student life for some, but what of the wider world beyond college walls?

This is not an argument against growth, nor against the University meeting genuine academic needs. It is an argument for proportion, imagination, and responsibility. For asking whether expansion must always mean acquisition. For recognising that “public benefit” cannot be measured solely in seminar rooms and study spaces. For acknowledging that a city in which independent, charitable, and community-led spaces are permanently precarious is a threat to Oxford’s culture.

The clash of town and gown is age-old, yet the two are undoubtedly mutually shaping. If one side absorbs the physical ground of the other, that balance begins to falter. The risk is not dramatic decline, but gradual homogenisation – a city that feels increasingly curated, wholly institutional, closed off from ‘real life’.

If we want Oxford to remain more than a collection of lecture halls and libraries – if we want it to remain lived in rather than merely studied in – then we must be willing to defend the fragile, ordinary places where its shared life unfolds.

THE VERDICT



The Schwarzman Centre is a commercial venture

The Schwarzman Centre prioritises profit over Oxford’s academic mission, missing the point of its creation

MORIEN ROBERTSON

The House of Medici, an Italian banking family, donated an enormous amount of their wealth to support the arts in the 15th century, from funding the construction of Saint Peter’s Basilica and Florence Cathedral to patronising some of the most famous Renaissance painters, like Botticelli and da Vinci. Their money indelibly shaped not just their contemporaries, but the groundwork of much of Western canonical art.

This might seem a rather lofty bar with which to judge the contribution of Stephen A. Schwarzman. But, with the University of Oxford describing his donation as their single biggest “since the Renaissance”, it’s hard not to harken back to the civilisation-defining benevolence of the Medicis. Indeed, the CEO of the private equity firm Blackstone is estimated to have a net wealth of over $42 billion, making him one of the 50 richest people on the planet – not a bad place from which to start a new era of Gilded Age-inspired philanthropy.

His donations to Oxford come to £185 million and have produced a new Centre for the Humanities – a single building in which seven faculties and two institutes come together, decked out with state-of-the-art music and theatre venues, a cinema, and exhibition spaces. The two-pronged vision is bold and enticing: an upgraded student experience and a way for the cloistered University to reach out to the public. The ‘Cultural Program’, launching this April, offers an enormous range of exciting shows, giving Oxford a new artistic centre and locals a pleasant benefit from the University with which they (sometimes uneasily) co-inhabit the city.

The neat concept, however, has in practice led to conflict. Rather than the student and public elements exhibiting a complementary relationship, the commercial side of the venture has dominated, sidelining students and moving the Centre uncomfortably away from the core operations of the University.

Firstly, whilst the Centre is a substantial building (much of which operates at a subterranean level), its size fails to do justice to the huge number of faculties, students, and academics that it represents. This is evident in a number of ways: the faculties themselves, which circle the RadCam-inspired and proportioned Great Hall, are fairly small in size, and homogenous in design. Whilst a coloured kitchenette is a nice touch, the move for my own department (Philosophy) from the spacious and historic Georgian building on Woodstock Road to a few rooms on the second floor is quite hard to sell as an upgrade.

Similarly, the Humanities Library, though bigger than it perhaps first appears, fails to adequately compensate for the libraries it supersedes. Books have had to be moved offsite to fit, and the number of dedicated seats in the library itself is less than the previous capacity. There are more if you count the other available seats in the building – but with no sound regulations, they are hardly a substitute when you need to hammer out an essay. Losing books and study space, whilst not quite the fire of Alexandria, is still disappointing for what promises to be an exultation of the Humanities in an age of their belittlement.

> *“The commercial side of the venture has dominated, sidelining students*

It’s not just the library that is rammed: fewer large lecture rooms means that bookings are more competitive, introducing frictions into already-bureaucratised academic schedules. Indeed, many lectures remain in their old locations, and feel all-the-less pleasant for it. Making the bottom floor open to the public, whilst a charming way to potentially break down the town-gown divide, also necessarily means fewer seats for the students paying (at least) £9,500 a year for access.

The worst issue, though, is financial. Schwarzman’s historical donation was enough to construct the largest Passivhaus university building in Europe – but as a one-time gift, not enough to keep it maintained. This has made the finances shaky, to say the least. Faculties have been squeezed and the focus of funding is now maintaining a truncated space. Far from being a boon for neglected studies, the Centre looks to be urging the cold free-market logic along.

Even students lucky enough to be in the University are losing out. Prior to the Centre’s construction, a society of which I am a committee member could use our faculty’s multiple lecture rooms for free, with very little competition. Now, the task to get a room is Kafkaesque. After over 20 emails and multiple booking form requests, I was told that the society would be charged £200 an hour for use of the cinema to do a private film screening for our members. The attempt to charge an academic student society eye-watering amounts to use a room in their own faculty building exemplifies how the commercial imperative has vitiated student experience.

In an almost paradoxical way, what should have been a desperately-needed and generous contribution to the Humanities, and the wider University, has actually reinforced the sense that Humanities students are unwanted money-suckers. Not long after the opening of the Centre, the Life and Mind Building, which hosts the Departments of Experimental Psychology and Biology, also opened its doors. If you looked at both buildings without any context, you’d be hard-pressed to tell, based on size alone, which was the home of two departments, which the home of more than three times as many. Rather than facilitating interdisciplinary study, locking all the Humanities students into a cramped part of OX2 and charging them more for it looks like another act in the long history of shunning artists and thinkers. It might be time for the music students to start busking outside.

Image credit: Aayan Riaz for Cherwell.

FEATURES

War within earshot: A year abroad in Jordan

As the U.S and Israel launch an offensive against Iran, one Oxford student in Jordan reflects on war, studying abroad, and trying to live a normal life in abnormal times

SOFIA O'CASEY

I think there'll be a war. Perhaps we're all going to die", my Arabic teacher announces as the engine-roar of an American fighter jet causes the walls to shudder.

The class erupts with a loud, anxious laughter.

"It's okay, we can all die together!" she says with a grin, giggling at our shock. Normally, she teases us for our absences or tardiness. She is kind and maternal, sometimes bringing us biscuits or dates. Today, her tone surprises me.

Coming to Amman for my year abroad brought the usual culture shock: new weather, new rhythms, new social codes. What I hadn't expected, however, and what even frightened me at times, is the ambient inevitability of conflict that permeates daily life.

We are nothing if not in a bubble at Oxford. We use the word "crisis" to refer to writing our essays last-minute. Last year, during term time, my life revolved around my work. The gravest things that could possibly happen to me was that I could sleep through a morning rowing outing, perhaps I'd turn in an essay late, or forget to return a library book. I stopped checking the news, simply because I had the privilege of being too busy for the outside world. Here, I hold my breath as I read the headlines each morning.

At the time of writing, Trump had been threatening American military intervention in Iran for several weeks. Due to its precarious location between the two conflicting nations, the result is an invasion of Jordanian airspace – the country being dragged, against its will, into a proxy war for the second time in under a year. The last time this happened, I was preparing for my Prelims when my year abroad plans had been thrown into the air without warning.

> *"Sitting on my bathroom floor, air sirens blaring, feeling the ground lurch with the crashes of intercepted planes, I was not certain they would ever stop*

Last June, Iran and Israel engaged in a brief and intense exchange of direct and proxy strikes during the Twelve Day War. Shrapnel fell in Jordan and air raid sirens blared, while the glow of American, Israeli, and Iranian missiles could be seen from rooftops across the Jordanian capital all the way to Beirut. I felt certain that I wouldn't be coming to Amman as I had originally planned – but when the war ended on only its twelfth day, I was reassured by both classmates and tutors that everything would be fine. Fast forward to the present, and my entire cohort is currently studying in Jordan.

The first time I heard an F-15 jet was last October. Some classmates and I were sitting on a street-side balcony in Downtown Amman, tasting Knafeh – a sweet, syrupy, Palestinian dessert – as the warm autumn sun shone down on us. Then it came. Though I had never seen a plane fly so low, low enough to darken the entire street with its shadow, the sight of it was nothing compared to the horror of the sound.

The sound of an F-15 is unmistakeable. In fact, I have been counting them. I used to hear them once a week at the very most. Now, I hear them at least three times a day. Even now, as I write, I hear one flying overhead. As they rip through the air, I think "keep going. Pass us by".

Until a few days ago, I did not know the sound that would come next. I only hoped for the engine's roars to fade away. On the 28th February, the US and Israel launched missile strikes on Tehran. In retaliation, Iran struck American military bases across the Middle East, including Jordan. Sitting on my bathroom floor, air sirens blaring, feeling the ground lurch with the crashes of intercepted planes, I was not certain they would ever stop.

On the 2nd March, Jordan announced partial airspace closures. I read this news in my break before class. Around half an hour afterwards, the air raid sirens started again and I had to take shelter in the library. Sat on an office chair between the bookshelves, away from the windows, I felt some of the biggest crashes yet. They were close enough for me to hear the ambulances racing to the scene.

> *"The sound of an F-15 is unmistakeable. In fact, I have been counting them. I used to hear them once a week at the very most. Now, I hear them at least three times a day*

I decided to go for a swim after the 'all clear' alert. Even though the women's pool is underground, around my sixth lap, I began to hear the unrelenting crashes of intercepted missiles once more. I dove beneath the water and sat at the bottom of the empty pool. Silence. Between the unwavering air raid sirens, the continuous crashes of missiles hitting the ground, the low thunder of American jets racing

An alteraction between protesters in Oxford over the US and Israel's offensive against Iran.

to Iran, and the near-constant patrol of the Jordanian Air Force; with my breath held and my eyes closed, I realised just how long it had been since I had the pleasure of hearing nothing at all.

> *"I used to think of safety as an invisible constant, something so guaranteed it did not require acknowledgement. Now, I know it is a privilege – and a fragile one at that*

A few hours later, I booked a flight home for 4th March. Almost all flights out of Jordan have been cancelled. My flight cost me over five times more than I would usually pay. I have spent every penny I have saved, but I need to get home. At the time of writing, I have no idea if this flight will be cancelled too.

In Oxford, war is only ever theoretical. It is something discussed in tutorials, analysed in essays, and debated in the Union chambers. Here, it is infrastructural. When my teacher jokes that we might all die together, we laugh. Beneath the laughter, there lies recognition. She has lived her entire life within earshot of other people's wars. I have not.

I think of my other teachers here in Jordan: one of whom is a Syrian, who spent three years in prison, where he was beaten for opposing his government. He and his wife – also a teacher of mine – are here because Jordan is the safer alternative. Like millions of others, they did not come by choice. I think of my grammar teacher, an elderly Jordanian woman, who called her sister fearfully when two jets interrupted class within minutes of each other. I think of my late father, an Iraqi who assumed an Irish name when he came to the UK to better integrate – and, I suppose, to forget. In our house, the news would play on a continuous loop. Now, I understand why.

A large part of my decision to study Arabic is owed to my father's passing. Having now experienced life in the Middle East, including its wars, I now understand him far more than I ever could have anticipated.

When I arrived in Oxford, we began learning Arabic from *Al-Kitaab* – the standard textbook used in universities. One of the first words we were taught was "United Nations". We could barely introduce ourselves, yet we were already pronouncing the language of international diplomacy. As the chapters progressed, the vocabulary darkened: "to decapitate", "bullets", "martyr". I remember finding it faintly comic, as though the syllabus had skipped the banalities of daily life and leapt straight into the Security Council. We laughed about it then, a group of slightly overwhelmed first-years conjugating verbs relating to political violence. Only later did I learn that *Al-Kitaab* was originally designed for American diplomats. Its vocabulary no longer feels random. Just two days before the first US and Israeli strikes on Iran, American officials were describing recent negotiations as constructive and promising. As jets pass overhead and air raid sirens interrupt class, I am struck by how quickly the language of diplomacy collapses into the language of violence. The same textbook that teaches us to say "peace negotiations" also teaches us the verb "to be killed".

I used to think of safety as an invisible constant, something so guaranteed it did not require acknowledgement. Now, I know it is a privilege – and a fragile one at that. I no longer scroll past headlines. The past few weeks, I have read them with the uneasy knowledge that they may determine whether I would remain here, or whether my year abroad would once again be suspended mid-air. I do not feel safe in Jordan anymore. The FCDO now advises against all but essential travel to Jordan and all Oxford students are now required to evacuate the country. In the worst case scenario, we are simply returning home to the UK. My teachers are not afforded this same privilege.

> *"A large part of my decision to study Arabic is owed to my father's passing. Having now experienced life in the Middle East, including its wars, I now understand him far more than I ever could have anticipated*

That said, Jordan is so much more than its geopolitics. Despite being so far away from Oxford, I really was beginning to feel at home here. In the early evening, the city softens; the swallows arc between the concrete rooftops, the call to prayer folds into the hum of traffic, and the hills glow pink under the sunset. Amman is erratic and sprawling, but it is alive. Shopkeepers press extra sweets into your hand. Taxi drivers insist on conversation. Strangers offer directions before you have even asked. The people possess a kindness that persists through the worst, regardless of what passes overhead.

Life continues with a startling normality. My teacher still brings biscuits. My classmates still complain about homework. Downtown Amman still smells of cardamom and diesel and sugar syrup. There is Knafeh to be eaten, exams to revise for, birthdays to celebrate. The jets pass overhead, and someone inevitably rolls their eyes and says, "again?".

We continue conjugating verbs.

Image credit (left): Tareq Ibrahim Hadi, CC-BY-SA-3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.
Image credits (right): Stanley Smith for Cherwell.

A counter-protester at the 'stop the war on Iran' demonstration in Oxford.

The essay and its long history in Oxford

The Oxford essay has undergone many iterations; it is an ever-evolving form. Your weekly tutorial essay – impersonal, hurried, and AI-tainted – is a far cry from Percy Shelley's 'The Necessity of Atheism'

NAIMA ADEN

In 1811, a student at University College published a pamphlet including an essay titled 'The Necessity of Atheism' that he later distributed to the heads of Oxford colleges. The student, after disputes with the Master of University College at the time, was sent down (forced to rusticate) on the grounds of contumacy (disobeying authority).

This student was Percy Shelley.

Famous more for his poetry than political views (and his wife Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*), Shelley's time at Oxford was short and defined by his anti-religious stance. The pamphlet argues that belief in God rests not on direct experience, sound reason, or reliable testimony, and so there is no rational basis for belief at all. It is no surprise then, that the exclusively Anglican-faith based Oxford University took issue with this particular use of free speech.

It is not the content of Shelley's essay that we must draw lessons from, but the structure. The essay is an essential element of university teaching, and, for those of us studying humanities and social sciences at Oxford, it seems to be the foundation of our learning. The average student in these subjects at Oxford will write one or two essays a week, 2,000 words long. But the essays we write, and the process of reasoning we follow, are arguably far-removed from the process of the essay produced by Shelley. They are more technically perfect, but also more sterile. Essays here are fixed; we all follow the same structures, word counts, and department-mandated reading lists. Great for displaying understanding of a subject, in theory. But consider the average writing process of the Oxford student:

(1) An attempt to plough through a seemingly unending reading list. You will begin each week with a desperate desire to get through it, that slowly diminishes as the week goes on.

(2) Developing a thesis to defend, struggling to find the balance between subject jargon and the literary standard of writing you try to maintain

(3) Begin to write, and aim for a perfection that is entirely unreachable. It is because of this that you desperately may turn to AI (made oh-so-much easier with the university's rollout of free ChatGPT), or essays handed down from college parents and friends.

(4) Hand in and brace yourself for critique in an imminent tutorial.

And so, it is the perfectionism that brought us to this place that becomes our downfall, as you scramble to produce something that looks coherent, rejecting the idea that the essay should be a personal form of learning.

If students aren't learning from the essays they spend over 40 hours on weekly, often the only form of assignment in one's degree here, it is worth assessing whether the Oxford essay truly has any merit.

