

The Langtonian returns

Thank you for remaining patient and calm throughout the global turbulence we have been experiencing. You can now unfasten your seatbelts and begin to relax. We apologise for any inconvenience or distress caused, and the lack of access to certain luxuries, including new issues of your favourite “periodical”, *The Langtonian*. Fortunately, we are now entering a period of relative peace, and, with it, the milk and honey can pour once more. And look! A new issue of your dear *Langtionan* cantering across the rolling hills of Canterbury, manned by an entirely new editorial staff!

Truly everything has changed since the publication of ‘Volume I’ in December 2019. No-one needs reminding of the treacherous journey into mass hysteria and isolation we collectively ventured on throughout 2020, marshalled by the bovine knight errant Donald Trump, and his devoted squire Boris Johnson. Our aim in this issue is rather to look bravely to the future. Ironically, as a result of the disruptions, the textual paraphernalia littered among these pages mostly date from simpler, pre-COVID, times. Consequently, articles have sadly found themselves on the cutting room floor, including one from an individual wisely professing they “don’t think we should be too worried about a mass infestation”.

Nevertheless, the large interval of time between issues has allowed time for a wide variety of texts to accumulate, including a beautiful poem, an intriguingly pseudonymous opening chapter, and a mysterious diary entry from one Charles John Huffam Dickens. This enabled us to compile a bumper issue to welcome readers back from the long absence. As editors, we thoroughly enjoyed perusing the texts for this issue, while ironing minor creases to ensure perfection, with the exception of one peculiar and amusing usage of the word ‘scatological’.

Most importantly, we hope that this issue will afford you some comfort, as we begin to return to normality, and we look forward to all your submissions for future editions.

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Chapter 1

By Volvic Rhubarb

White collar lacerating his neck, the American's eyes, livid with fatigue, reckoned one of many seeping shafts of light. Serpentineing its way through a crevice in the flint-plated walls, it spotlighted years worth of dead skin and hairs floating around the atmosphere. Huddled like cooped chickens, feathers half gone and ready for the abattoir, the final congregation of His damned house waited under the kirk's eaves for the rain to stop. The flock gathered there that day was larger than usual. Not only were those woodworm-ridden, sanctified doors being closed for the last time, but the festive season was once again spreading joy across the land! Abysmal fairy lights and pusillanimous tinsel littered the walls, and a barren conifer lay dead inside. The rain began to drizzle out as the first Christians wished a "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!" to the priest from the Bronx, occasionally translating it to the native "Y've a Blythe Yule!" before swiftly explaining what it meant. He didn't care. Shoot up, people: that's the last verse you're getting here! His headache grew worse and the strident Scottish accent didn't help.

Jesus Christ, where am I? Lungs feel like they're filled with vomit and cement and rain. I think I'm going to die. That'll make two of us. What? It's all coming back now. The limp carcass of a black teenage boy lies nearby, his abdomen punctuated by a knife. His curled hair is matted with thorns and filth, the result of an hour of being dragged across bitumen and churning fields. I was brought up a Jew, but fled to Kirriemuir. Death would have been slow and painful, a combination of the blade and a dent in the side of the skull inflicted later. The sun begins to rise over the frozen fields and barren oaks. The watch had cracked at midnight; God only knows what time it is. There aren't many like him in north-east rural Scotland. That makes two of us. How did this happen? I survey, shakily getting to my feet. A Volkswagen lies nearby - I think it's mine. Death feels very near, a chilled wind prickling the spine. I was born on 4/4/1968 - the same day a 30-06 bullet entered Dr. King's right cheek. Death feels very near - literally. You dream that you will wake but it fails to happen. I'm screaming at the body but it just stares. You have to laugh because there's nothing else left. The bloody morning sun has seeped into the graveyard shift and the trunk of a VW has become a coffin for the dead child you killed.

That is not on his mind eight hours ago. Some form of crazed happiness is crawling its way up him for the first time in forever. Worms hop through holes and jazz hands erupt from concrete. Woah. Smiles worthy of the Cheshire Cat rupture from the faces of three silhouettes. Over the next few hours, the lights mesmerize him. He feels free and the blade he carries for precaution now acts as a glossy toy. The shadows retreat at the sight of it and the power elates him - haha! Rodents, eyes filled with envy, flood the newly marbled floor. Three daughters, three wishes, three drug-dealers. You fear the cutting edge of my sabre, you mongrels! One didn't dare leave, whilst the other two ran. He was brave, and knew the risk of a rabid priest storming through town. The risk he put them both at. But the psychedelia is turning rotten and he doesn't like the sadness in the child's eyes. He fears it, and this night is for me. Hours become slime, and it pushes the knife through the slinger. He's leaving this earth now - the second phase of LSD. I know everything. I'll take this guy along for the ride; who knows where we'll end up?

So we leave the muddied fields of Kirriemuir, and fall further into the abyss. White collar straining against neck mirroring rope around another. A chair lies felled nearby. Of course, things had been... arduous for them, but she was beginning to reek, and rats had started gnawing at her exposed toes. He thought he would have become tolerant to death. Tolerant, eh? It gets no easier. For once, he regretted not having spent more time with his partner. *Ex-partner*. This could be the second life he's ended today: his drinking habits escalating to drugs, his impotence escalating to abuse, a spark escalating to a bonfire. Too much for a fragile heart. The rain's picking up a rhythm and there's so much to do. He should probably take her down and put up some lights. You could almost forget it was Christmas.

Extracts from: The Challenge of Our Age

How Electoral Reform will be the next great milestone of Democracy in the United Kingdom.

Questionable Opinions from: Jack Matthew Newbury

[*\(Find the full article here\)*](#)

In the great smoking lounge a number of Tory Lords and well-esteemed Members of Parliament are deep in congress. A thick haze of oak tobacco smoke has descended upon the great chamber, the tension in the air is palpable and the tone of discussion seems sombre. Beautiful Crystal decanters filled with rich, dark Whiskeys, Rums and Ports line the great tables of discussion. An old man of 80 or more scowls his tired, wrinkled face at the latest development in discussions. He pours himself another glass of something dark and strong with a 120 year vintage, perhaps the only thing older than the man himself, whose wispy white hair sits thin atop his creased, pox-marked skin. The esteemed Lord draws for his smoking tobacco from the inside pocket of his heavy overcoat, checking his solid gold pocket watch, chained to the lapel of his tailored dark suit, in the process. The frail hands of the Lord pack tobacco into the bespoke pipe, gifted to him by a visiting dignitary from some far corner of the Empire. Displeased with the tone of a dissenting MP, the lifelong Politician draws the pipe up to his mouth and with a firm rip of his lighter's wheel sends brilliant sparks and rippling flames into his pipe, momentarily illuminating the gloomy room. Smoke begins to bellow from the Lord's mouth in sweet, curled tendrils which rise to the ceiling like the great chimneys of London, visible from the windows of this increasingly isolated room. Outside, it was the afternoon of the 7th of June 1832 and a great commotion had characterised the city on this day. As folks weaved through the city between the great coal chimney stacks, there was only one thought on the minds of those bustling through the industrialising city and many like it across the country. The decisive vote in the Commons on the Representation of the People Act 1832 was to take place within the hour and it was widely reported that the Whigs finally had the numbers to pass the Bill and that the Tories would no longer be able to hold back the tide of Electoral Reform in the new, modern Britain.