The word essay comes from the french verb essayer. Michel de Montaigne is said to have coined the term, and in his seminal work *Essais* demonstrates this unique writing practice. Montaigne writes essays on numerous topics, not as authoritative explanations, but in an "attempt" to deconstruct and understand the topics. Covering ground from government and politics to religion and nature, all the essays have a sense of self fashioning and self discovery. The manuscripts are filled with the barely legible annotations of Montaigne, crossed out over and over. Montaigne himself said that he wanted a medium to assess the contents of his mind, leading to the outcome that the essay was to be a living, breathing document – collation of the human mind, with its tenacious facets. The essays have a distinct lack of structure, and Montaigne's stream of consciousness means they read more like diary entries. Refreshingly personal.

> *"If students aren't learning from the essays they spend over 40 hours on weekly, often the only form of assignment in one's degree here, it is worth assessing whether the Oxford essay truly has any merit*

Contrast this with my weekly essay, which is structured purely around my understanding of others' understanding of the topic. No merit is given to students whose 'attempts' feature themselves so clearly. Rather it is knowledge of the literature (and control of those never ending reading lists) that is most rewarded. It is also clear how contrary the perfectionism of the Oxford student writer is to the original form. Montaigne's whole point of writing was to lay himself out in all his fallible glory, as he proclaimed in his writings: "My defects will here be read to life."

The essay has never been so impersonal. It is this impersonality that means we cannot use these pieces of writing to achieve the aims once set out with them. Shelley's essay is made strong through the combination of a deeply personal viewpoint and the critical analysis that this entails. 'The Necessity of Atheism' (and essays in their truest form) are clear attempts to explore an idea or notion from his head onto the page. It is the product of the laborious activity of self-analysis, questioning, and critiquing, and an attempt to convey this final, highly personal product to readers.

If one is to consider that Shelley was writing some 200 years ago in this same institution that we are in, what may he think of the essay now? More perfect, yes, in knowledge of the topic, but always following some guide. The structure of the essay seems set in stone, but also, the ideas that we draw on too have become set in stone. A response to the rigid system of essay-writing in Oxford, no doubt.

I can't help but wonder if it is the nature of academia that 'voice'. and therefore 'self' is only something awarded to those senior enough. You must earn your right to speak here, in this place of inquiry and knowledge-seeking. This idea couldn't be further from the truth when you consider the political impact of the essay – something so revolutionary.

It was the lack of rules and boundaries of the essay that gave it such power to become something so great. With an accessibility that grew exponentially with literacy rates, the essay became a medium of immortalising any and all forms of discourse that recorded and reflected human and societal development. Literary discourses, philosophical discourses, scientific, personal, and religious discourses. The essay allows you to trace the origins of one's thought and the development of their ideas. The essay retained this ability for most of its existence. Provocative, introspective, more akin to diary entries on random topics than anything that we would credit as essay worthy now. This is exactly what made them revolutionary. The essay allows you to delve into the furthest corners of your mind, and to come up against the limits of your critical capacities until you are forced to evaluate, and re-evaluate. In the process of writing an essay, a writer is forced to take a position, and to assess this position constantly, until they reach a level of surety that makes ideas worth conveying to the masses.

It was in the 20th century that essayists showed this the best. Against the backdrop of international societal uprooting – decolonisation, women's rights movements, and civil rights movements – the essay gave an intellectual voice to those from whom the West had never listened to before. And it is here, in the 20th century, amidst all of these struggles, that the essay as a tool of dissent becomes most apparent. Edward Said coupled political discourse on occupation and the Palestinian cause with his personal feeling of alienation, and gave the basis of contemporary immigration discourse. bell hooks' deeply personal essays on her life gave scholarly birth to intersectionality. James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* is blistering when he says "I had discovered the weight of white people in the world". The pithy, descriptive sentences he uses not only affirm his lived experience, but are able to solidify them while staying far away from the structures we use today. Entire branches of Western progression of society towards this space of plurality of thought that we occupy can be traced by the remnants of people's innermost reflections, and the essay was the best medium for them to do that.

I suppose we have become disenfranchised. The prescribed nature of the Oxford essay shows little aside from the stagnation of Oxford as a birthplace for ideas. The weekly essay should be a place for exploration, and tutorials a chance to think aloud and arrive at new conclusions. In practice, both function as a performance. You will learn quickly that it is better to sound confident even when you are unsure, to speak fluently rather than tentatively, to cite rather than to speculate. Over time, the aim is no longer to discover what one thinks, but to demonstrate that one has mastered what has already been thought.

> *"The prescribed nature of the Oxford essay shows little aside from the stagnation of Oxford as a birthplace for ideas*

Hierarchy plays a crucial role here. Voice, in Oxford, is something to be earned. Students are encouraged to efface the first person, to speak through the language of others, to defer to the canon before daring to intervene. There is a logic to this: scholarship demands rigour, humility, precision. But the effect is the loss of selfhood, the fingerprint of authorship, the very thing that once gave the essay its force. Oxford is not bestowed upon you, but rather postponed. Does it come when you get your scholar's gown? When you get the first class honours? The right to say 'I' arrives later, if at all. Until then, you must speak cautiously, or not speak at all.

This is a far cry from the conditions under which the essay first gained its political power. Shelley did not write 'The Necessity of Atheism' as a rehearsal for authority. Montaigne wrote primarily to uncover his own fallibility. Baldwin, Orwell, Said, and hooks all wrote to give name to a novel experience that deserved recognition. In each case, the essay was a tool for a greater purpose.

Today, at Oxford, the essay is stagnant. The structure remains, the guiding principles unchanged. What has been lost is the sense that writing might still be capable of unsettling the place in which it is produced. Perhaps that is the final irony. At an institution that asks its students to write essays every week, we are closer than ever to a form that once celebrated personality, and groundbreaking ideas – and further than ever from imagining that our own writing might do the same.

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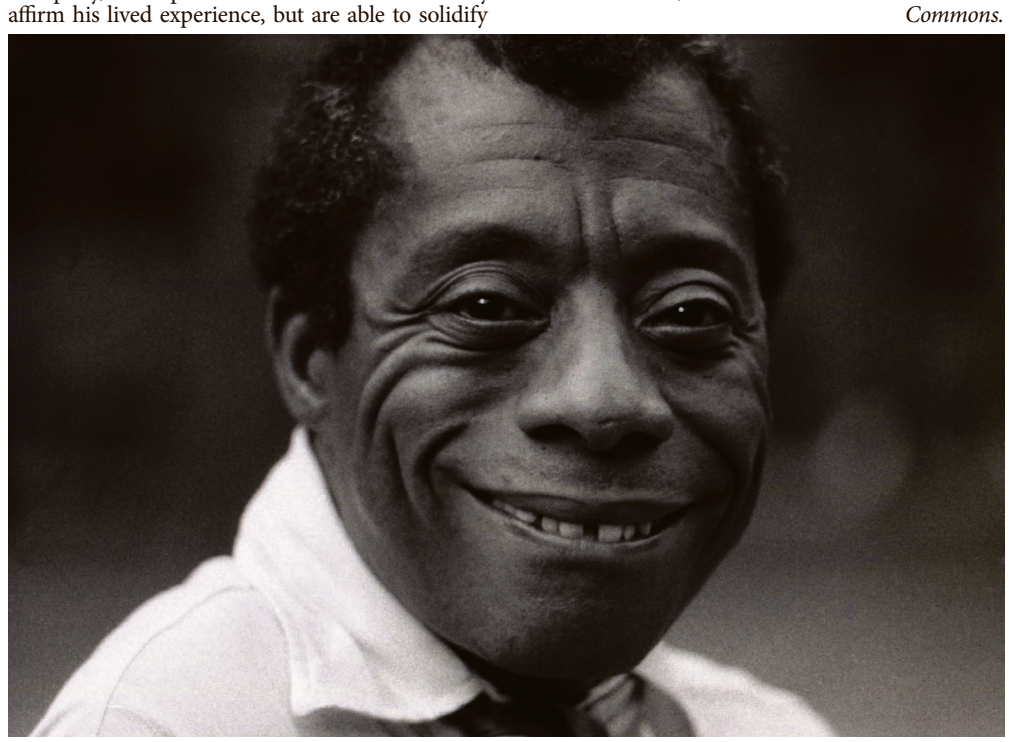

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John Evelyn

Hacks, you've been through hell for the past four months… well, me too, girl. With elections over by the time this goes to print, here is my insider scoop… for yesterday.

Despite the Deputy Ambassador making seccies cry with her speeches, yet again, it's more than likely that HackGPT will storm the election. I'll be trapped in a brazen bull for my comedy crimes, so let's have fun whilst I still can. Attempting at CC to frame Zero Ratified Minutes and her Worse Half as strangers with zero relation to her, she convinced at least one of the pigeons in the courtyard.

Later on, her Worse Half, and Bhanushali's Wingman took centre stage in TSC. Their golden gun? Very loud shouts and AI generated voice notes. Devolving quickly into chaos, Crashout One crashed out again and objected to his mates' rules changes, and Minecraft Steve found himself losing his own game of Musical Chairing. All over claims that the Deputy Ambassador also rigged tribunals, because her spinal surgeon was on them. A London-based surgeon operating on the Deputy Ambassador… in Qatar. I suggest that you hacks do your degree, there's a very good unit on Logic in first year PPE, in case you hadn't noticed.

Elsewhere, President Prada's Book-Tok Ball was so cool that nobody was even cool enough to show up. With empty corridors and a Macmillan Room full of committee, President Prada quietly distributed tickets for half off, after the gates had closed. Perhaps, moving the date of the ball, to the night where normal people are shoeing tabs, isn't a very good idea. Our students have already fended off one horde of unimaginable evil, why should they meet another when they're trying to celebrate?

And what would seventh week be without elections? Four presidential candidates: two with slates, two with dignity instead. It's quite shocking, actually; the least predictable election is to the position of secretary: four candidates, yet zero cumulative PV.

Editorial

Arina Makarina
Editor-in-Chief

Student journalism has delivered some of the most bizarre experiences in my university life. From having tutes with people that I have been reporting on to finding out about breaking news 15 minutes before my first exam, it has been a very colourful year. Now that I am wrapping up my time at *Cherwell*, it feels odd to abandon InDesign and stop checking Messenger at any social function.

Whilst I am not sure what I will be doing now, apart from enjoying my Trini-free, I know for a fact that *Cherwell* will be alive and well. Student journalism is an incredibly powerful tool especially in a place like Oxford. No one but the students themselves have as much access to the matter to be able to uncover and call out institutional failures and abuses of power in the university community.

Reading the entire paper, I get to appreciate the diversity of student experiences that *Cherwell* represents. From an incredible piece on Jordan and an interview with Christina Lamb, a *Cherwell* alumna (written by my brilliant co-News Dep Ed), to play reviews and shoeing the tabs, there is so much more to this place. I am also very thankful for everyone I got to work with, especially my favourite Russian ginger, Stanley Smith, whom I couldn't do this without. You are an incredible writer and a very kind soul, and I can't wait to read your name in the nationals.

Nonetheless, I am really looking forward to retiring, forgetting everything I know about the Union and never emailing the University press office again. I can't wait to see what *Cherwell* and all the brilliant individuals in it will get up to next.

Stanley Smith
Editor-in-Chief

By the time I write the final editorial for the Week 7 print, I will either be ready to submit a finished dissertation, or I will be forced to rusticate." I wrote these words back in January, in my first print as Editor-in-Chief. 5 editions, well over 175 articles, and several menacing legal letters later, and Week 7 has finally rolled around. It's March now, the weather is getting sunnier, bringing with it protests and Port Meadow day drinking, and I do not have a dissertation ready.

Rustication it is, then. As of Monday, I am officially a suspended student. Once I leave college accommodation in a few days time, I won't be allowed back on premises until 2027. To use the technical terminology, I have slightly fucked it.

But I don't regret the choices I've made. I feel incredibly lucky to have worked on so many important stories with such talented people. This experience has been, for someone who is delusional enough to want to be a part of this industry, the best training any aspiring journalist could ask for.

So much of this is owing to my co-EiC, Arina Makarina. An incredible journalist, a tireless worker, and a fundamentally good human being, it has been a pleasure to edit this paper with her. I also owe a massive thanks to the team at OSPL, who have been a steady hand guiding us through some rather gnarly situations.

So, it's back to Bristol and to my teenage job of working in a cafe for me. Whilst I might regard the next nine months with some anxiety, I look back at the last two with nothing but pride.

ARCHIVES

Fun Vac Ideas
1979

As term comes to a close, you might be wondering what to do for the five weeks you're free of essay deadlines. Why not take the advice of the Dangerous Sports Club? They spent the 1979 Easter vac being rescued by firemen, being charged by the police, and inventing bungee-jumping. Not quite in that order.

On the morning of April Fools' Day, four Christ Church students donned morning suits and clutched bottles of champagne. You'd be mistaken in thinking that they were off to a wedding, or a very early pre-drinks. Instead, they were bound for the Clifton Suspension Bridge, where they attached themselves to elasticated ropes and jumped. The fate of the champagne is unknown.

If that's all a bit tame for you, the Dangerous Sports Club had even more ideas. If the term's been a breeze, why not hang-glide from Kilimanjaro? Or maybe, if you want to get away from it all, you can escape to Rockall, a 56 feet high uninhabitable rock in the North Atlantic ocean. They hosted a breakfast there.

What about a tropical break? At the end of the vac, the Club had breakfast on the lip of an erupting volcano in the Caribbean. In a worrying demonstration of how far Oxford arrogance may go, they deceived officials into believing that they were seismologists. According to the members, the meal was dreadful, but the view was breathtaking. And it would have to be. They suffered sulphur poisoning as a result, and had to miss the start of Trinity while they were recovering. But don't feel too bad for them – they were convalescing in Barbados.

Charlie Bailey
Culture Deputy Editor

There's a myth at Oxford that joining societies outside of your degree makes grades plummet. This is easy to believe, when it feels like caring about anything other than your rigidly defined tute essay could cause that first to slip through your fingers.

A tutor once told me that the only extracurricular he'd accept is early morning rowing. A brisk 6am workout followed by a 9-5 in the library is the way to do it, he claimed. But what are we really here for? I couldn't be gladder that I decided to spend many degree-less hours running the *Cherwell* Culture section (alongside the fantastic Beatrix Arnold) in the term before my finals. Now in Week 7, feeling sentimental, I realise how much committing to doing something creative, with such a lovely team, was just the right way to spend my last Hilary. The Culture section definitely provided the best side quests: from London Fashion Week to the less dazzling 'soft launch' of the Schwarzman centre, *Cherwell* has travelled far and wide. Being a Dep Ed has provided a creative outlet, insider access to Balliol Bar, and the opportunity to overhear inspiring conversations from my peers that make me want to keep journalism in my life.

So, in the not-so-subtle lyricism of Cat Burns (who I wrote an article-length ode to) "if there's something you want to do, just do it".

PROFILES

‘Inevitably you make mistakes… often it is better to go with your instincts’

Sir Ed Davey on his political career

MELISSA EDDON

Multiple times throughout the interview Sir Ed Davey accidentally turned his Zoom camera off. He’d hastily apologise and search to turn it back on. His daughter, and later her cat, entered the room mid-interview, but only the cat was allowed to join us, resting her head on Davey’s shoulder. By the end of our conversation, it’s very clear that Davey is not a polished politician, nor does he wish to be.

Leader of the Liberal Democrats, the third largest parliamentary party in the UK, Davey markets himself as a “centrist dad” of “middle England”. Spending his undergraduate years at the University of Oxford, studying Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Jesus College, Davey speaks of Oxford with the faint glint in his eye so common amongst Oxford alumni. He admits with a chuckle that he came to Oxford completely unprepared after his gap year, having done no pre-reading: “I had one sleepless night thinking I’d gone to the wrong university.” Having never studied the subject before, he felt “totally at sea” with the economics papers of his course. Despite this, he threw himself headfirst into the myriad of activities Oxford has to offer: serving as JCR president, taking part in amateur dramatics (at which he was “absolutely hopeless”), and getting involved with the Oxford Ecology Movement. But as many of us will likely later reflect, he says “I wish I’d done even more”.

Oxford was also the site of his “first major political engagement”. As Jesus JCR president during the 1987 General Election, Davey joined the ‘Tactical Voting ‘87’ campaign, which aimed to keep the Tories out of power in Oxford. Yet, despite his early political activism, and his PPE degree, a career in politics was never on the cards for Davey. His initial desire was to work in development in the global South, having had relatives involved with the World Health Organisation, the European Commission, and even Tiger Conservation. Ultimately, he applied for the role of Parliamentary Economics Researcher at what was then the Social and Liberal Democrat Party, driven by his interest in economics. This decision has undeniably shaped his life in a way he might never have imagined. At the time the party was polling at just 4% under leader Paddy Ashdown, and Davey confesses that “they only really employed me because they couldn’t afford anyone else”.

Within a month, he had joined the party as a member. Davey describes being “totally inspired by Paddy, and his espousal liberalism” and he continued to work with the party through the 1992 General Election. Despite a momentary dalliance in management consultancy (about which his only comment was distaste for his boss), his “bug” for politics dragged him back. Standing in the 1997 General Election as the Lib Dem candidate for Kingston and Surbiton in South West London, “more as a have-a-go than anything else”, he was elected with a 56 vote majority. Davey reflects on his entrance into politics as a move of coincidence, and seems to believe fate was on his side at that moment: “I sort of fell into politics…it wasn’t a plan, it was a whole set of circumstances, and I ended up happily in a party that I feel is a classic liberal party, and liberalism is who I am.”

Our conversation moves to an emotive issue for Davey, one which has played a significant role throughout his life: care. Davey cared for his terminally ill mother in his early teenage years, then his grandmother, and today his severely disabled son. He admits that it’s a very personal issue and one that has only entered the public sphere of his life recently: “Only when you become leader do you become more open to questions about who you are.” He reflects that he’s “gone on a journey since becoming leader in 2020”, not only speaking about it more publicly, but also engaging with it more deeply on a personal level. His book, *Why I Care: And why care matters* (published in May 2025) is part manifesto, part introspection – his way of reflecting on his experiences.

> *“They only really employed me because they couldn’t afford anyone else*

Being a carer has, unsurprisingly, also informed his politics. He refers to the millions of family carers in the UK, and how “governments, councils, and public policy just don’t factor these people in”. He argues it would be “transformative…if we did care properly”; benefiting the economy, the health service, and general national happiness.

The movement from opposition to government was life-altering for a backbench MP like Davey. For the Liberal Democrats, it proved to be a once in a lifetime opportunity. After the 2010 General Election gave no overall parliamentary majority to a single party, an infamous five days of negotiations ensued, culminating with the Lib Dems entering into a formal coalition with the Tories. "I was actually arguing for a coalition with Labour…but we ended up extracting a lot more from the Conservatives in the coalition deal than I had possibly expected."

He describes his appointment to the role of Junior Minister at the Department of Business, Innovation, and Skills as "exciting…if very unexpected", and reflects proudly on his work to deliver shared parental leave that "ensured the labour market was fairer to women". It was his promotion to Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, however, that excited him most, and he visibly lights up as we begin to talk about it. "It was just brilliant…we essentially created the offshore wind industry as a result of what we did." Holding the role for three and a half years, Davey became the longest serving Energy Minister since the early 1980s. "At the time, I was convinced I wouldn't be a minister again, and I thought 'I just have to work as hard as I possibly can, score as many goals as I can'." He attributes all of his successes to "a fantastic civil service", and makes clear his outright distaste for the right-wing's undermining of the organisation's credibility, a clear reference to Dominic Cummings' "blob" label for the service.

When I ask him to reflect on these coalition years over a decade on, he's remarkably more positive than I, perhaps naively, expected. "We achieved an awful lot – taking the lowest paid out of tax [brackets], getting investment in mental health services, keeping us in the NHS." He admits, "politically, it didn't go very well for us", with the party losing nearly 40 seats, Davey's included, but "we showed a) what Liberal Democrats can do in power, and b) that coalitions can work, and be stable". If anything, Davey thinks the coalition acts as "a great argument for electoral reform". "I know lots of people don't like it…but for the country, I think it was the most stable government we've had in a long time", pointing to the five Prime Ministers the UK has had in the span of less than ten years. "They've had big majorities, and they've been completely unstable, divided, frankly hopeless."

> *"They've had big majorities, and they've been completely unstable, divided, frankly hopeless."*

Despite his distaste for the First Past the Post electoral system, it's undeniable that Davey has benefited from it. His pride in his party is undeniable, and when I ask what he brings to it, I get a single word answer: "Winning." He admits he is bragging, but "winning is rather important in politics". The three elections before 2024 gave the Lib Dems a respective eight, twelve, and eleven seats. With Ed Davey as leader, the 2024 General Election saw them win 72 – their best result since 1923. When I mention the recent polling, that has seen his party at just 12%, he quickly dismisses their value. "People often think about politics like we have proportional representation (PR)." In reality, it's about vote concentration in a specific geographic area, not about the lateral spread of popularity across the country. "I look at whether we are winning."

One thing that voters definitely know Davey for is his outrageous stunts, and when I mention them, I see a smile light up his face again: "It's really challenging for us to get media coverage...partly because we are sensible – we don't say crazy things, we don't say extremist things." It's true that a lot of the nuanced points Davey tries to make about care and EU relations simply aren't compatible with the clickbait media culture of today. But the reasoning for the stunts runs deeper than chasing journalists. He sees an emotional deficit at the heart of liberal politics: "People who have our liberal views…tend not to do emotion very well." The data and analysis, he admits, are well-covered – but "if you don't have the emotional element to what you are doing, you just don't connect with people". He posits this as the reason for the success of the Right, saying "Johnson, Farage, Trump, they are much better at emotions, but these emotions are often nasty emotions". It's a gap that's only widened on social media where, he admits, "we have been too slow in getting our social media team together, making it a priority, and coming across well".

> *"It's clear this is a man who still has plenty to fight for*

It's the question of emotion in politics that leads us, naturally, to Brexit. His time spent negotiating with the EU as a minister convinced him of the value of the supranational organisation. For Davey, "Brexit is just a total disaster…we have lost so much", but trying to get the public to engage with it again is proving to be difficult. "It divided people, divided the country, friends, families, neighbours, work colleagues, in quite an emotional way." As such, "even the most strongly 'remain' people…often don't want to talk about it…they just have this memory of it all being a nightmare".

Davey is unambiguous about the party's mission: to stop "Trump's America coming to Farage's Britain". It is here where Davey's passion is most clear to me. His smile and composure leaves him, and I see the anger beneath at the growing popularity of the Reform Party, a party he fiercely condemns as "a danger, an absolute danger". Davey draws parallels between Trump's protectionist tariffs and Farage's pioneering of Brexit: "Like Trump, Farage doesn't really believe in free trade. He wants to stop us from trading with our European neighbours." Davey argues that, under Farage, Britain's foreign policy would be centred on courting the favour of Trump and Putin, rather than the UK's national interests. "The authoritarianism, anti-democratic behaviour of America goes against British values", and, as such, he explains, Farage is "a real threat to our future".

It's clear this is a man who still has plenty to fight for. But I turn our conversation away from the future, and towards the past – and the regrets that inevitably come from such a long career in politics. When I ask Davey how he handles his regrets, he has a simple philosophy, but arguably one that would not stand up to scrutiny from the public. "You learn from it, don't you?... Inevitably you make mistakes…often it is better to go with your instincts." Particularly when he first started as a minister, Davey felt there was "so much to learn", so many processes to comprehend and utilise for his own agenda.

Any life after politics will likely be defined by his family and "what I like doing – going for walks, good food, travelling". But, for now, he certainly has ambitions that will drive him for decades to come, and is genuinely reluctant to imagine taking a step back from politics: "It's too exciting at the moment…. When I talk to colleagues and party members, I often say we have a moral responsibility to stop reform, and an historic opportunity to win many more seats." For a man who fell into politics by accident, he seems in no hurry to find his way back out.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

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OXFORD SPOTLIGHT

***Christina Lamb** spoke to **Conor Walsh** about Ukraine, an honorary doctorate, and story-telling*

Christina Lamb started her career as the Cold War was ending. She saw the fall of dictatorships in eastern Europe and Latin America, and the end of apartheid in South Africa. "It felt like things were going in the right direction", Lamb tells me. But in all her 38 years as a foreign correspondent covering countless conflicts – from Libya and Iraq, to Afghanistan and Sudan – "the last few years have been the busiest". Reflecting on Ukraine, she says: "I never imagined that I would be covering major land war in Europe."

When I meet with Lamb she is visiting Oxford to receive an honorary Doctorate of Letters as part of a special ceremony to mark the Chancellor's first year in office. Lamb was the first in her family to attend University, so, for her, attending Oxford was "already very special", and when she was contacted about an honorary degree she was "astonished".

Reflecting on what the honorary doctorate meant to her, Lamb tells me "sometimes you feel like 'what's the point of doing this?' You're taking a lot of risks, putting other people at risk, and it doesn't feel [like] you're making a difference." So, for Lamb, Lord Hague's recognition of her work was "particularly special. It was kind of recognising all of those people that I write about – that it meant something".

Life in Lamb's field isn't easy. "I basically see the best and worst of humanity." But, she remarks, "in most places you find really inspiring people." For Lamb, Ukraine is no exception. "Ukrainians get annoyed about this now", she says, "because everyone goes on about the resilience of Ukrainians. It's probably irritating for them. But it is true".

During Lamb's most recent visit to the war-torn nation, the temperature hit a staggering -21 degrees celsius. But in a country where "a lot of people don't have electricity", people "want to show that they're having a normal life". Lamb described busy restaurants, theatres, and discos.

Unlike much war reporting, Lamb's work often focuses on life away from the frontline. In Ukraine this is partly because "you can't go anywhere near the frontline now because of the drones". But in general, Lamb is keen to emphasise that war isn't all about combat: "People often think there's war and everything stops. But in fact people still go to work, get married, have babies, and go to school. All of that still happens."

Our meeting coincides with the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and I was keen to hear Lamb's thoughts on how things have changed. "Four years is a long time", she remarked, "people are very tired. Every night there's air raid sirens and your sleep is constantly broken". She added that "people don't particularly see an end" to the war. "Nobody believes that Putin has any interest in peace."

Whilst Lamb describes Ukraine as "extremely different" to any war that she's covered before, some things don't change. "Like most of these wars", Lamb tells me, "women and children are often the victims", and Ukraine is no different. She says that "we have seen Russians using rape as a weapon" and "domestic abuse increasing because a lot of the men fighting are often traumatised and sometimes take that out on their loved ones.

We live in an unprecedented era of conflict. There's never been so much fighting this side of the Second World War. So I was also interested in how Lamb chooses which conflicts to cover and which stories to tell. "Sometimes something happens and so we sort of have to go. If someone's just invaded a country or something – then it's just reacting", she says.

One of the many things that Lamb has learned over the past 38 years is to "never go anywhere thinking that I know what the story is". Of course, sometimes "people will say 'where are you going? What's the story?'", but "I always think when you get on the ground, it's there that you know". Fortunately, Lamb reflects, "my editor is very supportive". But she notes that that's not always been the case. "I've had struggles in the past", she says, "when I started there were very few women doing what I do".

"Sadly we're seeing a lot more autocracy, a lot of democracy being rolled back", she says. "It doesn't feel like the world is in a good place." But despite these turbulent times, Lamb emphasises the importance of having "confidence in doing what you believe in", telling me we shouldn't be "pushed into things because you feel that's what society expects of you".

With a nod to her own journey, she remarks: "I just really believed that I could write and that I would find interesting people to write about. Everybody has a story. It's just a matter of having the patience to sit and listen, to care."

Read the full article at cherwell.org

Image credit: Cyrus Mower, with permission.

A masterclass in devising: 'Noether' in review

Written by Esme Somerside Gregory, this poignant show tells the story of German mathematician Emmy Noether

JESSICA PHILLIPS

★★★★☆

Cartesian Production's *Noether* is a production driven by passion. This original play, written by Esme Somerside Gregory, tells the story of the German mathematician Emmy Noether (Yael Erez) and her struggles with the misogyny of her male peers against the backdrop of the rising Nazi state.

This show is unique in that it was devised entirely by the company. It touches on the major academic pursuits of Noether's life; from her struggle for habilitation at the University of Göttingen in 1915, to proving 'Noether's Theorem', and finally facing expulsion from Gottingen University under the Nazi administration in 1933 and finding refuge at Bryn Mawr College in America. My degree means that I rarely interact with mathematics, yet the skill of this production demonstrated to me the value of Noether's contribution to the field. Although maths might well be a foreign language to me, the feeling of academic curiosity and fervour that the show conveyed is impressive to students of all disciplines.

The show deviated from the usual OUDS venues, held in a lecture theatre in the Mathematical Institute. And that's all it was, complete with a podium and a whiteboard and jazzed up with a wooden cabinet, ladder, and chair. The audience were seated behind desks, which was particularly convenient for this reviewer scribbling away in my notebook (I like to think the scratching of my pencil was more immersive than distracting). I was initially skeptical about this somewhat sparse set design but it proved to be suitable for a play so entrenched in academia. The production didn't need a complex set to transport us to Noether's lectures; they were played out immediately before us by Erez, and watched by the cast in the front row.

Physical theatre was a recurring motif in *Noether*, with some moments triumphing more than others. The first use of this technique, where the cast arranged chairs which Noether stepped across and then leapt off was executed deftly but didn't seem to contribute much meaning or visual interest to the moment for me. However, the company later staged an argument between Maggie Kerson and Esme Dannatt, in which Kerson, embodying the misogynistic resistance to Noether's habilitation at the university, climbed a step ladder, with each step punctuating the words "every step of the way". She was met at this level by Dannatt, raised up by the other cast members arguing in defence of Noether's exceptional intelligence. The movements, paired with excellent performances from both Kerson and Dannatt, imbued this moment with an emotional intensity, and produced a captivating scene.

During one of Noether's lectures, Erez explained the maths while the rest of the cast began to move their arms rhythmically, creating shapes with the air; they pulled, tilted, raised, and lowered. The cast then joined Erez onstage, still reaching and compressing in these dancelike motions, first discordantly, until gradually the group began to cohere, and they were stretching, raising, inhaling in perfect sync. This dexterous expression of the learning process was undoubtedly one of the best moments of physical theatre in the show.

Somerside Gregory's script was well written, tight, and rich. She clearly engaged in a ruthless editing process to capture a lifetime of devotion to maths within an hour. The script felt well paced, if a little dense with information that I was underqualified to process, but nonetheless, the narrative overall kept me engaged. The script balanced between focusing on Noether's struggles in the university, and moving out to the wider tumultuous social climate. This provided a level of depth to the play, simultaneously

the story of an extraordinary individual, yet familiar to anyone who knows European history. This script resonates ever more jarringly with today's political climate – a line about America as the "hospitable" antithesis to Nazi Germany came across as sadly ironic, and highlighted the script's relevance and sensitivity to its context.

There were some issues with projection, with some lines getting lost, or trailing off towards the end. The cast were not fitted with microphones, and had a big space to fill, so this is an understandable technical challenge. It caused particular difficulties when the audience were faced with a script that was already at times difficult to follow because of the richness of information. The show featured an interesting composition by Nicole Palka, the initial few bars of which felt a little anachronistic, evoking 80s sci-fi rather than 20th-century Germany. But it soon came into its own, and underscored the cast's movements with an almost cinematic quality.

With its 1930s setting, the play inevitably interacts with the rise of fascism, and what this means for the Jewish Emmy Noether. The production doesn't tiptoe around its difficult topics; it tackles them boldly, most notably in a scene where Noether's teaching is interrupted by a bang at her door. The lights turn red and reveal a brown-shirted officer wearing a red armband descending the stairs through the audience towards Noether. The officer's silent presence instills a ripple of discomfort among the students, which bleeds into the audience thanks to a combination of the fidgeting and murmuring of the cast underlaid with the gradual intensifying of the sound. This moment was captivating; so simple, and yet so well executed.

Noether was a masterclass in devising. The passion conveyed in Somerside Gregory's script combined with the enthusiasm and precision of the cast produced a show that illuminates Emmy Noether through the skilful intersection of history, abstract algebra, and stagecraft.