In modern terms, the Representation of the People Act would receive the unanimous backing of politicians across the United Kingdom, apart from perhaps Jacob Rees-Mogg (the enduring figure of the 18th Century in Parliament). The Act majorly reformed the electoral system in the UK. So-called "Rotten Boroughs," where a tiny aristocratic electorate (often less than 50 voters) had the right to appoint an MP, were abolished, with 143 seats axed in total. Some extreme examples include the 4 MPs granted to the

Weymouth and Melcombe Regis constituency or the constituency of Higham Ferrers where there was only one eligible voter. Despite being the potential solution to consistent low turnout in 21st UK elections, constituencies with one eligible voter are not representative of the will of the people and as such are



hardly democratic or desirable. The Act went on to allocate the newly available seats to 'the people' in the UK. For example, the city of Manchester, with a population of 142,000, (who had not elected a Member since 1656) were granted the right to appoint an MP. In total, 130 new representative seats were set up and the result was more people than ever were allowed to elect the men who made decisions about their lives. This came as a result of the Bill, which further extended the franchise by offering the vote to shopkeepers, smaller farmers, as well as small landowners.

In the modern day then, this Bill would undoubtedly receive unanimous support as society has become more liberal, progressive and most importantly, democratic. Yet, this was not always the case. My venture into creative writing in the opening of this article, which (considering my Grade 5 at GCSE English Literature) I had no business pursuing, was ultimately intended to draw you into an era where this Bill was controversial and by no means certain to pass. Obviously, on the 7th June 1832, the world was a far different place and there was a genuine debate about whether giving more people (viewed by some as uneducated riff-raff) the vote was a good idea. After all, Britain had risen in status to the world's most powerful nation, so why risk this in the fruitless pursuit of the abstract concept of 'better representation for the people'? Indeed, when those in power in France had allowed the idea of reform and progress to gain momentum, the result was a great number of decapitated ruling class. Certainly many of the ruling class in Britain didn't want to put their neck on the line for the working classes just to have it declared surplus to requirements.

The political history of the United Kingdom, I argue, can be viewed as a steady progression into democracy. Unlike a nation such as France, which forged its democracy in the bloody crucible of the French Revolution, the UK has gently lowered itself into democracy as if it were an icy pool. "That's all very well and good Jack, but what on earth are you actually talking about?" Firstly, I am acutely aware that the majority of my opening page concisely highlights why I will not be the next J.K. Rowling, for my lack of creative writing talent, as well as my lack of transphobic views - yeah, I went there. Secondly, I don't appreciate your tone, I was just getting on to what I was actually talking about. The challenge of our age: bringing around further electoral reform. Specifically, the Democracy of the United Kingdom needs to rid itself of its most toxic political aspect - the First Past The Post (FPTP) electoral system. In the pre-1918 political world, women were denied the right to vote. This was undemocratic and the 1918 Representation of The People Act addressed this issue. I argue that the FPTP voting system denies people

the right to have their vote properly accounted for. This is undemocratic and at some unknown future date, some Bill, of some unknown name, will address this issue and replace FPTP with Proportional Representation (PR).

I ought to briefly lay out the voting systems in discussion, FPTP and PR, doing my best impression of a Year 12 Politics student writing a Mr Butler essay. In fact, I will just directly quote from my own work: “First Past The Post is a very simple plurality election system. Single member seats are contested by a



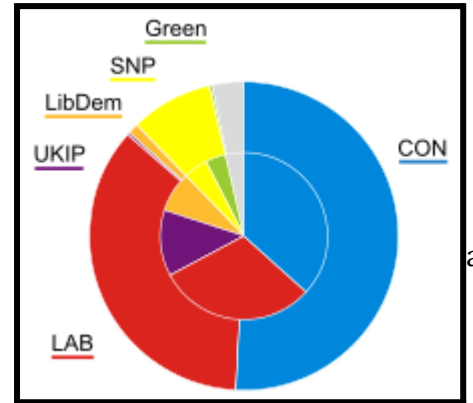
range of candidates, normally one from all the major Political parties. The winner in a constituency is the candidate who receives the most votes. These ‘mini’ constituency elections are all added together, 650 in total, and the winning party is the one which won the most seats, who will normally go on to form a Government. Individual voters simply cross an “X” next to the candidate they want to vote for on their ballot paper.”

“Proportional Representation instead focuses on proportionally representing how the country votes by transferring the popular vote directly into the number of

seats each political party wins. Instead of the 650 ‘mini’ elections the UK acts as one huge constituency. In a party-list proportional representation system individual voters still pick one candidate with an “X” but much else is different. Seats are assigned in this system by achieving a percentage of the popular vote. To understand this, imagine an election where a total of 500 people vote and there are 10 seats to fill. To achieve 1/10th of the vote a party needs 50 votes (10% of the popular vote) and therefore receives 1 seat. On a national scale these numbers become huge, but in general the number of votes cast divided by the total seats available ($500/10 = 50$ votes) gives the number of votes required to win a seat, which can be converted to a percentage. The party list is the way of allocating the seats based on the popular vote. If, in our model 500 person election, the Purple Party receive 30% of the popular vote, then we can work out that they deserve to win 3 of the 10 seats. But which actual Purple Party Politicians (say that 3 times as fast as you can) deserve the seats? This is where the party-list comes into play, because we are electing on a national basis we can’t simply elect based on the ‘mini’ election votes of constituencies, but on a full national scale. The party list ranks all the politicians from one party running in the election from 1st to last. In our fictional Purple Party, the first 3 names on the list are elected to Parliament whilst 4th on the list (most probably Nigel Farage) and lower do not have a seat.”

Now that the far less charming, witty and sleep-deprived Year 12 Jack has explained the basics, I will answer your next question, “So what? All you’ve done is explain a voting system I know and understand, versus one so complicated that you might as well have been writing in German.” Well, I will explain why this is so important, why FPTP is useless, why it undermines our democracy, why I compared it to Victorian legislation which denied women the vote and most importantly, why Proportional Representation is the best political idea since Tony Blair, minus the Iraq War.

The challenge of our age might well be how we do it. How do we reform a political system when the only people with the power to do so are the two political parties who benefit most from it? Political types will often talk about 'the Westminster bubble' and this is basically what they mean. The Conservatives and Labour are enemies, yes, but they depend on each other for survival in a symbiotic relationship. Without one, the other doesn't have a scapegoat, an enemy to make their voters fear, a punchbag on which to land political blows. They might hate each other but... not really! They all came from the same 3 private schools, then Oxbridge, and then straight into politics. Regardless of party, most MPs have a great deal in common and might well be friends. They all know how the game works and at the end of the day, the duopoly they have on British politics means they have important job titles, comfortable salaries, expenses and assistants who do everything for them. The Tories would rather spend ten years in opposition, knowing voters will inevitably have enough of Labour and they will end up back in power, than let someone else disturb the duopoly. Yes, that means the 'Liberal Democrats' aren't the answer and anyone carrying a membership card might as well wear a shirt saying, 'I've given up' because (hint) even they know they can't win. So what is the answer then? The short answer is I don't know exactly. Disappointing I know, but I will endeavour to give you some idea when and how this might happen. Firstly, the bloody revolution only truly envisaged in the dreams of Mr Mattingly isn't the answer. The health and safety paperwork for a guillotine alone these days would involve far too much box ticking for anarchist lunatics. In all seriousness though, I am a firm believer in the democratic process and reform from within the system is the most preferable option available. The reality is, this reform will not come from the Conservative party, how could it? It is in their name; they look to conserve what is present and oppose the new.



all

Overall, the challenge of our age is clear: overthrow our adversarial political system, by finally dumping the First Past The Post voting system. Ushering in the next great milestone of Democracy in the United Kingdom, where the winner has more votes and our parties might focus on working together for the good of us, rather than fighting each other. Like the Representation of the People Act 1832, this change is going to happen. Those, like the Old Lord, who oppose the course of progress will eventually lose and I can only wonder how they will be viewed when we are all long dead. I imagine they will be viewed like our old Lord: ancient artefacts of a different era. This country will one day adopt Proportional Representation. Please quote me on that.

As for who will do it? I don't know.
 As for when it will be done? I don't know.
 As for what they will call it? I don't know.

I think I've told you enough, don't you? Why don't you go out and make it happen yourself? The future is ours after all.