Image credit: Marcus Ashworth, with permission.

Let's go to the movies: Fennec Fox Productions' 'The Flick'

BEATRIX ARNOLD

After their vibrant staging of *Company* at the Oxford Playhouse earlier this term, Fennec Fox Productions are set to return next week with a run of *The Flick* (2013) at the Burton Taylor Studio. Annie Baker's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama follows three underpaid cinema attendants negotiating quotidian trials and tribulations as they rehearse the tedium of their service jobs. I sat down with Joshua Robey, the director, to discuss what it was about the play that appealed to him so much.

Robey tells me that *The Flick* is a play he's been considering for a long time; he'd previously encountered it in an academic context, but was drawn to it as "the most naturalistic thing [he's] ever done". For Robey, the play's affective power lies in its subtlety, featuring compellingly understated dialogue, and focusing in on the minutiae of character interactions. Within the play's idiolect, there is "so much unspoken subtext", such that "every moment is rich with what's not being said".

After the expansive and well-equipped stage at the Oxford Playhouse, this production's venue, the small-scale Burton Taylor Studio, might threaten to raise more than a few logistical restrictions. Yet the production promises to mine the venue for all of its potential by means of somewhat unconventional staging. In order to reproduce the cinema setting, the action of the play will take place on the seating racks, with the audience positioned centrally on the stage. This arrangement is just one of the ways in which the production seems to thrive on fostering a close, yet subversive, connection between the audience and the onstage characters.

The thematic concerns of the play are ultimately well reflected by the venue, harnessing what might have been a disadvantage to enrich the play's emotional matrix. The intimate space, in combination with the limited cast, facilitates concentrated access to the characters as they lay bare their psyche, generating an atmosphere that Robey calls "claustrophobic in a good way". Bound as it is by dramatic unity, the play is fundamentally absorbed in characterisation, paying close attention to the nuance of human dynamics.

The Flick demands a different kind of attention from its audience, asking us to detune from the overstimulation of life in order to zero in on the compelling moments of quietude. The play's action is slowed down by the mechanics of reality – silences are deliberately drawn out as the attendants sweep the cinema, and trivial conversation immerses you in the stasis of the characters' everyday, producing what Robey describes as "a heightened form of realism".

> *"The production seems to thrive on fostering a close, yet subversive, connection between the audience and the onstage characters*

The play's script, first performed in 2013, bears the inevitable contours of a society still weighed down by the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. The focus on the petty betrayals among the cinema employees is set against a background of widespread disempowerment, a failure of trust in the mechanisms that structure working life. Nor are these concerns frozen within their original context. The continual resonance of such themes is illustrated by their application to, say, the fraught state of graduate employment and the enforced monotony of service jobs in an environment where capitalism systematically de-skills all of its labour. The narrative may, then, resonate with a potent reflection of the artistic cost of this. For Robey, the play explores "how difficult it is to care about others when self-preservation is so necessary". Yet in spite of these tensions, testing the limits of human empathy, he maintains that the narrative is ultimately about "solidarity".

Robey seems to approach the play as an exercise, comparing the process to that of restoring a painting: for him, the emphasis is on lifting out what's already there, uncovering the play's essence rather than smothering it with additional brushstrokes. While directing is usually an additive practice, he explains, with *The Flick*, it became "a process of winnowing". Robey describes the play as one that sits and rests in the imagination. It resists playing up the emotion, and won't necessarily devastate its audience in the moment, but lingers and accrues impact through retrospect.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

ART

Confronting the future of art: 'Responding to AI'

***Emma Heagney** reflects on Shamsi and King's exhibition in the Christ Church Chapter House*

In the face of changing technology, how do artists perceive artificial intelligence, and what role does it play in their work? *Responding to AI,* an exhibition curated by Aniq Shamsi and Alice King, confronted this question directly. I had the great pleasure of attending a private viewing of the exhibition in the Christ Church Chapter House, and of meeting the artists at the forefront of the discussion.

Whether AI-generated images can be considered 'art' is highly contentious, even among non-artists. Arguments against 'AI art' include the lack of originality and the negation of effort. But others see these tools as a platform for innovation, stimulating ideas and testing different options. The entanglement of art and AI is only increasing, with models like ArtEmis even claiming to be able to predict a viewer's emotional response to art, using large datasets of visual inputs and textual descriptions. Entering the centuries-old Chapter House, I was gripped by the contrast between such modern subject matter and the truly historic setting.

I was initially surprised by how many of the artists I spoke to were in favour of artificial intelligence, or used it in their creative process. One such artist, Alan Kestner, used AI to layer the vignettes in his piece, which would have been extremely time consuming to do in the traditional way. The description of his work, *Dark Eyed Sailor* (2024), includes a positive reaction to AI: "It opens up new possibilities to extend an artist's repertoire."

However, not everyone agrees. Sonja Francisco, a DPhil Chemistry student at Wolfson College and one of the exhibition's featured artists, expressed concern about the effects AI may have on the environment. This was reflected in her artwork, *Remember to Water the Pink Tulips in My Bedroom* (2026). It consists of one mixed media piece and two separate tulip vases, one of which wilts with the label 'generate image: pink tulips', while the other blossoms. She poignantly focuses on the huge amounts of water used by data centres, creating tap droughts in local communities and affecting their everyday lives, down to the flowers in their homes.

A prominent theme of the exhibition was that of the artist's creative process, and its inability to be recreated by AI. Munise Akhtar's foray into Persian miniature painting focused on the physical effort artists pour into their work, tied to the emotions which motivate them to do so. After the death of her father, the symbolism of angels resonated with her, and she describes the creation of her piece as "allowing grief and focus to coexist within the same space". She hand-burnished paper with stone, prepared pigments herself, and transformed raw gold leaf into paint. For her, AI cannot replace these traditional methods, nor can it remove the grief characterising her work.

> *"I was gripped by the contrast between such modern subject matter and the truly historic setting*

Ruth Swain takes an alternative approach, with a series of oil paintings blurring the line between reality and image. Her *Tom and Jerry* (2025) piece captures the current state of AI-generated art, often producing images which are ever so slightly off or misproportioned. The viewer is presented with an unnatural, almost birdseye angle of a cat reacting to a photocopy of a mouse emerging from a machine.

The painting intentionally mimics the appearance of AI and challenges the viewer to question the extent to which AI-generated images are reflective of reality. Swain confronts the theme of the exhibition directly, focusing on the viewer's perspective rather than the meditative processes behind the art.

While the exhibition was student-run and featured the art of several postgraduates, it was nonetheless star-studded. M. Freddy, a Parsons School of Design graduate and featured speaker at MIT and the United Nations, explored the idea of art as a relationship through the concept of an envelope. Viewers were encouraged to open the letter, read its contents slowly, and reflect on how the fingerprints and subtle creases on the paper could not be recreated by AI. Likewise, Farrah Azam, an award-winning painter who has been commissioned by Charles and Camilla, presented a beautiful work of gold leaf on a navy blue background depicting the London skyline, influenced by her Kashmiri background. Like others in the exhibition, Azam drew upon her upbringing and culture to ground her art distinctly in humanity. Aniq Shamsi, one of the curators of the exhibition and the Christ Church GCR Arts Officer, traced his family tree through the ancient cuneiform script (*Inheritance*, 2025), drawing upon such traditions to remind us that art and its power have endured several millennia before AI, and will continue to do so alongside it.

Shamsi and King's *Responding to AI* exhibition was vibrant, heartfelt, and raw, stripping art back to its foundations and reconsidering what it means in a world of changing technology. The high quality of the exhibition and its organisation were impressive and spoke to the curatorial vision of Shamsi and King. Whether AI comes to have a true place in art is yet to be seen, but showcases like these forecast the controversy it creates, and remind us of the traditions that brought us to this point.

Image credit: Danise Wu, with permission.

Stitching the world together: GFC's London Fashion Week

FASHION

CAITLIN TIFFANY and VICTORIA CORFIELD

A few weeks ago we, the *Cherwell* fashion editors, were lucky enough to be extended an invite by the Global Fashion Collective to their London Fashion Week show. After a flurry of excitement and calling our parents to announce that we had finally 'made it' as fashion journalists, we assembled the closest thing to an avant-garde look we could muster with our uni wardrobes and hopped on the Oxford Tube to Shoreditch. The stated aim of the Global Fashion Collective is to "amplify global voices in fashion" with an emphasis on elevating "independent designers on an international stage", an agenda that was abundantly evident in the show. It consisted of the collections of four independent designers, hailing from all over the world, to create a loud and rich celebration of multiculturalism in fashion, proudly weaving national identities into their work. It was a breath of fresh air, a rejection of the notion that appearances or customs divide us, instead showcasing the beauty and artistry that comes from collaboration and community.

First onto the runway was Alex S. Yu, presenting his collection 'A Flicker of Winter'. Yu's eponymous label, based out of his studio in Vancouver, presents itself as "contemporary womenswear for the everyday dreamer", and this emphasis on bringing the whimsy of a fantasy world was certainly present in the rose-tinted lens through which his pieces seem to be filtered. Sharp tailored silhouettes, emphasised through contrast seams that foregrounded structure and craftsmanship, were veiled in tulle, giving such formal attire an ethereal air of magic. The streetwear elements, hoodies or t-shirts, meant that while his items had all the glamour of an editorial shoot, they still felt firmly grounded in urban life, pieces of art one might actually pull from one's wardrobe on a dreary Monday morning. Yu's work is based upon the dynamic friction of unlikely pairings; the mix of the high-low dressing, layering a sweatshirt over a tailored blouse, or the tulle accents and textured fabrics used to reinvent what we deem conventional workwear, is at the heart of what Yu is doing. It's classic silhouettes with innovative details, with chunky silver jewellery and hair pieces reinforcing this expression of brand identity. Yu's use of layering was equally noteworthy, adding graphic floral *appliqués*, or layering unorthodox materials like faux leather, latex, and mesh, which speaks to his interest in the unexpected. There was something about Yu's collection that made the little girl inside me jump with joy. In an ocean of Pinterest outfits and micro-trends, Alex S. Yu is all about finding the excitement and beauty in the unexpected.

The second collection displayed was from the French label SAYF. Titled 'Excellence', the show focused on a wonderful combination of traditional clothing from Arab, African, and Asian cultures with contemporary street wear style. Hoodies, coats, and jackets were extended to the length of tunics and modernised through variation in material: denim, silk, and leather hoodies all made an appearance. In a time where men's fashion is limited and often dull in comparison to women's shows, Sinan, the designer, shot life back into it. These items were injected with elements of rich cultural and religious history through the models' head coverings and even rosaries dangling from some of the models' hands. It was here, in the accessories, that this collection truly shone. The most striking of these, for me, was the closing look where the model was adorned with an entirely white headscarf underneath a matching baseball cap. The combination of the traditional with the contemporary in a chic yet inventive way was at the very soul of Sinan's collection.

> *"It was a breath of fresh air, a rejection of the notion that appearances or customs divide us*

Dunne Cliff was the penultimate display of the show. Its designer, Allison Dunne, perfumed her runway with the concept of "clothing as essay" as she questioned technology and the climate crisis through the fashion show. Before the models arrived, Dunne Cliff was introduced to us with a visual piece. On the screen behind the runway we saw videos of beaches contrasted with images of pollution and a once beautiful environment damaged. The first model then walked out, carrying a bucket which she placed halfway down the runway. Each model that arrived after her placed something into the bucket. It started with bottles of water being poured in, then mock ceramic phones with earphones attached. This performance exploring a wasteful society consumed by technology was somewhat reflected in the clothes.

If the show made one thing clear, it was that nobody knows how to make a woman feel like a goddess quite like Olena Adam does. The Ukrainian designer, who was kind enough to speak to us about the inspiration behind her collection after the show, highlighted her desire to bring out the beauty in our world, especially during such a bleak time both in her home country and beyond. The collection, entirely created and produced in Adam's studio in Ukraine, took my breath away. Amongst the bold colours and prints Adam sent out onto the runway the star of the show had to be her 'Festan', which she describes as "a versatile wardrobe piece that seamlessly fits into any setting". These flowy robes shimmered under the lights, the air catching beneath them, creating dancing trains that followed the models. Garments that would not look out of place in a Disney Princess' wardrobe, bedecked with statement jewels and envy-infusing bedazzled headpieces. Another interesting aspect of Adam's collection was the contrast of these flowy, almost sleepwear-inspired pieces being styled with intricate updos, full glam makeup, complete with a red lip, and statement jewels. She fully leans into the notion of intimates as outerwear, transforming corseted details, and slip inspired dresses into works of art, elevated through her incorporation of rich colours, ostrich feathers, and embroidery. She finds the beauty in the ordinary, transforming her models into ethereal beings with her focus on the elegant woman who deserves to be seen.

The pieces held strong senses of originality and modernity as well as being deeply rooted in tradition. Contemporary style could be seen in the cuts and tailoring of the clothes, with baggy jeans and fitted tops dominating the show.

Read the full article at cherwell.org

What Hollywood blockbusters say about us

***Lydia Armstrong** discusses the 'dad film', and the political implications behind it*

Among the most cherished genres in American cinema today might uncharitably be described as 'dad films'.

These are blockbusters dripping with testosterone, usually involving some major set-piece, at the end of which our heroes, whether the government or the police, carry the day against the odds.

Think of *Die Hard*, when Bruce Willis's street-smart off-duty police officer defeated a gang of terrorists and left egg on the face of the overbearing FBI. *The Hunt for Red October* was a similar story. Jack Ryan (Alec Baldwin) is a CIA analyst specially enlisted to find a defecting Soviet submarine captain (Sean Connery). In the end, the crisis passes, and nuclear war is narrowly averted with the help of the strongest Glaswegian accent the Kremlin ever had.

With enough funding and hype behind them, these films can enter the national consciousness even if their very nature suggests they shouldn't. *Point Break*, for example, is a deeply silly film: Keanu Reeves goes undercover to infiltrate a gang of surfers, who rob banks while wearing rubber masks of former US Presidents. On paper, the long, lingering shots of Reeves and Patrick Swayze surfing with very little on, not to mention the fact that it was directed by Kathryn Bigelow – a woman (gasp) – ought to have scuttled this film as a vehicle for middle-aged men. By rights, *Point Break* is the sort of film that bombs on release and ends up a camp classic decades later. But no – it made $83 million and ended up with a notably inferior remake, the blockbuster's equivalent of an Oscar.

So, why do films like this not seem to have the relevance that they used to? After all, they were popular, and some of them were even good. But in the 21st century, stories like this just aren't convincing anymore. In today's world, the threat that people want to see vanquished isn't limited to international terrorism, or the Soviet Union, or even straightforward armed robbery. The American population – the target audience for these films – have quite enough to worry about.

> *"The comforting narrative that such films promote, where American power is used in the service of the innocent, seems not to resonate so much in today's political landscape*

The comforting narrative that such films tend to promote, where American power is used in the service of the innocent, seems not to resonate so much in today's political landscape. Take, for example, the growing "militarisation" of law enforcement to deal with perceived domestic disorder. Last year, 32 people died at the hands of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which was the highest number in over two decades. This year, as it takes on more government funding than any other law enforcement body, eight people died in January alone. None of them were armed. In this America, it's far harder to buy the usual morality tales where the 'Good Cops' fight against the system and everyone goes home happy.

This is arguably exemplified by Kathryn Bigelow's latest effort, *A House of Dynamite*. The film centres on a fictional American government and its response to an incoming nuclear attack – but it falls flat in several bewildering ways. For one thing, it consists of the same events repeated from three different perspectives, which are so similar that you may as well just watch the opening 45 minutes on repeat. Nor does the baffling conclusion help: everyone panics, Jared Harris's Secretary of Defense throws himself off a roof, and then… roll credits. No resolution. No decision. A two-hour talking shop, an inexplicable suicide, and by the end of it all we still don't know what the protagonists have actually settled on doing. You'd think that the imminent nuclear apocalypse would have sharpened their minds even just a little bit.