VOTE NO TO AV ON MAY 5th

“ The ‘Alternative Vote’ is an unfair, expensive and discredited system, that allows candidates who finish third to steal elections. On May 5th, I urge you to vote No to AV. ”

THE CURRENT VOTING SYSTEM ✓	THE PROPOSED AV SYSTEM ✗
Everybody has one vote	People's votes count differently, with supporters of extreme parties like the BNP getting their vote counted many more times than everyone else
The candidate that receives the most votes win	The candidate who finishes third can steal the election
The most widely used system in the world	Only used in 3 countries – Fiji, Australia and Papua New Guinea
Cheap, simple counting process	Long, complicated process, which would cost the taxpayer millions
Results announced on election night	Counting can take days and days

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The Bit at the End...

Questionable opinions from Jack Matthew Newbury. I would like to take this opportunity to apologise to none of the Copyright holders for their images which I stole from the internet, grow up. I would also like to raise some thoughts and concerns about the school generally:

1. I object to not being able to carry hot food or drink through the reception because it looks 'unprofessional'. On the contrary, I think 'we feed our students' is a quite effective strapline and should be rolled out as the school's main advertising strategy immediately. Take that, Langton Girls.
2. The central heating in the L Block still isn't on. It's cold, I'm cold, please turn the heating on.
3. The Remembrance service was much more grand outside (connecting us to nature and so on) and should be kept outside for future years, as a memory to the Covid-year. Also, nobody fainted. So yeah, Remembrance outside please.
4. Petition for Blazers to be abolished immediately in favour of Harry Potter style cloaks and hats. No reason for this one, I just think it would be funny.
5. Is there any way to put lights along the fence running down the cycle path, for at night, it is dark and scary and often slippery with leaves and I don't like it. If there was money for a nice smoking area... can we do something about that please and thanks.
6. Cafe 42 (boring and to do with the school's history or something... snoozefest) should be renamed Cafe de la Gwen (in honour of the school's most important member) with immediate effect.
7. If you have somehow read this far thank you very much, I am flattered. If you are a member of staff I didn't mean whatever I said about you, it was a joke, I would never criticise Langton. Glory to the great Langton republic. Newbury out.

Mary Wollstonecraft Statue: a testament to the 'mother of feminism?'

By Emma Lacina-Moser

Who was she?

In November 2020, the first statue commemorating 'the mother of feminism' was unveiled (only 223 years late). Its depiction of the feminine form has exposed the divisions and contradictions between modern feminist ideals, so much so that one has to question whether Wollstonecraft's ideals have actually lost their relevance. As a liberal feminist, she questioned why Locke neglected to recognise women's equality in a free, meritocratic society. In response, Wollstonecraft defended the positive right to education from which women can unlock their rational potential and compete against men; the statue stands in the shadow of her all-girls' grammar school.

Maggi Hambling's statue '*for* Wollstonecraft' is unique in its abstraction from the historical idol, as she presents the femininity which Wollstonecraft championed, rather than the woman herself. I believe that this abstract approach to commemoration is a promising alternative to the busts on our streets today. Over summer, the fall of Edward Colston's statue in addition to the fight over Churchill recognised what we all know: that humans are not perfect creatures. Although we may want to remember and celebrate political ideals and contributions, we do not necessarily have to cast the thinker's figure into stone.

Instead, we should celebrate the achievements in isolation from the person, acknowledge their contributions, but refrain from idolising the body and all its additional faults, secrets and past.

Those against:

Simply put, non-essentialist feminists disagree with the notion that gender has any connection to one's biological sex, and that therefore there is no single 'everywoman' which the sculpture could encapsulate. Columnist Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett, among others, expressed their disappointment that the female form was nude in particular. The 'Fourth Wave' of feminism in the 21st century is concerned with the over-sexualisation of women in the media, which conflicts with Germaine Greer's push for women to own their sexuality.

I would argue that neither concern is valid in this instance.

Those for:

The reason we haven't seen a statue for Wollstonecraft yet is thanks to misogynistic attacks on her reputation. Having a child out of wedlock cost her any due-respect, and as a result she was a victim of her own femininity. Concerns over her virginity ironically repudiated (rather than vindicated) her work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In an age in which womanhood was repressed from the public sphere, both in their education and sexuality, this statue stands in defiance of these historic obstacles, not as an embrace of modern objectification. To ask for a more conservative presentation insults the system of shame which Wollstonecraft challenged and refuses to reform how we commemorate in a fresh society. I would go as far as to say that to over-emphasise the potential sexuality of nudity suggests the female form is vulnerable. We cannot pretend that Michelangelo's 'David' hasn't been celebrated as one of the greatest artworks of all time. Hambling's sculpture is similarly proud and simple; its controversy is a testament to a new era of feminism, one progressed thanks to Wollstonecraft's humble vindication of rights.

The Dream Journal of Liam Malswix

by Liam Malswix

I'm now at that stage of my adolescence when, after 16 years of lovingly cuddling me and telling me old wives' tales of unconditional love, my parents have metamorphosed, dropped their facades and ordered me to bog off into the world of work. I initially told them in desperate protest that I couldn't do that because I didn't have a VISA for the world of work, and anyway, when I looked up the world of work on TripAdvisor, it didn't get very good reviews. But they didn't want to hear it.

And so I found myself looking up available jobs in the area online. Then getting bored and ending up doing something far more interesting instead. I can't remember what it was now.

Following the fallout after that incident, I ended up getting a job in McDonald's, because I have no original thoughts when it comes to choosing jobs (or indeed anything), and we are all mindless vassals subservient to the might of large and unwieldy American transnational corporate empires. I know because Daddy told me.

But don't get me wrong, McDonald's was actually fine, although I have of course been brainwashed into thinking this. It was going pretty well, and I was standing there at the checkout shouting out numbers and passing over trays of food that thankfully weren't too heavy, thinking, for the first time in my life, that I was actually good at something and I wasn't an incompetent loser. Obviously this moment of ecstatic joy couldn't last. Someone with a grotesque face, populated with acne, asked me if I had a Big Mac. I told him that I didn't know what he meant, and frankly, I didn't want to know. It sounded like a euphemism to me at the time. He didn't take that very well.

I left the outlet very quickly after that for what would be the last time, having been sternly told by my now ex-manager to move to Rutland, the only county in the UK to not be blessed by a McDonald's. As I left, I heard someone telling the manager that actually this wouldn't be good enough, as actually they are building a McDonald's in Rutland now: they've had planning permission and everything. He reacted quite amiably, I think. But I might have rewritten that memory in my mind to make it seem better than it actually was.

My aforementioned lack of imagination meant that my next job was at the checkout in my local supermarket. This meant that my responsibility was to knock out any customers of Czechoslovakian descent. At least, that's what I thought the word 'checkout' meant. Why do we not learn these essential facts about life in school? The excuse I gave to supermarket management, 'Sorry, I thought it was my job to be racist' seemed to go down reasonably well. As well as the Titanic, that is.

The pub beckoned next. I thought I'd fare better here, free from the malign influence of corporations so large they do not care about people and resources. Incidentally, corporations want money - I can accept that - but is it true that corporate behemoths only look at the bottom line? Because surely, if they'd done that, they would never have risen up from the bottom line in order to become the hierarchical superpowers that they are now? It doesn't make sense to me, but then very little does because I am stupid and feeble and not fit to be living and, um... where was I?

Oh, yes. The pub. I thought, foolishly, what could possibly go wrong? We all know what happens when one thinks that. But unfortunately for me, I didn't. Not then, anyway.

I want to make it absolutely clear at this point that any mistakes I made, including the incident with the malfunctioning beer tap, oh, and that failed experiment with the acid, were caused not by my own incompetence, but by the atrocious Spotify playlist that the pub insisted playing on the P.A. because it apparently made the pub feel 'homely' and 'welcome'. To hell with that pretentious nonsense. I stated in no uncertain terms to the owners that I would simply refuse to fill drinks to the virulent sound of Ed Sheeran squealing like a girl on general principles. "If you don't play actual proper music," I said,

“ideally the seminal 1997 EP by Aphex Twin, ‘Come To Daddy’, available on Warp Records (ISBN no. 643443100120), which is the best EP in the history of EPs and anyone who doesn’t agree deserves to be crucified, by the way, I will resign as part-time waiter of this establishment and devote the rest of my life to spamming your social media accounts, and you will almost certainly crash and burn without me within two years, I’m willing to bet my life on that, you know, you dim selfish two-headed asinine corporate maggots.’

“That’s absolutely fine by us,” they bleated, “you weren’t very good anyway.” The cheeky cretins.

The pub’s still running, and seemingly more popular than it was when I was there for some reason. I got bored of spamming their Facebook page after five minutes. I get bored very easily. My parents don’t speak to me anymore.

I would now like to exercise my inner demons and talk about the hit TV show, ‘Death In Paradise’, and how it deserves a death in Purgatory. The show is currently in its ninth series, a tenth series also having been commissioned, and for those who don’t know it is mainly a largely accessible counterpoint between whodunnit murder mystery cliches and light-hearted humour, mostly originating from the main protagonist and his relations with his colleagues.

The show focuses on a Detective Inspector who has flown from England to the Caribbean’s answer to Midsomer, the fictional island of Saint-Marie, in order to investigate the oddly frequent murders that take place there. In the show’s nine-year history, there have been four Detective Inspectors, played by Ben Miller, Kris Marshall, Ardal O’Hanlon and Ralf Little respectively. These actors have played completely different characters, but for some inexplicable reason these characters always have the same irritating characteristics - social awkwardness, a tendency to fall in love, a lack of familiarity with their tropical surroundings, etc. All of these bumbling traits serve as ways of presenting ABSOLUTELY HILARIOUS jokes, but also make it hard to believe at times that these characters are highly intelligent and capable of solving the toughest of crimes.

Now look, I enjoy the earlier series of Death In Paradise. It may never have been the most sophisticated crime drama, but it can be nice amusing escapist fun. Watching the most recent series, however, made me think that it’s really said all it can. Every series has a sell-by date, from which point on it has no original ideas and plots left to plunder and thus can only repeat itself. In the case of Death In Paradise, the pre-title sequence to any episode aptly demonstrates how formulaic the show actually is. Every episode always starts with the same basic scenario - we see some people, usually family, talk to each other, possibly with some hostility. Someone goes for a lie down, and immediately you know that they’re soon going to get it. Despite the show’s best efforts to build up tension and suspense, particularly with the moment someone tries to knock the door down, it’s an utterly pointless exercise because you always know exactly what’s going to happen. The only surprise comes from sadistically trying to guess the cause of death (‘Oh look, it’s a hairdryer in the bath, put that in the book, oh wow, it’s worth 50 points!’). Notice how the sequence always ends with the same type of shot, looking over the dead corpse before abruptly launching into some light jaunty reggae theme music, which is about

as fitting with the sense of drama as a guillotine in a pre-school nursery, but is there in case you hadn't cottoned to fact that we are in the Caribbean.

Death In Paradise has run for 71 episodes. The idea that it has anything new that it can say is laughable. Not as laughable as the sound of Tony Blair screaming as he gets eaten by monkeys, but still. Look at other crime dramas - Poirot ran for 70 episodes, Inspector Morse for 33, Foyle's War for 28, Broadchurch for 24 (some have argued 16 too many)...

There's only so many plausible ways in which you can give a character the motive, means and opportunity to commit a murder and create ambiguity around their identity without seeming as though you're making it up as you go along.

The nine series we already have are a fun ride, and I do recommend the show as a bit of transient fodder for a Sunday afternoon or a Wednesday evening. But I think it's overstayed its welcome and should depart after its tenth series, although it probably won't because it remains popular with the casual viewing public - it still manages to get seven million viewers per episode, and as we all know TV commissioners make decisions based on that as opposed to actual quality.

For those looking for crime dramas with actual quality, I also recommend Inspector Morse and Kavanagh Q.C. These two dramas really are gripping viewing-

what?

yeah, I'm doing it now, mum, honestly, I am looking, I haven't got distracted again. I was thinking of applying for HMV, y'know, what with my love of music and it looking really easy, you just stand there cataloguing stuff. There was also WHSmith, where you can just ignore customers who want your help or tell them to go away if you're not feeling like talking to people- No, look, I can explain this, really I can. I simply needed to write about how Ralf Little is an annoying- Wha... How dare you, that's just so... What do you mean, ten minutes? Why are you chucking me that bin bag?

O

by Dr Taylor

'this is something that Dionysiac man shares with Hamlet: both have truly seen to the essence of things, they have *understood*, and action repels them; for their action can change nothing in the eternal essence of things, they consider it ludicrous or shameful that they should be expected to restore order to the chaotic world. Understanding kills action'

Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872)

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!

Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (c. 1600)

Images of nothingness, annihilation and emptiness proliferate in world literature, and feature in our own lives. Or, rather, and like Hamlet's, our lives are lived at such close proximity to the void of death, 'the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns', the vast terra incognita of the land beyond the living, that we turn to literature to express our fears and our sense of tragic impotence – our awareness of the Dionysiac futility at the heart of existence, which pulses out of sight (but never truly out of mind), softly throbbing and reminding, throbbing and reminding, as we plod wearily from day to day. O.

O is exclamation and ejaculation. O is nothingness expressed as plaintive phoneme. O is both letter and symbol, character and semiological pointer: it invites the gaze, and repels it. It seduces, and repels. O is siren and gorgon. O is the heart of darkness: entropy, zero, the well of unmeaning, the unknown. O.

Melpomene, tragic Muse, holds a mask whose face is contorted into a rictus of horror: the mouth broken, the lips parted into a spasm of O. What has the mask seen? The gaze of the Gorgon. The heart of darkness. The undiscovered country. The o-minous. The putrefaction of the post-mortem. Void, blackness, abyss and chasm. O.

Shakespeare knew all this, of course, and his tragic vision is circumscribed by repetitious flirtations around the rim of the O of o-blivion. His playhouse, the Gl-obe, enacts in its physical space this o-bsession with the O of human unknowing – 'this wooden O' as his Chorus in *Henry V* calls it. 'Nothing will come of nothing' he has Lear say. O then as both acting space – o-mphalos of Shakespeare's world – and also as dominating artistic o-bsession: with chaos, with emptiness, with tragic decline and fall. O.

O-(t)hell-o, his name bookended by intimations of doom, exclaims:

O, now, for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!

O, blood, blood, blood!

O Desdemona! Desdemona! dead!
Oh! Oh! Oh!

each 'O' a recapitulation and reinscription of the same tragi-comic fatalism: the o-utrageous fortune that mocks all of us, and which cannot be put off.

Desdemona, too, ech-oes the O sound of tragic yearning in her pitiful exclamations:

O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

Farewell

Commend me to my kind lord: O, farewell!

- this last as she dies: o-verwhelmed. O-vercome. O-bliterated. O.

Hamlet abounds in characters defined by their dealings with the unbounded O of death and chaos - O-phelia, O-ld Hamlet, Horati-o – all of them encircling Hamlet himself: a human vortex spinning around the still point of the prince's hectic imagination, pseudo-insanity and tortured self-(re)fashioning.

Hamlet's expostulations and denunciations never stray far from the gravitational pull of the O, which exercises an almost magnetic hold over his language:

O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie!

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

and so on.