The problem is the film's uncertainty about what it actually wants to say. The view that it promotes of America's role in the world – a basically liberal, benevolent force for good – would have been misguided even when people bought into it under Bush and Obama. Two decades of war and its human cost have made that increasingly hard to defend.

These days, however, not even the government can be bothered to keep up the façade. It's little wonder, then, that we get a similar lack of conviction from the studios that make our major films.

FILM AND TV

Editors' picks

Moonrise Kingdom

Beatrix recommends *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012): *"Moonrise Kingdom perfects the blissful kind of nostalgic melancholy at the heart of so many of Wes Anderson's films. Innovatively shot and subtly heartbreaking, this is a visually rich tale of young love, adventure, and the complications of coming of age. I'm already planning my next rewatch."*

Love Story

Charlie recommends *Love Story* (2026): *"Love Story covers the relationship between Carolyn Besette and John F. Kennedy Jr, imagining their whirlwind romance before their tragic deaths. A comfort watch leaving the audience wondering when it will all go wrong."*

Image credits: 'Moonrise Kingdom' and 'Love Story' via imdb.com

What's wrong with the nation's obsession with 'Love Island'?

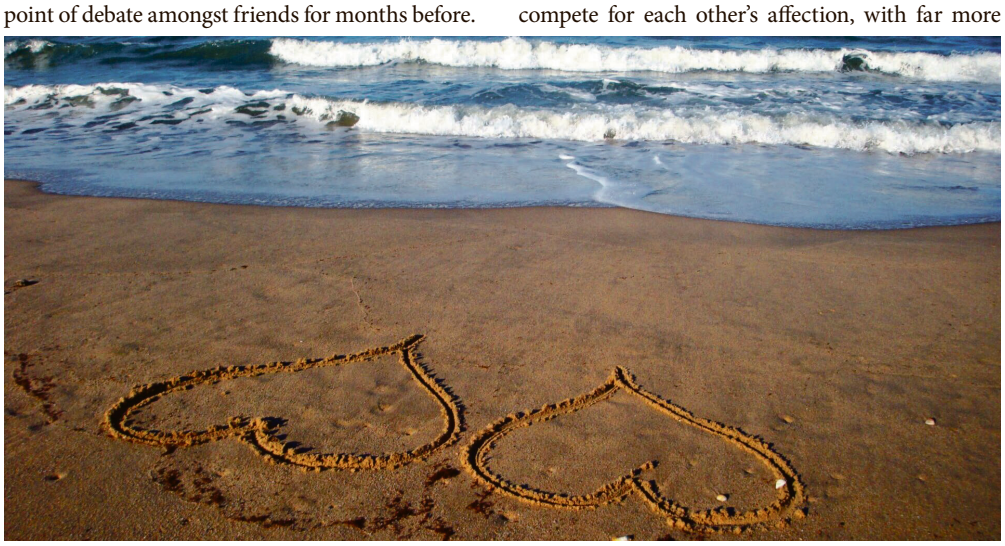
CHARLIE BAILEY

Introducing myself on the *Cherwell* Instagram page, I claimed that the Culture section is "about the media you consume outside of your degree". For this to be true, it's only fair that I dedicate an article to my occasionally borderline addiction to reality content.

My personal motivation for watching reality TV is definitely comfort: there's something reassuring about the way the extremely familiar plotlines are edited to seem shocking. Unlike certain TV dramas which release a handful of episodes at a time, reality TV producers churn new seasons out once or twice a year, thereby removing the element of choice. I also like how they become a talking point – the final instalment of this year's season of *The Traitors*, for example, drew 9.4 million viewers, and provided a point of debate amongst friends for months before.

Naturally, reality TV takes many forms, its less family-friendly iterations being romance shows (*Love Island, Love Is Blind, Ex on the Beach* to name a few). Especially in an environment like Oxford, where philosophical conversations are genuinely commonplace, watching these shows feels like a bit of a contradiction. As a 15-year-old, gleefully discussing last night's recoupling the next morning at school felt normal. A few years on, I've realised that it's impossible to see these shows uncritically, and wondered if they can legitimately be seen as dangerous. My instinct to rely on them for comfort becomes questionable.

Shows like *Love Island* profess a commitment to contestants' mental health that constantly falls short. Where *The Traitors* makes bumbling members of the general public complete tasks against each other, *Love Island* sees highly aestheticised young people compete for each other's affection, with far more painful results. During each episode, drama erupts, and scenes of women crying after the news that their partner of six days wants to 'explore other options' are accompanied by dramatically crescendoing soundtracks. Inevitably, the situation resolves itself, the contestants go to bed, and the cycle begins again.



Recently, these formulations have begun to seem increasingly sinister. Last summer's season (series' twelve) saw a particularly high number of viewers and a particularly high number of Ofcom complaints. In the context of a media landscape where voices like Andrew Tate's are becoming more popular, certain *Love Island* scenes start to feel slightly chilling. The season highlighted the ability of articulate older men to encourage lost younger men to turn to misogynistic modes of seduction. Viewers noted how contestant Harry Cooksley, the eldest in the villa at 30, made it his personality not to commit to any of the girls. He spoke about them in largely objectifying terms and jokingly 'taught his ways' to younger contestants such as Harrison Solomon. Solomon's behaviour (breaking ties with contestant Lauren Wood shortly after sleeping with her) in turn led to 221 Ofcom complaints in response to a single episode. No action tends to be taken by Ofcom in relation to the comments; the watchdog argues that *Love Island* is beyond criticism because it does not frame the men's behaviour in a positive light.

Reality TV as a genre does not always create such controversy. I'd say *Love Is Blind* is viewed as a much more humorous, wholesome version of the show, in which contestants' external appearance is (rightly), deprioritised. When it seems to be creating harm rather than good, there is an argument that *Love Island* needs banning altogether.

The issue with this statement is that it is not directly the fault of the show that the men act that way. *Love Island* survives because of its high viewership. Its popularity has intensified rather than decreased now that short-form content is so popular: influencers make careers out of dissecting each episode. The producers receive almost 100,000 applications per season: while complaints continue, young people are still keen to get involved. Producers have become more creative with how they find contestants, going as far as to walk up to people in nightclubs. This tells us that people see themselves in the contestants and romanticise what the show could bring them. The ideals it represents are therefore ones that resonate with today's youth.

Someone once joked to me that *Love Island* is a social commentary; given its huge popularity, I think this has validity. In context, they were justifying watching a show that is framed as such a 'guilty pleasure'. Perhaps it retains its standing because it is in fact familiar – it magnifies the relationship worries that young people feel day to day. If the show's misogyny is so apparent, we should assume not that the producers encourage it, but that these are attitudes towards women which are acted upon every day in society. If a man behaves this way on camera, one worries about how they talk behind closed doors. As much as we'd like to see reality TV as a falsified 'bubble' in which feelings are expressed in their most extreme form, the intensity of emotion expressed on *Love Island* can reveal how young people see relationships. Any superficiality within that is an issue wider than the show, and one which needs addressing.

Image credit: CC0 , via pxhere.

INDUSTRY
OXFORD RETREAT
7:30-11
MONDAY, MARCH 9TH
WEEK 8
readings, live music and DJs

MUSIC

Editors' picks

Charlie recommends *Muna* (2022) by Muna: *"Upbeat pop done well. I discovered them through their song 'Silk Chiffon' which I used to listen to to give me a boost on the way to first year lectures. A current recommendation is 'I Know A Place' from their earlier album About U."*

To prove her niche music credentials, Beatrix recommends *Big City Life* (2025) by Smerz*: "Recommending this album from the Norwegian electronic music duo Smerz does slightly make me feel like one of those men who demand that you "name five Cameron Winter songs". But Big City Life is sonically impressive and lyrically unique, the perfect soundtrack for when you're getting ready to go out."*

Image credits: 'Muna' and 'Big City Life' via Spotify.

Why you should run to classical music

EVELYN LAMBERT

During my year abroad, precisely the 29th May 2025 according to my Strava, I went on the best run of my life. It was raining, and I didn't want to go, but I dragged myself outside, and decided on a whim to put on Gershwin instead of my usual playlist. It was life changing. As I ran to the finale of *Rhapsody in Blue*, I had a spring in my step like I had never experienced before. That was when I realised that I had been doing running music all wrong.

Previously, I had listened to a more standard running playlist. For me this consisted of high-energy 2000s and 2010s pop classics, the sort you would find on the bop playlist of an unimaginative entz rep. Don't get me wrong, this certainly has its place, and I do sometimes return to this playlist when I'm in the mood, but I think running to this sort of music has a few key issues. Firstly, each song is self-contained and unrelated to the ones preceding or following it. This means on runs when I was lacking motivation, I would find myself counting the songs, and discouraged when it would take me three to complete a kilometre on slow days. Secondly, you're never going to be in the mood to run to every song on your playlist, and it can be frustrating to find yourself needing to skip and interrupt your flow. Finally, at times it just feels a bit lacklustre; sometimes you just want to feel like you're in a film, and for this there is nothing better than classical music.

If you think about it, the standard structure of a symphony – one of the most common types of longer orchestral piece, made up of four musical 'chapters' called movements – is the perfect companion to a run. They usually start out lively, either matching your motivation and keeping your energy levels high, or giving you a much needed boost on days when you're not feeling it so much. Then, with a couple of kilometres under your belt and a state of flow reached, you can settle in and enjoy a slower and more lyrical second movement. If you are starting to lag, a dancelike third movement is sure to give you a pick me up, often more light-hearted to keep you energised. You then finish with a flourish as the finale, the most epic of all the movements, leaves you feeling like you have conquered the world as you cross your imaginary finish line – bonus points if you listen to a live recording so are met with rapturous applause. Your run becomes cohesive, tied together by the narrative arc of one whole piece of music.

> *"I had a spring in my step like I had never experienced before*

But of course, not all symphonies follow this structure, and indeed, not all classical music comes in symphonies. That's the beauty of it, you can find a piece that suits your mood for the day and the length of your run, and then you just keep running until it's finished. You are discouraged from stopping early, lest you leave any themes unresolved, or lose out on the satisfying ending that ties it all together. It's the ultimate motivator.

If you're not sure where to start, I have a few tried and tested recommendations to help get you outside this dark and rainy February. If you're only going on a short run, *Boléro* by Ravel is the ultimate slow burn, perfect for helping you push through to the end (or for those, inspired by the Winter Olympics, who want to feel like Torvill and Dean). For runs around half an hour long, concertos are often a good bet, and you can hardly do better than any Rachmaninoff piano concerto, especially the second. Then for runs nearing an hour, you need to look for a symphony. Some personal favourites to run to are Tchaikovsky's fifth and Sibelius' second Symphony, but you really have so many options available to you. For runs even longer, Mahler symphonies are a great choice – my first time running to Mahler's second Symphony was transcendental. Getting into half marathon territory, you could listen to an entire ballet or opera – I can personally recommend Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* for your next 21.1km run. Someone brave enough to embark on an ultramarathon could even listen to Wagner's entire *Ring Cycle* – there really is a piece for every run!

So next time you don your running shoes, or if you've never run before in your life, I encourage you to put on some classical music. You'll never be able to look back.

How 2025's films made their mark through music

RUARIDH MCEWEN

The recent Oscar nominations for Best Original Score and Best Original Song in films of 2025 have sparked much debate and some controversy, particularly from those who believed *Wicked: For Good* was snubbed a nomination. Beyond that, the nominations have allowed us to reflect on how fundamental musical scores are to film, and the highlights of last year's film soundtracks.

The nominees for best original score include *One Battle After Another*, *Sinners*, *Hamnet*, *Frankenstein*, and *Bugonia*, transcending a variety of genres and invoking various emotions within the listeners. Paul Thomas Anderson's *One Battle After Another* is perfectly encapsulated by the tense and foreboding score from Johnny Greenwood, which takes the stage at certain points of the film, leaving the viewer on the edge of their seat. In contrast, Max Richter's score for *Hamnet* sits quietly in the background, breaking through at the most emotional scenes to tug at the viewer's heartstrings.

Alexandre Desplat's *Frankenstein* and Jerskin Fendrix's *Bugonia* share similarities in their grand orchestral scope, yet they diverge in purpose. Desplat's score leans heavily into the gothic tradition, with grandiose baroque elements echoing the tragic Romanticism at the heart of Mary Shelley's original novel, while Fendrix's work for *Bugonia* feels more playful and unpredictable, mirroring the film's surreal and satirical tone. Together, the nominees demonstrate the remarkable versatility of film music in shaping atmosphere, emotion, and narrative across wildly different cinematic worlds.

Beyond original score, the category of best original song has continued to highlight how music can transcend a film's runtime and embed itself within popular culture. The original song category includes: 'Dear Me' from *Diane Warren: Relentless*, 'Golden' from *KPop Demon Hunters*, 'I Lied to You' from *Sinners*, 'Sweet Dreams of Joy' from *Viva Verdi!* and 'Train Dreams' from the eponymous film. This category is much broader than that of original score, including a variety of genres from K-pop to Mississippi Delta blues. This is where much of the controversy surrounding *Wicked: For Good* has emerged. For many viewers, its musical impact felt inseparable from the film's success, reigniting debates over how originality is defined in an era of adaptations and reimaginings. The backlash arguably reflects a broader tension within contemporary cinema: audiences are increasingly drawn to musical familiarity, while awards bodies remain hesitant to recognise it.

What is perhaps most striking about the soundtracks of 2025 is how deliberately they are deployed. Gone are the days where scores simply fill silence; instead, composers now carefully choose when to recede and when to overwhelm. Silence itself has become a musical tool, making the moments when sound does break through feel all the more powerful. This restraint is especially evident in films like *Hamnet*, where the absence of music can be just as emotionally resonant as its presence.

This careful approach to scoring also reflects a broader shift in how audiences engage with film music. In an age of streaming and fragmented attention due to viewers often being stuck between two screens, soundtracks increasingly serve a dual purpose: enhancing narrative immersion while also existing independently beyond the cinema. Scores like Greenwood's or Richter's are not only experienced in the dark of a screening room, but through headphones, playlists, and concert stages, allowing films' impacts to linger long after the credits roll. The Oscar nominations are not merely about recognising technical achievement, but acknowledging how deeply music now shapes the afterlife of cinema.

Having watched all nominees for the best score category, I have to say that for me personally, Johnny Greenwood's score for *One Battle After Another* is the standout soundtrack in its category. The sheer tension created by the staccato of piano notes and piercing string orchestra of its title track reflect the unpredictable nature of the film, drawing the viewer in on screen and allowing the retrospective listener to relive the emotion of the film at home. The rest of the soundtrack, too, has similar elements of tension with nervous piano notes and dramatic synth surges making the 162 minute epic fly by.

Ultimately, the soundtracks of 2025 demonstrate that music acts as one of cinema's most powerful storytelling tools. Whether swelling grandly or whispering in the background, film scores help to shape our emotional responses often without us even realising. The Oscar nominations may spark controversy each year, but they also offer a valuable opportunity to reflect on how music continues to define the films we remember, not just through spectacle, but through silence, subtlety, and emotional precision.

Image credit: Greg in Hollywood, CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

Translating Oxford into Urdu

Manya Singh dicusses how a language has helped her to romanticise Oxford

It's a different emotion whenever I read the Urdu language. I'm not a native speaker, nor have I actively pursued learning the language, but as someone who finds solace in reading *shayari* (Urdu poetry), I wanted to follow it even in Oxford. I have friends who can speak and read the script brilliantly, and I have always envied them. Not because knowing another language adds feather to their cap, but because it allows one to feel differently, or rather multilingually. It's like being multilingual in emotions.

Urdu has a certain gravitas to it – *gherai*, or depth. I had started reading Urdu poetry during my undergraduate years, and that is when I came across a few poets who wrote on love (*mohabbat*, *ishq*) and separation (*firaq*). In that sense, coming to a new city and joining my dream university was *ishq* for me, but leaving behind my country and loved ones was *firaq*.