Hamlet represents the existential O of forlorn humanity, and its bleak, because foredoomed, nature. He is also the character closest to death in the play: as both tragic victim-to-be, and as son of the done-in, poisoned father – himself an o-therworldly O from the o-ther side, crying out his 'list, list, O, list!' and 'O, horrible! O, horrible!' as he recollects Claudius' unnatural fratricide. O.

O's litter the play. Ophelia:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!

O, woe is me,
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

Claudius:

O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs
All from her father's death. O Gertrude, Gertrude

O, 'tis too true!

How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!

O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven

and other wo-eful lamentations. O. Woe. O woe. But to what end?

Harold Bloom asserts that Shakespeare 'invents the human' – gives us the emotional vocabulary we need to talk about the human condition – making Shakespeare an existentialist *avant la lettre*, an architect of human consciousness, and of the language needed to begin an investigation into the O of the human mind. In *Hamlet*, perhaps, we witness Shakespeare's most focused, sustained elaboration of the concept of nothingness and the proximity to human life of the intractable problem of death: the unbearable lightness of not-being. By no means the first writer to tackle this problem, he nonetheless can claim (perhaps) the distinction of having created the most powerful embodiment of the tragedy of human anxieties about death and the yawning gulf of cosmic absence which awaits us in the person of Hamlet himself. Perhaps. And then there's *that* soliloquy (etymology: *so-lus*; *al-one*. Latin – Horatio's speciality). 'To be' is to exist – hence, to fill the void. 'Not to be' is death, or suicide: the collapse into the void. Either way, Hamlet is an o-bsessive character – constantly, insistently, one might even say religiously contemplating the hereafter – the nothing to come. If it be not now...

And us? How do we forestall the looming O of our own imminent unbeing? (*Out, out*). Our ways are various, and designed to console - even as we endure, in our more speculative moments, the certainty of its certainty. Cheap thrills, intoxication, music, religion, infatuation, sex, the gratification of the instantaneous. Art - a temporary stay against confusion - yes. Yes. All that.

But still. Up ahead, breasting the surge, Larkin's black-sailed unfamiliar: implacable, resolute. Overhead, wings beating the air, Marvell's cheerless chariot.

What then? What to do?

O.

Remembrances from Old Langtonians

Malcolm Wood

My name is Malcolm Wood and I attended The Langton from 1959-1966.

I lived on a council estate in Cambridge Road. Dad was a coal miner Mum, an office cleaner. I went to Wincheap County Primary School where I was Head Boy and captain of the football and cricket teams. I was the only boy in the year to pass the 11+ to get to grammar school.

Sport was my first love and was later to develop into my career. My sporting mentors were the teachers A. G. Hummerstone (Hummy), Bernie Falconer, Tony Brimmacombe and Peter Marks.

I went on to train as a P.E. teacher at St. Lukes, Exeter. I was appointed Head of P.E. at Walton High School Stafford where I taught for 27 years. Outside work I coached Cannock Hockey Club and the Welsh Men's Hockey team. I was then invited to join the England and Great Britain Men's coaching staff full time.

I had not been to the school since I left, but on February 14th 2020, I was very kindly shown round by Hardev Mudhar.

I originally started at the "old" school in town where my first classroom was a bomb shelter. My form teacher was in his probationary year, Michael Marland, later to become Sir Michael, a leading educationalist. We moved to the "new" school during my 1st year.



When I visited this year I was both shocked and amazed. Shocked to see the Old Pavilion still standing, and amazed at the changes. The original build was the main block, CDT area, Labs, gym and hall. The swimming pool was uncovered and unheated!! There were the playing fields as they are today and tarmac tennis courts, now the car park. I was very impressed with all of the new facilities and the many innovations I have been reading about. The P.E. facilities are the best I have seen in any state school. A memory of the Main block I have is of us trying to get as many pupils out of the window at the back of a classroom on the first floor, onto the roof without the teacher noticing.

When I started we were a three form entry with a sixth form of about 180.

On my trip round the school I was very proud to see my name on the honours board along with many other successful Langtonians. Long may this production of excellence and achievement continue at The Langton.

William Sawtell

Today, students recognise the Langton to be a highly successful school, where they can enjoy a safe and familiar environment in which to learn (unless of course you're partial to reading the Guardian).

Obviously, life at the Langton wasn't always this easy. In wartime especially, the students' experience of Langton was shaped by a very different way of living, as remembered by ex-Langtonian William Sawtell.

Sawtell attended the school during the Second World War for just over three years, from late 1942 until 1945. In those days, both the Boys' and Girls' schools were situated in Whitefriars and had "almost nil facilities" according to Sawtell.

The school was indeed relatively spartan, with the gym and showers being "the only modern part of the building", and the lunch hall a prefabricated building. The school toilets were just as bad back then too, except when Sawtell attended they were only found outside.

During this period, he remembers that, in addition to having to pass the entrance exams, a majority of the Langton students didn't enjoy the benefits of a free education.

"All parents had to pay for tuition unless you were abnormally bright ... I owe a great deal of thanks to my mother and father for my education."

The procedures prepared for the event of an enemy bombing raid were only a bit different from the fire drills we have today – "the alarm went and you made your way to the shelter (which were installed beneath the school yard), it was all extremely efficient and completed very smoothly" Sawtell recalled.

It was only after the Girls' section of the school was bombed during a night raid in mid-1942 that the illusion of normality was broken at the school. After this Sawtell says that he and his classmates "only went to school for half a day – the girls started early and would finish early one week, and the week after it would be the boys' turn."

Perhaps a reason why the boys and girls have separate schools nowadays is because of the boys' habit of leaving letters in their desks for the girls to read later – the contents of which Sawtell didn't comment on.

Although he most fondly remembers getting together with his friends at lunchtimes, Sawtell also happily reminisced over one particular incident. One day, whilst being ordered to be silent, a boy from Sawtell's class had to be suddenly rushed to hospital after loudly choking on a bone from his stewed mutton that was stuck in his throat (unmistakably a Langton-canteen-quality lunch). Fortunately the boy was fine in the end, so it's OK to look back and laugh.



William Sawtell today

During his Langton career, Sawtell also joined the Air Training Corps (ATC) squadron stationed in Herne Bay. His main duties involved peeling thousands of potatoes at the local airfields of Manston and Hawkinge, in return for which he and the other cadets received short flights in a DeHavilland aircraft.

However, once he became a Senior Cadet, Sawtell recalls being given the opportunity to go on a retrieval mission. Around six weeks after D-Day, he and some other cadets were taken to Ramsgate harbour and boarded “a squadron of really fast Air/Sea rescue vessels”.

The task was to retrieve submerged jerry cans of fuel from a sunken American ship. The ship had struck a mine off the coast of Le Havre, so you can imagine that the job was a fairly dangerous one for young boys, but Sawtell remembers not being scared at the time, jokingly pointing out that “you are invincible at that age”.

After leaving the Langton, Sawtell was enlisted as a ‘Bevin Boy’ as part of his compulsory national service, which was the name given to the young men who were sent to work in the mines.

Sawtell’s service began in 1946 when he was 18 years old. He was sent to the coal pit in Chislet, where for two years, he was exposed to what he describes as “one of the worst experiences”.

His job was to be an engine driver, which put him in control of moving the trucks when they were full. “If you got it wrong it was a nightmare, as men would lose pay if things went wrong” Sawtell recalled.

He says that he regards his time as a Bevin Boy as “two years of my life stolen from me”.

Despite their toils, the Bevin Boys’ services didn’t receive recognition from the Government until ten years ago, when Sawtell finally received a service medal for his time down in the mines.

The Bevins finally being credited only came about as a result of extensive campaigning from survivors, and the fact that it took so much time and effort to finally get the commendation that they deserved was described by Sawtell as “a real tragedy as far as I’m concerned.”

Despite his disapproval of his mistreatment, he didn’t partake in the campaigns himself, because he says that “...once I left the pits I got on with my estate agent studies... I didn’t have time to campaign – I just wanted to forget”.