When reading Urdu poetry, one often encounters poets residing in a no-win situation: there is neither love nor forgetting; neither acceptance nor forgiveness; neither destruction nor sanctity. Instead, it leaves the reader suspended in a state of emotional encumbrance. Feeling too deeply, and yet nowhere to settle, and that is the crevice where most admirers of Urdu poetry wish to stay.

On some days as I amble around Oxford, I'm struck by a reality that I rarely focus on – I am in Oxford. I had longed for it, desired it, and adored it (but maybe just never enough).

Firaq Gorakhpuri, an Urdu poet, writes: "*Ek muddat se teri yaad bhi na aayi aur bhul gaye ho tujhe aesa bhi nhi*" ("It's been a long time since I even remembered you, but it's not as if I've forgotten you either"). That is exactly how I feel for Oxford on some days. I haven't still figured out which part of Oxford these lines speak to: the city itself, or the experience of being a member of this institution? Yet, on walks to Tesco on Magdalen Street, I rarely pause consciously on this feeling. It is only when I see something as magnificent as the Christ Church dining hall, Duke Humphrey's library, or the RadCam that I'm nudged in the arm by this reality.

Urdu is often called the language of love, and rarely does it speak without invoking a beloved. The beloved is omnipresent in its poetic universe: sometimes distant, sometimes cruel, sometimes divine, but always there, shaping longing and language alike. As a reader of Urdu, I have always filled the beloved's space with my own meanings. The beloved, in that sense, becomes less a human and more a vessel for desire, devotion, and imagination.

> *"As a reader of Urdu, I have always filled the beloved's space with my own meanings*

But this makes me wonder: must the beloved always be human? Can objects ascend to that almost sacred rank? I have always found a similarity between Urdu and Sufi poetry – a form of mystical Islamic devotional literature – in the ways in which the interpretation of the beloved is neither fixed nor singular. Either the divine is the human, or the human is the divine. Perhaps, in both forms the beloved has always been a metaphor expansive enough to hold whatever the heart chooses to sanctify. For me, the beloved is the experience that this city and institution offers to me.

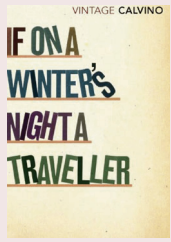
In his ghazal, Jaun Eliya writes: "*Tum haqiqat nhi hasrat ho…*" ("You are not the reality, you are a longing…") And then you would ask me to what extent does a person love something? Maybe it is always in the longing. All desires wane once the longing is fulfilled, once the dream materialises. I'd say keep chasing, keep longing, because that is how you preserve its *kadar* (value).

Writing about the prospect of seeing his beloved, Ahmad Faraz begins his ghazal with: "*Sunā hai log use aañkh bhar ke dekhte haiñ so us ke shahr meñ kuchh din thahar ke dekhte haiñ*" ("I've heard that people gaze at them to their heart's content, so let us stay a few days in their city and see"). Faraz has only heard of his beloved's beauty and presence. There's curiosity, admiration, and desire to witness her directly. Though convention often renders the beloved as 'her' in translation, I prefer 'them'. It preserves the ambiguity and expansiveness that make the ghazal form so enduring. Whenever I read this ghazal, I'm always reminded of this city as my beloved and I, as a traveller, visit it for tales of its splendor echoing far beyond borders and seas.

Sometimes I'm astonished by how much a language, through literature, can offer; I came with it to Oxford, and now I'm living Oxford through its lens. In between journal entries, I find myself using these poems more for this city than for my beloved. Perhaps at this stage, my love for both Urdu poetry and Oxford is interdependent; one cannot grow without the other.

BOOKS

Editors' picks



Beatrix recommends *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979) by Italo Calvino:
"This postmodernist novel, from Italian author Italo Calvino, effectively deconstructs the process of reading itself, taking you in newly unexpected and innovative directions on every page. The narrative plays with tone and perspective in an addictively destabilising manner, rich with literary allusion and complexity. A perfect read for fans of Joyce, Nabokov, or Woolf."

Charlie recommends *Open Water* (2021) by Caleb Azumah Nelson:
"A love story crafted with beautiful prose, this debut novel makes poignant impact despite its short length."

Image credits: 'If on a Winter's Night a Traveller' and 'Open Water?' via Amazon.

WHAT'S ON

STAGE
The Flick
Burton Taylor Studio
10th-14th March

The White Devil
St John's Auditorium
11th-13th March

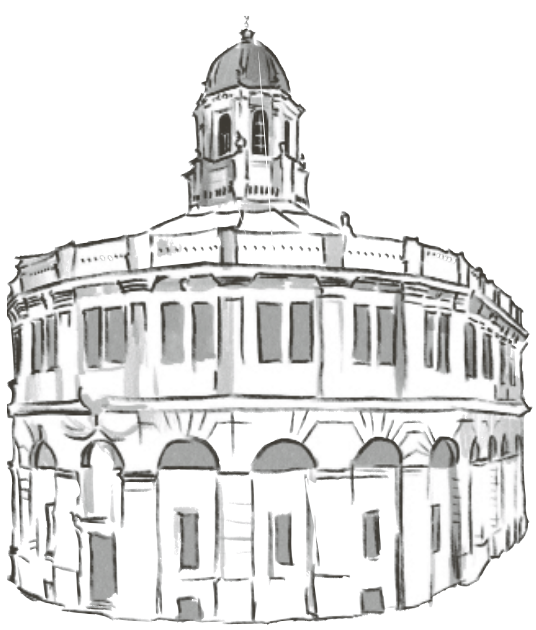
MUSIC
Adler Quartet
St Hilda's College
10th March, 6:45pm

FILM
If I Had Legs I'd Kick You
Phoenix Picturehouse
4th-11th March, 4pm

LITERATURE
Philosophy In The Bookshop with Anthony Gottlieb
Blackwell's
14th March, 11am

ART
Images Of Authority: Portraits Between Iran And Europe
The Ashmolean Museum
1st-15th March

Prophetic Daydreaming
Modern Art Oxford
Ends 12th April



The Source

Untitled

I read birthday letters.
I go to the library. I weep through mornings
I never knew existed. My hands are birds
that keep flying away from me. I reinvent life,
now, without. My grief gets the finest cuts
of meat. My sorrow sits at the head of the table
filling the space that once was not.
I mourn in long low undulations
which rock the steady deck of childhood,
which fell the shoulders I once saw the world from.

Grandfather, I thought you could live forever.

BRIONY ARNOTT

‘Flânerie’ for two: The lost art of doing nothing together

From vacuum logistics to calamari confessions, this author makes the case for friendships shaped by simply existing in the same space as one another

SAHANA NARAYAN

Order of operations, vacuum first or last when cleaning your apartment?” The question comes sandwiched between a diatribe about a paper that is begging to be written but hasn’t progressed beyond a few measly bullet points and a rather comical story about a blind date and far too much calamari. It is in this way, sitting on the couch in orientations that would make some olympic gymnasts proud, that some of my most intimate and important relationships of my life have started.

A couch is hardly the most ‘happening’ place in any city or university, but when there’s always that one next thing on our to-do-lists, it’s nice to take a beat and do absolutely nothing.

I will also sheepishly admit I’m sitting next to two friends in this very way whilst writing this. One is crocheting, the other is cross-stitching, I’m clicking and clacking away on my laptop, and the newest season of *Love Is Blind* is playing in the background. We tune in and out on the ridiculous conversations going on in the screen, our reactions flickering between annoyance, exasperated laughter, and reluctant amusement.

The point is, we’re doing nothing. Because…yes, let me sit on the floor of your room while you fold laundry, or clean out your closet for the 62537th time (because I know you and I know your desk chair will become a secondary pile of clothes….closet…in about 48 hours), let’s lay on opposite ends of the couch half-working and half-talking (“What do you think is the most important part of falling in love with someone? How should I format my CV for this job? Oh my god, he texted!!”).

There is a particular kind of closeness that forms when someone sees the mundane architecture of your life. The fuzzy corners, the silly errands, the random side-quests, the matching PJs, woolly socks, and cozy blanket burrito you become on the couch.

So it’s a smidge ironic that we allow something rather peculiar to happen to this habit in adulthood. We’ve professionalised friendship, made it something to organise. We schedule it. We theme it. We “prioritise connection”. We book the table, split the bill, debrief our lives in 90 minutes flat, like we’re auditioning for a talk show, and then we return to our calendars, and with luck, maybe we’ll have penciled in the next hang out. It’s efficient. It’s intentional. It’s adult.

University life sharpens this mindset. When constantly surrounded by ambition and constant motion, we absorb the idea that time must be maximized. We fill our weeks with lectures, extracurriculars, networking events, and looming deadlines. Even socially, there is a quiet pressure to make every interaction meaningful – to “catch up,” to debrief, to make it count. It becomes natural to treat friendship as something to schedule carefully rather than inhabit casually.

But that’s not the same as wandering aimlessly through a Tesco together at 9pm just because neither of you wanted to be alone. The relationships that endure in my life all seem to have passed that test: can we sit here, in fluorescent lighting or lamplight, and not need anything from each other except proximity?

In a life increasingly optimized for output, the couch feels almost subversive. There is no metric for it, no hard stops imposed on leisure. No photo op (as much as I do love those). No specific outcome. Just parallel existence. And yet, if I trace the through-line of the relationships that have felt safest — the ones that did not dissolve under the weight of time or stress or distance — they are all marked by this kind of unstructured closeness. My friends and I will text sometimes, thousands of miles apart, about how much we’d love to be able to sit on the couch and just stare at each other.

So is this what it means to just be with someone? To bask in their presence? It’s almost too indulgent, too much, and yet so simple, in the most disarming way possible.

I have even mistaken and misattributed relationships that I thought passed the couch test. And even if that’s led to some tears, I can’t say I regret it. Spaces like this, where it’s less about performance and more about presence, are where the most authentic versions of all of us can be born. What I’m reaching for is, perhaps, a kind of shared *flânerie*. The *flâneur*, in the original sense, wanders without destination, attentive, unhurried, and unproductive, entirely on purpose. Shocking, I know. But, not moving through the world to extract something from it, but simply to observe, is a luxury we very rarely allow ourselves anymore. There is something about doing nothing together that feels like that. You’re not optimising the moment. You’re not squeezing meaning out of it. You’re just moving side by side through the ordinary.

And university campuses are technically built for *flânerie*. Entire friendships form in the margins: walking back from a lecture, finding a new restaurant to hyperfixate on (5 Akhis is on call for us at even the slightest whiff of a crashout on the horizon), sitting in silence in a library cubicle (Rad Sci, anyone?), wandering to nowhere in particular simply because you can.

Image credit: W. F. H. Titzenthaler, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons.

An amateur’s guide to being chronically ill at university

SOPHIE PRICE

In a job interview, I could describe myself as “resilient”, “adept at multitasking”, and “highly organised”. What is yet to be a LinkedIn badge is actually my most developed competency: running a 24/7 biological systems management operation from my jeans pocket, with death as the price for quitting. Oxford is my day job. The other one never clocks off.

There is a particular cruelty in being an English student whose life is governed entirely by numbers. Being a Type 1 diabetic at university is, in essence, a double degree. One in your chosen subject, one in Applied Medicine. I might spend my morning attempting to decipher Middle English poetry, but my brain is simultaneously occupied with a far more urgent set of metrics: “6.8 and steady. 4.2 and dropping. 15.0 and climbing, ISF, HbA1C, mmol/L, IOB.”

The inner monologue never stops. This is the part that is genuinely difficult to convey to anyone whose pancreas has the basic professional decency to show up for work. Every single decision, every walk, every meal, every night out, every lecture, is a variable in an equation I have to solve in real time.

Before I leave my accommodation in the morning, a complex algorithm is already running. I wake up and immediately “pre-bolus” (dosing insulin before I've dragged my half-asleep body to the kitchen) because the mere act of leaving my bed causes my blood sugar to spike. Then comes the mental mapping: How far am I walking? Long enough to require exercise mode on my device? How much sleep did I get? Not much if my glucose alarms woke me up. Did I over-correct? Do I need less insulin now, or more if I’m sitting in the library? Is my blood sugar too high to eat lunch right now? Too low to walk to class? Did I just take insulin, and now there is nowhere to sit and eat, leaving me stranded in a metabolic no-man’s-land?

> “*Now I have concluded that the disease has made me exactly who I am*

I’ll block out an afternoon to crank out an essay, only to realise I’ve miscalculated a dose. “18.0 and rising.” My brain can’t focus, I stare at a blank work document, silently fuming that my own biology is sabotaging my education. 11pm rolls around, and I’m writing the essay that should have been completed hours ago. The frequent reminders that what is medically classed as a “disease”, or a “chronic illness”, is often precisely that. I am ill, I feel ill, and will be ill until the magic stem cells leave laboratory dreamland. “A cure is five years away” my paediatrician said, ten years ago.

Every three days, I perform the ritual of replacing the cannula that keeps me alive. The glucose sensor on my arm (has been mistaken for a nicotine patch, shoutout to the chef at my summer job for that innocent query) requires a mandatory 30 minute warm-up period after each change. 30 minutes chained to my room, waiting to be cleared for re-entry into regular human activity. I have learned to schedule this. I have learned to schedule everything.

I would also like to use this space to formally, publicly apologise to my tutor. There is nothing quite like a CGM sensor failure alarm, a sound engineered to rouse someone from the deepest unconscious state, detonating in the middle of a quiet discussion on the Enlightenment. There is something fitting about discussing thinkers who sought to master the human body as, three centuries later, so am I.

Socialising introduces an entirely new layer of chemical engineering. My thought process at the college bar feels more like a risk assessment than a carefree night of fun: What's in that mixer? Is it sugar or sweetener? The liver processes alcohol before insulin, which means I'll spike now and crash at 3am on the walk home. On the plus side, there is no antidote for hangxiety quite like the more critical relief of being able to look at my graph and see I’ve stuck the landing.

Here is what eleven years of this have taught me, beneath the dark comedy of it all. I am organised in a way I perhaps never would have been. There are 42 documented variables that can affect blood sugar, including stress, sleep, temperature, hydration, illness, and altitude. I am a self-aware “Type A” individual by necessity, not by nature. I plan compulsively. I carry backups of backups. I’ve had to explain to friends that it’s simply easier for me to wake up at the same time every day than to sleep until 1pm , because the beastly numbers on my phone prefer consistency.

I have also become a part-time educator to new acquaintances who spot the device in my pocket and receive my well-practised explanation: the difference between Type 1 and Type 2, “yes, I can eat that”, my immune system is simply a traitor. Finding other T1Ds at university has been a lifeline.

Chronic illness forces a kind of self-knowledge that is uncomfortable to acquire but genuinely helpful to have. I go about the struggles of Oxford life while actively keeping myself alive day in, day out, against a disease that would have been a death sentence had I been born a century ago. I often joke about my condition, but anyone living with chronic illness can take a step back and feel it's pretty impressive to be not just surviving here, but thriving.

I sit writing this while a Type 1 Diabetes Barbie doll watches from my shelf: an Amazon impulse buy, but far more than a plastic children’s toy. The media reaction to her release told me everything I needed to know about how people might see and misjudge the devices on my body. It also reminded me that a decade ago, I was a ten-year-old who wanted to hide it all. Now I’m a 20 year-old who has concluded, reluctantly, that the disease has made me exactly who I am.

I would have preferred a functional pancreas. But I'll take the essay crisis survival skills, the encyclopaedic knowledge of glycaemic indices, and the CV that doesn't quite capture any of it.

HOROSCOPES

Aries

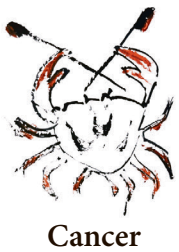
Hilary is almost over – move with some urgency!

Taurus

Don’t let a word count silence you.

Gemini

Time to whip out the sunglasses. It’s basically summer!



Cancer

2:2s are for ballet dancers. Lock in.

Leo

Are you seriously going to wear *that*?

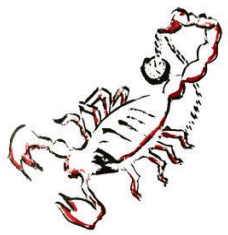
Virgo

Sweat the small stuff. You’re a perfectionist. It’s what you do.