Sawtell finally went on to forge a successful career as an estate agent, but always looks back at his time at the Langton with affection. To this day he maintains that “I owe all my business success to the masters and mistresses of the Simon Langton School.”

Sawtell’s hard-earned Bevin Boy
Service Medal



Wheat Fields

by Elizabeth Watson

When you weren't here to hold me,
I fell naked into weeping wheat,
just evening night to robe me.
Back-lit, that day, by sun-swollen clouds,
a child in midnight corn crop,
danced slicing circles round my feet.

Your palms are pressed flat against paper,
an empty promise to call back later,
sits beside the phone.
An interrupted jawline falls seamless
amongst tongues which will not listen,
is waiting on his own.

Our symmetry holds a female form,
her shadow that slips seamlessly into enamel nights;
my shadow that falls so boldly over gardens full of light.

Orwell Will End Well

by Mr Moffat

Literature, like all other disciplines, pastimes and interests, is subject to fashion. What's in and what's out depends on such factors as what is considered contemporaneous or may be subject to more superficial foibles. For now, we find the Jacobean and Shakespeare, in his uncut state, are in. In Webster we see Tarantino as well as the London of 1611. In Donne and the Metaphysicals we see tough headed answers to our own emotional challenges. The earthy humour of Chaucer reflects our own scatological and iconoclastic urges. The tea soaked, or muffin dry, Augustans, whichever way one wishes to look at them, are right out, as is the now distinctly un-modish foppiness of the 1680's (way too much of the 1990s there for our liking.) and Austenian mannered period comedy is only allowed after 9 pm on Sundays and in occasional girlie forays to the local cinema. Oddly, we still like the insecurity of the semi crumbling jazz age of Fitzgerald, though Graham Greene is considered just too *autre* for modern sensibilities. The tough realism of the noble and stately early Nineteenth Century novels still grips us. And we'll always see our mad neighbours in Dickens.

However, when our descendants reconsider the Twentieth Century it is interesting to speculate what will command their attention. Nobody anticipated the Twentieth Century in the way that nobody really anticipates their own death. Except slightly sentimentally. Thus when Arnold wrote "where ignorant armies clash by night" we can be sure he wasn't really contemplating the smart Hugo Boss tailored hordes of the Third Reich, or when Hardy wistfully invoked his darkling thrush at the dawn of the new century he had no idea of how hollow it would sound on the Western Front. Despite living through it, he remains almost entirely silent about the Great War, as if perplexed by it, or nonplussed.

Capturing the *zeitgeist* is what all writers wish for, but few manage. When future generations look back at the Twentieth Century, what they won't focus on is Oh So Clever Joyce merging Dublin and Ithaca or T.S.Eliot's oxymoronic allusions - even today it is difficult to follow Eliot without a concordance, however well read the reader may be. And Auden's linguistic parachuting, though brilliant for its time, I suspect will remain just that, for its time. And Orwell even then damned him, memorably and cruelly, as "a boy scout communist."

And what of Mr Blair himself? Eric Arthur, of course, not Tony. The latter part of the Twentieth Century condemned him to key stage three for *Animal Farm* (or the key stage four remove if he was really unlucky) or O Level or key stage four for *1984* - and one of Richard Burton's worst films to boot. The intellectual elite loathes nothing more than populism and because he fell foul of both the Scylla and Charybdis of being both readable and popular, Orwell was largely written off as a premiership writer by the end of the century.

But revisionism is as fun to the scatological intellectual mind as Asbos may be to the less sophisticated. It will become difficult to resist declaring his *1984* image of a boot repeatedly stamping on a human face as the defining image of a century that gave us such inglorious instances of sub-human behaviour as the Somme, Guernica, Treblinka, the outrages of partition India, the gulags, Cambodia, Rwanda, Serbia - the horrifying list is endless. The Twentieth Century was a dismal century in mankind's time on earth. What Auden said of the 'thirties, "a low dishonest decade" could be amplified ten-fold to epitomise the whole shameful century. And Orwell seemed to capture it all.

1984 was written as a warning in 1948, not as a prediction. Double plus bad, we didn't heed it. Export products up 30% in the last year? Have another Victory Gin Chancellor Brown. And in the most chilling scene of the novel in Room 101, Orwell shows our survival instinct at its necessary worst; when the chips are down we will sacrifice our loved ones in order to preserve ourselves. Our modern day response to this is to turn the room of horror into the title for a rather cheesy, sweaters-by-the fireplace schmaltz comedy. And I'm using the term comedy loosely.

Orwell's lasting success, however, is to be found in his essays where he shows a photographer's eye for detail. Not the emaciated napalmed child for him, but the understated picture of the Burmese prisoner insouciantly side-stepping a puddle on the way to the gallows in "A Hanging." The deconstruction of *The Wizard* and *The Eagle* as Samsonite pillars of the crumbling Georgian establishment showed him to be forty years ahead of Barthes, Derrida and Foucault at a time when deconstruction meant the closure of another Welsh slate-mine. And the gentle irony of the sanitation of vicarious blood-lust in "The Decline of the English Murder" showed him able to put an ink stained finger on the thready pulse of the English nation.

I was in a second-hand bookshop recently and asked optimistically if ever any hard backed copies of Orwell's essays came on the market when the bookseller rather sadly reached behind himself to a private shelf. "Well, you can have this", he said, "I was going to read it myself, but never quite got round to it. I've earmarked the chapter I meant to read on booksellers." Of course, I bought the book ruthlessly and when I got it home read immediately the essay on bookselling, only to find Orwell at his scintillating best, categorising the characters he himself served as a bookseller. Shakespeare & Co. it wasn't. The mad, the bad, the lingering and the unhealthy, none of whom bought anything but all of whom haunted the bookshop as if it were a mildewed and stuffy doctors' surgery. Poring over past disappointments or remaindered or unloved or abandoned tomes, they themselves mirroring the sadness of the books they fingered. Books can be wonderful, but never under-estimate their power to be tragic.

His great strength as an essayist is his power to slice a Sheffield blade through an aristo's butter pat effortlessly. *Down and Out in Paris and London* is a fascinating insight into vagrancy and *The Road to Wigan Pier* shows an understanding of the working class it should have been impossible for Orwell to attain. Every Sixth Former who wanders forlornly through my teaching is urged to read *Homage to Catalonia* before their 18th birthday. Please God, not Laurie Lee's *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*, or even Graves' *Goodbye to All That*.

No, Old Etonian, old TB sufferer, old veteran of Wigan, Paris and Penang wins it every time. Yes, of course time spent with Orwell personally would have been about as much fun as tea at The Savoy with Billy Bragg and Darcus Howe, and evening out boozing with MacNeice or Dylan Thomas would have been much more life affirming. But believe me, I had dinner with Ted Hughes once and, frankly, the man was bloody terrifying. Give me wheezy Eric any day.

And don't forget that Orwell coined the phrase "Big Brother" which we now use, and even celebrate, without a shred of irony. A bigger condemnation of the way we have started the Twenty First Century I cannot imagine. Whoever writes for us may have an even bleaker prospect to commemorate.

The fact of the matter is that the Twentieth Century wasn't life affirming at all, quite the opposite, and we only turned into boozers to get away from it all:

"Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day
The lights must never go out
The music must always play
Lest we should see where we are
Lost in a haunted wood
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good."

The words may be Auden's and they typify the common sentiment of the 'thirties brigade, but if future historians want Auden's average day truly uncovered, or to really learn the horrors of the haunted wood, they'll turn to Orwell.

1593 And All That

by Dr Taylor

“a blunt blade of iron with a basket hilt, used for defence”

– Johnson’s *Dictionary*, 1755

“Yet this sentiment is weakened by the name of an instrument used by butchers and cooks in the meanest employments: we do not immediately conceive that any crime of importance is to be committed with a *knife*; or who does not, at last, from the long habit of connecting a knife with sordid offices, feel aversion rather than terror?”

– Johnson, *The Rambler*, 1751, in response to Lady Macbeth’s allusion to killing Duncan with a knife

Knives, daggers, swords, poniards, bodkins, axes, rapiers, blades and foils clutter the tragedies and history plays of Shakespeare like so much outmoded, medieval ironmongery. But this, of course, was a medieval age – only limping towards what we would call the Renaissance. Blades were to Shakespeare what pistols are to us: trusty and efficient sidearms – but deadly. And easier to wield. Pistol in *Henry V* takes his name from the weapon of the same name – only with the contemporary association of pistols with weapons that often misfired or missed their mark. Made a mess. Not so the humble knife.

Elizabethans loved blades. Nobles, swaggering onto the stage Bankside, or mincing their aristocratic way round the grand tour, wore swords: often jewelled or ornate, and hanging at their side as a badge of rank – a totem of privilege. Commoners, too, went equipped – but with daggers and knives: lower, meaner markers of social class. Not jewelled. Never ornate. Just efficient, easily concealed, and ready for immediate use: ‘an instrument used by butchers and cooks in the meanest employments’, as Johnson notes. Quite so.

And Shakespeare? Marlowe? Did they carry a sword or knife? In Shakespeare’s case – who can say, although the plays suggest more than a passing familiarity with armed combat: witness, inter alia, Toby Belch’s comic mock-duel involving Viola and Andrew Aguecheek, Othello’s ‘put up your bright swords’, and Hamlet’s tumultuous duel with Laertes (more anon). And then there’s *that* play – in which the dagger is not merely a weapon, but a recurring symbol, a motif, almost a character in its own right: ‘I laid their daggers ready;/He could not miss ‘em’; ‘why did you bring these daggers from the place?’; ‘infirm of purpose!/Give me the daggers’ (Lady Macbeth). ‘Is this a dagger which I see before me?’ (Macbeth). And Donalbain notes, shrewdly, ‘there’s daggers in men’s smiles’.

As for Marlowe, the case might be more robust: certainly, he was either attacked by, or himself attacked William Corkyn, tailor, in Canterbury in 1592, and a knife was used. And, in his plays too, we see repeated references to knives and swords – from Faustus enjoined to stab his arm ‘courageously’ when signing away his soul to Lucifer with his own blood, to the bladed lexicon of limping Tamburlaine, shepherd-conqueror: ‘here is my dagger’; ‘draw forth thy sword, thou mighty man-at-arms’; ‘by this my sword that conquered Persia’; ‘our conquering swords shall marshal us the way’. (But soft. That last phrase. ‘Marshal us the way’. *Tamburlaine Part I*: when? 1587? Before *Macbeth* then (1606). Before ‘Thou marshall’st me the way that I was going’. Mark.)

In *Hamlet*, swords, stabbing and duelling are conspicuously present. At 3.3 we have Hamlet, watching Claudius at prayer, putting up his sword rather than send a shriven soul to heaven. Earlier, at 3.1, and amid the cosmic wasteland of his 'being' soliloquy, he contemplates a brisk shuffling off this mortal coil – a deflated suicide effected with a 'bare bodkin'. Then we have Hamlet and Gertrude: both characters invoking daggers as externalisations of grief and pain (and, for acolytes of Freudian Jones, providing grist to the Oedipal mill at the same time):

'O, speak to me no more;
These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;
No more, sweet Hamlet!'

she says.

And he:

'I will speak daggers to her, but use none'

Then Polonius is run through – stabbed as he cowers behind a wall-hanging in Gertrude's chamber, his fate recalling Duncan's stabbing in his own bedchamber, and both *great reckonings in a little room*. And then the final, spectacular duel, which sees Hamlet, Claudius and Laertes shuffle off themselves - run through with rapiers, poisoned by envenomed tips.

But why might *Hamlet* stand out? Surely it is no different to *Macbeth*, or other Jacobean plays which reference stabbing, slashing, cutting and the like? Perhaps – except for two incidental, although enticing details.

First, references to daggers in the plays of Shakespeare (especially after 1593) suggest an unusual preoccupation with an implement, as Johnson notes, associated more often with the common ruffian than with lords, kings and princes. Daggers are tools of trade – whether licit or illicit – and are synonymous with murder and the swift despatch of enemies (Banquo, we recall, suffered 'twenty trenched gashes on his head'). Daggers are not ceremonial weapons – they are secretive, hidden, cloaked or pulled from behind the back. They might, for the sake of argument, be wielded by a Skeres, Poley or Frizer, or even by a Corkyn. These names, linked as they are to Marlowe's own by lore and post-mortem mythology, invite us to speculate that in *Hamlet*, the undead Marlowe, safely stowed in Europe, and writing the mature tragedies that bore another's name, was playing with his audience, and communicating, *sub rosa*, with a select entourage: those acquaintances who knew that he had survived Deptford, survived 1593, survived the daggers in men's smiles – and made it out alive to the continent.

Of course, this is mere speculation, fuelled only by the premise – easily refuted with the right kind of evidence – that Marlowe was not indeed killed at Widow Bull's house, and that he did indeed live beyond 1593. But then the right kind of evidence has never – ever – been presented. If it ever will. Other tropes, images and ideas in *Hamlet* suggest in-jokes: the preponderance of references to surveillance, watching and spying for instance – but it is this matter of the dagger, the blade and the bodkin which is most compelling.

Food for thought – if only a side dish.

Secondly, and by way of footnote, the lovely, teasing minor detail embedded so quietly, so adroitly, into the play, one that is so easily overlooked, or not looked for at all: in 1593, Marlowe was 29. In *Hamlet*, the

hero is 30. Was this a Marlovian jest? A Yorick-like jibe? A joke reserved for those with eyes to see – those in the know? Was Marlowe reminding us – them – that he was still alive? That 1593 wasn't his end?

We might never know.

How did Morales' party return to power in Bolivia in just under a year, and how does it involve America?

by Felix Fraser

The US election has finally drawn to a close somewhat, with former Vice President Joe Biden being declared the president elect. However, the bombardment of legal challenges coming from the Trump Administration put the heart of American democracy at risk. The challenges are based on allegations of voter fraud, but when the New York Times contacted election officials in every state, it was reported 'there were no irregularities that affected the outcome'. In fact, one of the only proven cases of voter fraud came when a Republican voter registered his dead mother and cast her ballot. This is somewhat reminiscent of how the US has acted in many countries, supporting democracy only when it supports them. In the case of Bolivia and former president Evo Morales, we can see democracy has not sufficed American interests.

In December 2019, the former president of Bolivia Evo Morales not only resigned as a result of a highly debated and controversial election, but also sought exile in Mexico and subsequently Argentina. Yet somehow, just ten months after he resigned, the party he previously chaired, MAS (Movement for Socialism), returned to power after a presidential election. All to the dissatisfaction of the CIA.

America has often involved itself in regime changes in South America, more often than not backing coup d'états aimed at replacing socialist leaders with right-wing, usually military and authoritarian regimes. The US has backed the removal of socialist governments in Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, Nicaragua and Venezuela to name a few. In 2019, it happened again in Bolivia, but this time it was unsuccessful.

Morales was the first ever indigenous president of Bolivia, coming from the Aymara people. Morales gave more support to the indigenous population of Bolivia, and revived the Wiphala flag, which represents the natives of the country. It is even in law as the dual national flag, and must be flown alongside the green, red and yellow tricolor.