HOROSCOPES

Libra

Stop giving out pity laughs. Let silence linger.



Scorpio

Enjoy the sunshine while it's still here!

Sagittarius

Your eyes have turned square. Maybe put down the phone?

Capricorn

Hilary wasn't your strongest showing. There's always next term...

Aquarius

Stop comparing yourself to those around you.

Pisces

You don't get a horoscope this week.

Under the intellectual microscope

AAYAH ASLAM

At Oxford, debate is not only a skill, but a reflex. Amongst the candlelit formals, under the watchful eyes of the old portraits, between the stacks of ancient books in the many libraries, we debate one another. It can happen at any place, at any time.

We are trained by our tutors in the art of debate and critical thinking. The art of articulating one's opinion clearly and confidently is absolutely necessary to survive; in tutorials, in seminars and with academics you're vying to impress.

I can recall countless times where my friends and I have analysed a text message from a situationship like we would a Robert Browning poem. A singular "seen" notification becomes evidence to interpret, and we dissect punctuation to conclude the tone. I have watched friends retell stories and defend their actions in a romantic situation like they're defending an essay in a tutorial. They diagnose the problem, psychoanalyse their emotions and contextualise the situation in a single sentence. Oxford students (including myself) treat our emotions like intellectual problems that need to be dissected and solved.

It doesn't help that the wellbeing of students is often placed on the back burner whilst at Oxford. If an essay is due, or a problem sheet is waiting, there is no time to fully feel our messy emotions. Oxford teaches you a key skill: to compartmentalise.

> *"We treat our emotions like intellectual problems that need to be dissected and solved*

We are able to place our mental health to the side when necessary. This occurs not due to lack of care, but lack of time. Oxford is a magical place, and we put ourselves within the context of our surroundings.

We yearn to fit into the mould of an Oxford student, to prove that we belong here. Allowing emotions to get into the way is often viewed as a distraction from the larger goal.

But also, any statement that you make in a conversation must be something you can stand by and defend. It doesn't matter if it's a conversation on whether or your college is better than the next one, or whether Hussain's is better than Najar's – everything can be, and is, up for debate. This conversation style is rarely malicious. It is merely a habit, forced onto us from the moment we arrived in this city. After all, is it not what the institution expects of us as Oxford students?

> *"In one conversation, I get a psychological assessment, a literary analysis, a historical oveoverview, and a medical examination*

But does this debate-style conversation truly benefit us? Or are we suffering under the intellectual microscope? From discussions about politics to defending our subject or our college choices, we are constantly on the defensive. Through persistently defending or over analysing our emotions, perhaps we fail to fully experience them. We accidentally create distance from our emotions, viewing them analytically as problems to be solved, rather than natural human feelings to which we should fully succumb and experience wholeheartedly.

And yet, there are undeniable benefits. I cannot describe how useful it is to have friends who are excellent at their different subjects. In one conversation about a relationship problem, I get a psychological assessment, a literary analysis of the context, a historical overview on the gender dynamics that have led to this very situation, and a medical examination of the impact it may have on me. The opportunities are endless and being surrounded by people who have both an analytical mindset and the ability to empathise is a hybridity you may struggle to elsewhere.

Perhaps that is part of the appeal. After all, if you are at this university, there is probably an aspect of always being beneath the intellectual microscope that you get a kick out of.

Or, perhaps, the more radical skill to cultivate here is not a sharper argument which considers the issue from all sides, but softer response. What would it look like to let a statement hang in the air without refining it? To respond to "I'm upset" with "I'm sorry" rather than "why?" To allow emotions to exist without immediately placing them under scrutiny? We are so well trained to anticipate rebuttal that we sometimes forget conversation does not always require one.

There is a quiet bravery in resisting the urge to polish every feeling into something defensible and to know when not to argue.

CHERWELL-FED

All roads lead to bagels: Green Routes review

★★★★☆

NANCY ROBSON

Don't get me wrong, I love my college. I'd proudly defend it against most criticisms. But it does have one major flaw: the absence of Sunday Brunch. So, to overcome this tragedy, and in the hope of appeasing my hangover with some much needed sugar, I headed out last week to the Green Routes Café in Cowley.

Walking down Magdalen Road, we pass two well-cared-for gastropubs, three Scandi-style cafés and one Tibetan restaurant. Green Routes, with its wooden benches, whitewashed walls, and enough plants for a small greenhouse doesn't look in the least bit out of place.

The other patrons seem, and I don't know how else to put this, like they have their lives together. Joggers, dog walkers, well-dressed hipsters and mums with strollers. They probably look after their microbiome, have an active Strava presence, and earn a stable income.

Green Routes is the kind of place that cares a lot about coffee. Their speciality roasts come with a backstory longer than most Hollywood characters. Their latte art could be framed. I'm probably not qualified to talk about it (my point of comparison here is freeze-dried instant coffee), but I've got to admit they know their stuff.

Their sustainable ethos carries over to the menu, which is mostly plant based and, given the sheer volume of adjectives in it, is halfway to a food review itself. My dining companion (confusingly also called Nancy) orders the 'Bagel Baby'. I'm slightly sceptical about it, given that it has seven fillings, including a hash brown and smoked chilli jam. My suspicions, however, are entirely misplaced: once you've actually managed to fit it into your mouth, the flavours complement each other surprisingly well. It's a little on the oily side, but it comes pretty close to the Platonic ideal of a hangover cure. Especially because the plate is also heaped with a generous helping of Tater Tots, which the other Nancy describes as hash browns with extra surface area. She's pretty bang on. These are a far cry from the humble jacket potato. I don't see any possible room for improvement. Except that the table next us has ordered the Marmite Tots. We catch a whiff as the waiter carries them past, and the scent alone is enough to make me genuinely start salivating.

Menu

'Bagel Baby': £11
Spiced apple pancakes: £13
Latte: £3.60
Marmite Tots: £6

39 Magdalen Road, OX4 1RB

If good old oily food is one answer to a hangover, then I've gone for the other – sugar. But even I am not prepared for the miracle that is the spiced apple pancakes. Draped in maple syrup and a heavenly apple compote, the pancakes themselves are pillowy without being too dry. Dolloped on top is a "whipped brown sugar cream cheese", which I'm hoping they will start selling by the kilo. And then, as if it couldn't get any better, there is the almond brittle, salty and sugary and crunchy and utterly addictive.

At times Green Routes might feel a little like a parody of itself and its concept isn't exactly groundbreaking, but, with the end of Hilary on the horizon, it might just be the perfect place for a sunny Sunday morning.

Image credit: Nancy Robson for Cherwell.

AGONY AUNT

I'm a fresher, and I feel like I'm drowning. Between my degree, societies, and trying to maintain a social life, I'm running mainly on four hours of sleep, coffee, and pure adrenaline. How do I keep up without burning out?

Sincerely,
Over-caffeinated fresher

Dear Over-caffeinated fresher,

I see you have quickly become acquainted with the infamous trilemma of Oxford: to have a vibrant social life, be an academic weapon, or maintain a healthy sleep schedule? For the mortals among us, the truth is that only two of these are achievable at the same time, even though it may not seem like it from the outside.

This Aunt Agony is usually fond of saying sleep is for the weak, but, invariably, weakness catches up with you. Slow down. Take a deep breath – preferably one that doesn't smell of espresso – and remember that you're a student, not a machine. If you don't pick at least a few days to rest, your body will eventually pick one for you, and it usually chooses the day of your exams. It's okay to focus on yourself and what you need, instead of getting caught up with what everyone else is doing. Above all, remember to be kind to yourself – there are many more terms to go!

Lots of love,
Agony Aunt

All (college) creatures great and small: A guide to Oxford's pets

***Abigail Christie** investigates the collective menagerie Oxford colleges have to offer, not to mention the joy they bring*

Growing up, the loving companionship of animals had been a constant for me – a living, breathing reminder that life is worth treasuring and slowing down for. Yet, now separated by hundreds of miles, at university the happiness I had felt amongst my animals began to dissipate. That is, until I saw the cat tree in my college lodge and heard the tip-tapping of four paws across the wooden floor. Amidst the relentlessness of term, the joy of college pets becomes unparalleled. Unexpectedly, in the last weeks of Hilary, this is how I stumbled into the highlight of my term: the opportunity to discover what college pets mean to their community.

Professor Biscuit and Admiral Flapjack: St Hugh's College

Biscuit (ginger boy) and Flapjack (tabby girl) are the two resident cats of St Hugh's College. Both cats live with the Junior Dean, Bethan, who takes care of them. Flapjack is described as the more independent of the two; she enjoys wandering around college, believing everything belongs to her, granting her rights to go anywhere. Biscuit, quite differently, prefers to lounge and snooze at home. However, his nighttime patrols often end up with him in people's kitchens. Bethan told *Cherwell*: "Biscuit and Flapjack have been a constant throughout my time here. I met them on my very first day at St Hugh's, and they helped me settle into a completely new place. Even when my DPhil feels stressful, I know I can pick Biscuit up for a little dance or have Flapjack block my laptop and demand attention. They've been an absolute highlight of my time here."

Walter de Stapelcat: Exeter College

Walter arrived in Exeter College in 2020 during lockdown when a Junior Dean brought him in to accompany her. Walter is described as a relatively grumpy cat, and, in typical cat fashion, his affection depends on the person and the day – but is strictly limited to scritches under the chin. In fairer weather, Walter can often be sited in Exeter's Rector's Garden or near the Library in the Fellows' Garden; if it's cold, Walter (very sensibly) goes inside Palmer's Tower to keep warm. Helena at Exeter College said: "I love Walter! He's always outside the library, so whenever I step outside to take a break, he's there to be cute and friendly and remind me why I love this college. He's especially friendly in the mornings, so my top tip is to look in the Fellows' Garden first thing, to find him."

Isambard Kitten Brunel and Benedictus Benedicat: LMH

Lady Margaret Hall has two cats: Isambard Kitten Brunel (Issy, the fluffy Siberian Forest Cat) and Benedictus Benedicat (Benny D, the tuxedo). Since Michaelmas 2019, Issy has been commuting into college on the bus several times a week, riding on the Librarian's shoulders. Like most cats, Issy loves to be worshipped, and is very happy receiving lots of fuss. The LMH Librarian told *Cherwell*: "He loves climbing, as a Forest Cat should, but unfortunately isn't always great at climbing down. This is particularly a problem in the summer, when he will sometimes escape out of the window into the wisteria – but then gets stuck half way!" Unlike Issy, Benny D lives on site, but is reportedly less people-focused, so students and staff alike see far less of him.

Truffle: Regent's Park College

Truffle the tortoise became Regent's Park College's pet in 2023, after Emannuelle the tortoise had sadly passed away in 2022, having brought the college much love (and glory in tortoise races) throughout her 120 years. Most of the year, Truffle can be seen (often after much searching) free-roaming in Regent's Main Quad, with her hutch near the Principal's Garden. Truffle is well-pampered, having her very own JCR-appointed 'Tortoise Keeper', and her diet provided for with fresh fruit and vegetables by Regent's Catering Team. Fun fact: Truffle loves watermelon and having the lower back of her shell scratched. Members of Regent's have said about Truffle: "In the Oxford world where everyone is rushing, Truffle reminds us to slow down, be present, and breathe."

Basil and Beatrice: Mansfield

Mansfield College is home to Basil and Beatrice, an uncle and niece cat duo. Their family's grey tabby gene runs strong, so although they look similar, Basil is differentiated by the nick in his left ear. Their favourite treat is Dreamies, frequently provided by students – the vet reportedly believes them to be overweight (surely no correlation!). Ella, a student at Mansfield, said about the cats: "At Mansfield, our college cats are well-loved and a surefire way to

bring people together. They can be found snuggled up together on their armchairs, clamouring for Dreamies, 'helping' in the academic office (heavy quotes there) or just generally brightening up everyone's mood. I don't think Oxford would be Oxford without the animals that call our homes home."

Teabag: St Hilda's College

Teabag the cat made St Hilda's College her home in 2014, and promptly became guardian of the lodge, overseeing internal affairs. Teabag can often be found going for walks with one of St Hilda's tutors, Irina Boeru, who said about Teabag: "She was named Teabag as there was a grey cat named Earl Grey wandering about at the time, who was the father of her kittens, which she had in the Lodge (it all happened rather quickly, and she is now spayed!). Carrying herself like an Egyptian God with emerald-green eyes, Teabag likes going out for walks in the gardens, and is particularly keen on exploring the river pathway in college, from where she enjoys watching punters and ducks, chasing butterflies, feathers on sticks and getting into (gentle) fights with the other feline residents!"

Reglisse and Ulysse: New College

Reglisse (all black) and Ulysse (brown and white) are the two resident dogs of New College, both of whom live with the Warden. Both dogs are French (and even have their own passports!), and in France all registered dogs born in a certain year must have names beginning with the letter assigned to that year. So, Reglisse's official name is Liquorice-Reglisse, being born in the year 'L' Their favourite spot in college is the Mound in the gardens. Members of New College have said about the dogs: "Both Reglisse and Ulie are very valued by students – they'll often be seen bounding around college events, looking for food and attention, which they get in abundance!"

Image credit: New College, with permission.

OXFORD TINY LOVE STORIES

About 55 days of rain later: March, pushing its crocus-like throat up through the soil, ready to receive the jolting sunlight. Two dachshunds in little red jackets, waiting patiently outside Jericho Cheese Company in hope of reward. A line of daffodils light my way to the library, undeterred by the gathering clouds. I sit and stare through the window into the dew-filled gardens and wait for essay inspiration. In 55 days' time, I could write seven essays with the exhausted passion I have for my degree; but right now, murmurs of spring have caught my attention, so instead I go outside and touch grass.

Amy Lawson, St John's College

CHERPSE.

Oxford's blind dating

An evening at the White Horse. Will there ever be an end to the cult of performative rowing?

Mr Vertically Challenged

First impressions?
I had the feeling I'd seen her somewhere before, and it did turn out that we had acquaintances in common (Oxford is far too small).

Did it meet your expectations?
It was a really pleasant evening! We bonded over our shared hatred of Facebook Messenger (I only use it for rowing, I promise).

What was the highlight?
I was really excited when I found out she was from a part of the West Country that happens to coincide with my historical interests at the moment – I had even heard of the village where she lived.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
I claimed quite boldly that I was involved in *Cherwell* (I've written one article), and then quickly realised she had an actual position on the paper.

Describe the date in three words:
Diverting, friendly, funny.

Is there a second date on the cards?
I don't know, I'm not really looking for anything concrete at the moment. But would love to go for another drink next term.

Miss West Country

First impressions?
When I realised he was my height I couldn't stop thinking about how we would look next to each other if I were wearing heels.

Did it meet your expectations?
He seemed sweet enough, but talked about rowing A LOT. Also went on a rant about how his college serves too much guinea fowl at formals – really down to earth stuff.

What was the highlight?
He seemed weirdly excited about West Country lore. Kind of endearing, I suppose, if a little unexpected.

What was the most embarrassing moment?
He offered to walk me back to college (it was about 20 metres away) and suddenly started whistling as we were walking. I didn't really know how to respond.

Describe the date in three words:
Posh, sporty, entertaining.

Is there a second date on the cards?
My friends and I stalked him on LinkedIn afterwards and found out that he is a member of a rifle-shooting club. So no.

SPORT

OURFC crush Cambridge to sweep Varsity 2026

Sophi Hayes-Hoyle reports from a triumphant afternoon at StoneX Stadium

SOPHI HAYES-HOYLE

Stepping out onto the field carrying the weight of a historic rivalry is one thing; winning the battle is another. Yet that is exactly what Oxford's Blues did last Saturday. As the 141st Varsity match commenced, the stakes held more than just quantitative significance, but pride, tradition, and most importantly, bragging rights. A meeting of sunshine and rain, of young and old, of past and present, culminated in a staunch victory for both the women's and men's teams. Oxford's Women's Team defended a four-year streak of titles, winning by a dominant margin of 52-8. Captain Chloe-Marie Hawley elicited audible awe from the crowd as she led the Dark Blues to victory with a kick of razor-sharp precision. Despite their rocky start, Oxford's women recovered diligently to command the field, displaying a mixture of possession and determination in the first fifteen minutes which culminated in the game's first try. Hawley, foreshadowing an afternoon of calculated conversions, brought the score up to 7-0.

A score of 19-0 at half-time had Cambridge's prospects looking bleaker than the grey skies enclosing StoneX Stadium. Cambridge was to find no silver lining in the second half – only the boisterous glee of navy-lined blazers. Sophie Shams scored Oxford's fourth try, followed by a trusty conversion from Hawley to make the score 26-0. In response, a rapid solo-run from Cambridge's Esther Makourin gained Cambridge their first try of the game. Nevertheless, as the sun peeked through the clouds, it was clear the Dark Blues would succeed in foiling the tabs' bright hopes. Oxford wasted not a moment to react; the second half was simply a consolidation of defeat. A final score of 37-25 would seal Oxford's victory for yet another year. Having also clinched Player of the Match, Hawley rejoiced as her teammates hoisted her into the air, their glossy trophy reflecting the now-streaming sunlight as well as the jubilant crowd.

The Men's Varsity Match, on the other hand, was an edge-of-the seat affair and would prove just how much perseverance is demanded of these players throughout their 80 minutes on the pitch. Oxford's early lead of 5-0 was established by Will Roddy, powering towards the corner in a fast-paced start. Cambridge won a penalty soon after to equalise, courtesy of an aggressive Oxford scrum. Even scores would be a recurrent theme of the match. Cambridge's Danny Collins reinforced a try from James Wyse to establish a Cambridge lead of 7-5, before a penalty taken by Oxford's George Bland levelled the field to 10-10.

No one was left wondering whether these walls could talk: the stadium stands were brimming with navy and turquoise blue. Alumni and supporters alike had a lot to say from the sidelines, with one heckling his own side from the stands. His uninhibited accusation of uselessness proved a feat of tough love, however, prompting a solo-dash from Oxford's number 11, Wolfe Morn, in a narrowly-missed try.

Soon enough, Oxford retook the lead. A try just before half time from Harry Pratt pushed the score back up to 15-10. Half-time respite did not hinder Roddy's efforts; the forward proved his indispensability with a hat-trick soon after the second horn had blown, galvanising Oxford into a lead of 20-10.

> "*Cambridge was to find no silver lining in the grey skies – only boisterous Dark Blue*

A sudden shift in weather brought no change in fortune for the tabs. As the clouds parted, however, Harry Bridgewater pulled through, converting Josh Hallett's run to the line. The score read 27-15.

Hungry for more, Roddy claimed his fourth try of the afternoon. Bridgewater provided the conversion once again, stepping up to the plate for a score of 37-18. Cambridge, credit where it's due, refused to quit even in the throes of the game's last quarter, with their persistent efforts edging them up the scoreboard.

But Oxford's defence stood firm, holding them up at the halfway line, and 37-25 is exactly where the numbers remained. Penning his name in the history books, Roddy was crowned Player of the Match for a formidable individual performance.

Tears of victory attest to the sport's poetic brutality: the battering and bruising of the game is not divorced from its deep sentimentality. The heavens split, casting a spring afternoon's surprising sunlight over the rainbow seats of StoneX Stadium. An uncertain future is, however, what keeps us coming back, year after year, to watch this historic rivalry unfold once more. The Varsity Matches of 2026 belong to OURFC.

Image credits: Sophi Hayes-Hoyle for Cherwell.

SHOE THE TABS

Oxford Netball and Touch Rugby do enough shoeing to make cobblers proud

The Blues triumphed 52-35 in a spirited performance, whereas Cambridge put up a good fight to split the rest of the results: the Bolts snatched victory 51-32, and the Sapphires won in emphatic fashion 60-40, while the Electrics and Midnights fell to their counterparts across the pond. Elsewhere, Oxford Touch Rugby almost completed a clean sweep: the women's Blues won 4-1, with the mixed Blues also triumphing with a score of 9-8, whereas the men's Blues narrowly lost.

UP THE YELLOWS

Oxford United beat West Brom to earn three valuable points in the relegation battle

Oxford hung on for a deserved, scrappy 2-1 victory against fellow relegation-zone occupants West Brom to put themselves within three points of safety. In what was only manager Matt Bloomfield's second victory since he was appointed in early January, goals from Stanley Mills and Will Lankshear put them 2-0 up in the first 26 minutes. The visitors always looked threatening, but Oxford hung on after a deflected shot from Oliver Bostock put West Brom on the scoreboard.

OUTSIDE OXFORD

Six Nations returns after a colourful first half

In stark contrast to England, who have had a thoroughly terrible start to the tournament, France sit top of the table and stand a good chance of securing the crown with a round to spare, having scored the most tries, conceding the fewest of the six sides in the tournament. Scotland look poised to pose them a threat after veteran Finn Russell inspired them to a dramatic second-half comeback against Wales.

VARSITY VICTORY

Oxford Women's Lacrosse continue shoeing streak

The Women's Lacrosse match saw the first double win in 15 years: both the Blues and the 2nds shoed the Tabs across two closely contested matches last Saturday. One goal behind in the last quarter, Oxford's women had Cambridge hot on their heels. The Blues reigned victorious, with a final score of 11-9. Hat-tricks from Isla Finlay, Tilly Pearse, and Alice Elkington proved a lucky number as the women beat Cambridge for the third year in a row. The player's named Kate Savage POTM, the umpires' POTM going to midfielder Honor Gibbs.

UPCOMING

Basketball
Saturday 7th March
Iffley Road Sports Centre
President: Julian Manyika

Volleyball
Sunday 8th March
Iffley Road Sports Centre

Ultimate
Sunday 8th March
Cambridge
President: Lena Manchorova

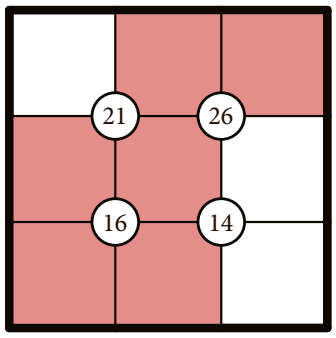
Going to watch a Varsity or Cuppers match?

Email sportcherwell@gmail.com to write up a match report

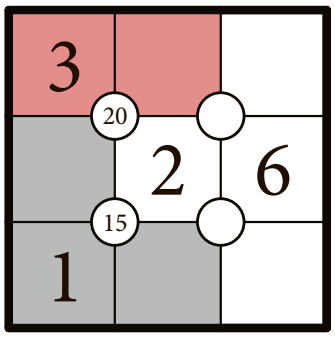
Puzzles

Suko by MAGNUS PAGE

Place the digits from 1-9 exactly once each in the grid. Numbers on corners show the sum of the four digits around them. The sums of all boxes of a given colour are also given.



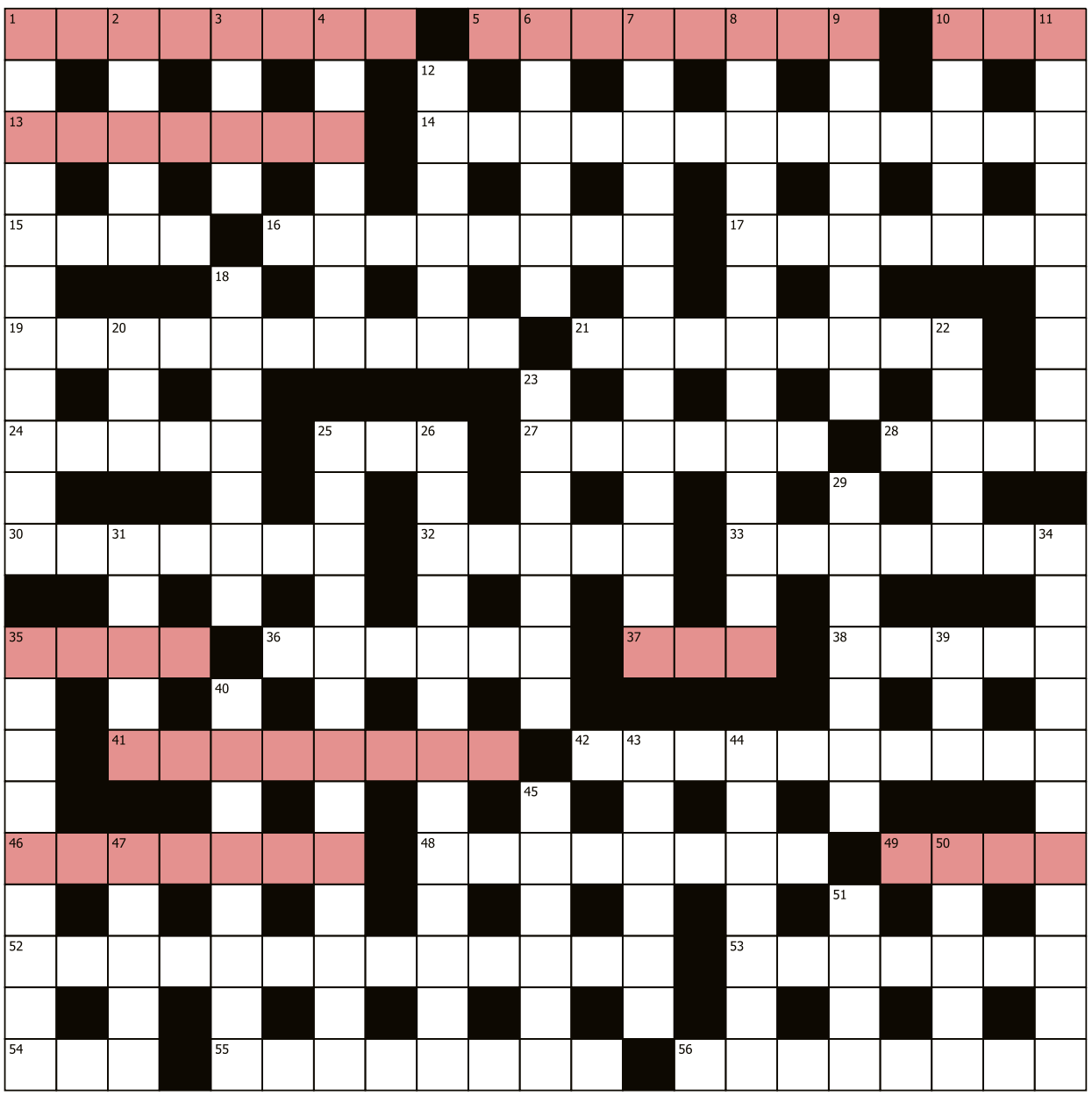
Σ = 14
Σ = 12



Σ = 31

Cryptic Crossword by NAT ELDER, ALESSANDRA EDWARDS, ZOË MCGUIRE, AND JADEN LEE

Difficulty: 5/5



ACROSS:
1) Heartfelt words spoken in reference to line (5, 3)
5) Eight billion all-time for Beyonce's third single (8)
10) In order to hear number (3)
13) Chant about options first to fifty-fifth for completing puzzle (7)
14) Hold Camel in packet before smoking it at notoriously queer locale (6, 7)
15) Sublinear, oddly parallel to radius (4)
16) Deny that professional jumped into fake fall and scored second (8)
17) Some chump I resonate with, they judge whats in or out (7)
19) Unfashionable anger when removing first class travellers (10)
21) So amused evil demon (8)
24) Redevelopment of La Paz's square (5)
25) Dear one, some say, is finally going to bed (3)
27) Plush is nonplussed by endless craze for wine (6)
28) Chief's bullshit contains nothing sandwich primarily (4)
39) Seduce Bismarck from dictator's rice dish (7)
32) Tend to fly over South East (5)
33) Twisted groin on the rise in clique (2-5)
35) Out of timeless French cheese (4)
36) Cross bride abruptly finishes greeting in speech (6)
37) Article describing tea in Paris (3)
38) 51 + 1000 basically becomes zero? Like hell! (5)
41) You're reading revolutionary paper at last? Good! (8)
42) Some five-a-side comes with case of beer, the works (10)
46) Page on gossip needs no introduction with the french section of the *Cherwell* (7)
48) Good plaited loaves containing hemp seed to share equally (2, 6)
49) Ate a massive piece of joint (4)
52) Envious slobs surround me in a state of ignorance (13)
53) Saint Al converted Spanish women (7)
54) No odds of a flat; it's every man for himself (1,1,1)
55) A place to dissolve, biologically, so something can be extracted (8)
56) They got a nose job – it's originally done badly in commercials (8)

DOWN:
1) The problem with *OxStu* – it could be something to blow your nose with (6,5)
2) 100% committed to calling without limits (3-2)
3) King can reject bond (4)
4) Hellish noon gig is in progress (7)
6) Skipping No. 2 and 4 of Slowdive's alternative records (6)
7) Sites regarded as bad place to learn about various things (7, 6)
8) Charlie amongst overtake, running a stretch that begins mythical story (4,4,1,4)
9) Beat from Sheeran ft. Pusha T and Malice (8)
10) More open to father marrying English Queen (5)
11) Leaders in resistance movement hero succeeded and went back immediately (9)
12) Tinder user to build spiderweb without sleep (6)
18) Erg malfunction at volunteers' rowing races (7)
20) Reported fight in relaxation venue (3)
22) Super League leaders' match started in nil-nil at halftime? (3-2)
23) Last rider lost extremities on horseback (7)
25) Fine year for couples, dirty tools, and Mr. Right? (5, 3-5)
26) Trodden logs is disgrace to tree experts (13)
29) Speed at which karate uniform got lost in Italy is crazy (7)
31) One unlikely to complain it's to [sic] spicy (5)
34) Zoë, Ali, Nat, and Jaden are likely to lose degree by hazes (11)
35) Get rid of evidence that can't be brought to light (9)
39) Khalifa's not here (3)
40) Lock in Knievel's benchmark for measurement (3, 5)
43) Finally find capital of Togo at the back of map collection (2, 4)
44) Briefly fine with maiden name taken in requested marriage (7)
45) Acidity of portion of meal primarily found in throat (6)
47) Princess to sort of laze around central Windsor (5)
50) "Boring..." said Parisians in agreement
51) Sci-fi film about sweet mess (4)

Week 5 Answers:

Capital Letters: Across: CHINA; STAG; BLAKE LIVELY; BARGAIN; ELATION; IN A BAD STATE; EMIR; ADIEU. Down: CUBA; IRAQ; AZERBAIJAN; THE UAE; GUYANA; MICRONESIA; BELIZE; MALAWI; MALI; PERU. **US-Style:** Across: BARD; MPG; STEAM; BLUR; ORE; SO RARE; **QUEEN** BEE; ARARAT; SMS; OTS; STILLS; BRISK; SEN; MADAME; I DID WHAT; AMENS; I SEE; RELO; GIRD; MISER; ELON; NOEL; ORCS; MCING; **ANGEL**ICA; PEKOES; AAS; MAINS; CREDIT; RED; FRO; RATED E; **REM** SLEEP; OUTRUN; AAA; ESAU; CLASP; SSN; TSPS. Down: BBQS; ALUM; RUES; DRE; MOB TIE; PRESS; GEE; SORTED; **TRAIN** WRECKS; EARL; ARAL; METS; SASSIER; NORMS; **BANDLEADERS**; **KISS** CAM; MAGNA; AM I ON; DEREG; DEES; HELIO; ALONE; TONGS; IIRC; MOISTEN; MENDS; LAID UP; PIE MAN; AREAS; CROC; RAUL; ETTA; FESS; REAP; OPUS; RAS; LET. **Cryptic:** Across: OMEN; INEVITABLE; SKETCH; BAD FAITH; NAAN; EXCELLENCY; RAVE; MEOWS; RANK; AMBASSADOR; OGRE; HABITANT; SIMPLE; WEB BROWSER; TWEE. Down: SMOKE ALARM; INSTANCE; MICHAELMAS; HERB; KIND; DAMAGE; PLOT; CLOUD; LAST RESORT; CONTROLLER; ROOMMATE; AKIMBO; APES; ANON; TEST.