This was not the American problem with Morales though. Instead, it was the political stance of his party, the Movement for Socialism. On top of the ideological disputes between the White House and the Aymaran leader was the cocaine problem. The US often reminded him that he was not doing enough to tackle the problem of cocaine production and trafficking. This came off the back of Morales' push to keep

the production of the coca leaf legal and regulate its supply, rather than eradicate its supply entirely, like the US wanted. Morales argued that chewing coca leaves was a long-standing and important tradition for many ethnic groups in Bolivia, and that they should be allowed to continue doing so. Tensions peaked in 2008, when Morales expelled the US Ambassador Philip Goldberg, accusing him of conspiring against his government, and suspended the operations of the US Drug Enforcement Administration in Bolivia.

Socialism has been the enemy of the American state for many years. In the early twentieth century farmers, factory workers, new immigrants and Native Americans all rallied around socialist ideas. This posed a huge threat to the capitalist model the state was running on, and which the political elite supported. A relentless campaign to frame socialism as anti-American ensued, and the debate was purged in the mainstream. Foreign policy throughout the century took a similar form. After the Second World War, there was a worry in the US that the rise of communism in the Soviet Union would lead to it spreading throughout the world and eventually become a direct threat. In 1947, the Truman Doctrine was launched to Congress, with the purpose of containing Soviet geopolitical expansion. It was extended to contain socialist uprisings in Greece and Turkey, as well generally implying American support for nations threatened by Soviet communism.

Aggressive wealth distribution, a heavily socialist policy, was also pursued under Morales, like in many other 'pink tide' South American countries in the 2000s. Most of them have since been replaced by conservative governments. As soon as he entered the office, Morales cut his salary, alongside those in his cabinet. Then came the more controversial measures, which involved renationalising the gas and oil industry. This gave the government access to a highly increased amount of tax revenue, which was used to improve public services and strengthen the country's foreign reserves. It is hard to argue that Morales wasn't at least somewhat successful in his aim of reducing inequality in Bolivia. This is reflected in extreme poverty which fell from 38% to 17% between 2006 and 2018. Critics are quick to point out that extreme poverty has risen again in the last few years, as well as the idea that Morales was riding the wave of large economic growth in the 200s, fueled by the rise in commodity prices. The US took less of a problem with this policy due to becoming oil self-sufficient in 2017, but as champions of private enterprise and capitalism, they were still strongly against the move.

So what happened? In October 2019, Morales again won the presidential election, and was gearing up for his fourth term in office. However, there were widespread accusations of rigging and this resulted in weeks of mass protesting in the administrative capital, La Paz. A report by the OAS (Organisation of American States) found "deliberate" and "malicious" tactics to rig the election in favor of President Evo Morales. Subsequently, the results were scrapped, and Morales was forced out of the country. His supporters claimed this was part of a racist, right-wing coup. It is common knowledge that the US backed the coup that led to 33 deaths as well as 715 injuries. The leader of the opposition, Jeanine Áñez, was backed by US officials and became the de facto leader. She pursued anti-socialist policies, quickly cutting ties with the socialist nations of Cuba and Venezuela. This, alongside other factors, led again to widespread protests, this time in favour of Morales and his party.

This caused an election to be called for the 3rd of May, but it was later postponed until October 18th due to COVID-19. The results of the election were clear, with Luis Arce, the new leader of MAS securing over

50% of the vote, with his closest rival, the centrist and former president Carlos Mesa, winning less than 30%. Mesa is known to be a member of the Washington DC-based Inter-American Dialogue think tank, which is currently headed by someone who used to work for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The NED is primarily funded by the American government, and its board members include Elliot Abrams and Henry Kissinger. To most people these names will mean nothing, but Abrams served in foreign policy positions for Reagan, Bush and, most recently, Trump. Henry Kissinger is a more recognisable figure, as he served as the US Secretary of State, and National Security Advisor under the Ford and Nixon administrations. The foreign policies pursued by both of these men were fiercely anti-socialist, and it could easily be inferred that the CIA have again involved themselves in a foreign election.

Morales raved about the result, tweeting “Sisters and brothers: the will of the people has prevailed.” It was a resounding success for Bolivia’s left, and showed that there is not an appetite for right-wing politics in the country, whether or not it is supported by the US. Morales recently returned from exile as a result of the election, and was welcomed by hundreds of supporters at the border.

The right offered little support to disillusioned MAS supporters, and their anti-indigenous, theocratic and neoliberal ideologies enjoy major support only among light-skinned residents in eastern Bolivia. In addition, candidates who were allied with the US after the 2019 election suffered as a result. The OAS is majority funded by Washington, and Trump openly supported the coup, which did not go down well when it was discovered that the OAS had a major role in causing the coup d’etat.

Either way, the result can be seen as a win for Bolivian democracy. The country managed to democratically re-elect the party it wanted, in the face of American intervention and imperialism. For a country which claims to be the leader of the free world, and enshrines voting rights in its constitution, America has shown itself to be anti-democratic when it fits their view.

We may see this socialist witch hunt play out on American soil in the coming months and years. Notable politicians such as Bernie Sanders, Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and even Kamala Harris have been labelled socialist and marxist by the right, who are employing scare tactics similar to that of McCarthyism. More importantly, the anti-democratic stance America has taken in many foreign countries is closer to home than ever. The refusal of concession by Donald Trump in the recent election puts US democracy at risk. If the Americans can so willingly act undemocratically abroad, what stops them from doing it at home too?

Here, Kitty

by Dr Taylor

Julius Caesar, act one, scene one. That was me. Although they thought it was *him*. No matter.

Let those with eyes to see, see. Eh?

So, Flavius: 'thou art a cobbler, art thou?', and I have the cobbler say 'I am, indeed, sir, a surgeon to old shoes'. 'As proper men as ever trod upon neat's leather', I have him go on, 'have gone upon my handiwork'. That, as I maintain, was me.

His father made gloves. *Mine* made shoes.

Yes, there's *that* glove reference that Romeo blurts out. True. But – a smokescreen. Covering my tracks. Same with the sonnet about wills. 135. Decoy. Smoke and mirrors. All surface: no depth. The plebs must *believe*. And so they did.

But I just can't help myself.

I like to hide in plain sight: bait the bastards – mock them to their faces. How best to do it – *that* was the question. To be or not to be? *Not* to 'be' – obviously. Dead men tell no tales. But they *have* tails.

I hit upon the artifice of including my diminutive in my plays: playing on my name as a cat plays with a mouse. Easy, after a fashion. But still tricky. So – no 'Kit', but, instead, 'cat' – lots of cats. Cats in nearly every play. Listen.

In *Macbeth* (anagram, *he be cat, m?* [nearly]) I have Lady M lay into hubby about 'the poor cat i' the adage', my name artfully sewn into the sleeve of the scene like a patch of smooth velvet. Pristine. Witch 1: 'thrice the brinded cat hath mewed'. Nice. Lots of dogs, though: *in the catalogue ye go for men...* Yes, yes. But only so no-one twigged. Seems they didn't.

Much Ado; Lear ('thou ows't the cat no perfume...'); one of my Henrys ('I am as vigilant as a cat to steal cream'). Oho. Did anyone notice? I even have Shylock, my lesser Barabas, talking cats (and du-cats). Well. No-one said a word, if they even noticed. I grew bold.

And so *Othello*, where I have Iago chide Roderigo about drowning cats and blind puppies, then *Midsummer* (more cats), and *Romeo and Juliet*, where I have Tybalt (cat's name – taken from *Reynard* and begging to be translated as Italian 'cazzo': a very naughty word) called prince of cats and king of cats – and killed. Stabbed. Like me. See? Then my *Hamlet*: 'the cat will mew, and dog will have his day'. And my *Shrew*, where wild-cat Kate (Katherine – Kat) spits and scratches. Perdie. Meoww.

Shrew where I even have the gall – the bare-faced, rascalion cheek – to actually put myself, fully formed, although tricked out as alehouse tosspot, into the play, slyly.

Christopher, Sly.

That was a pawstroke of genius, though I do say so myself.

8th June 1870

- Taken from *The Diary of Charles John Huffam Dickens*

Staplehurst is a most unprepossessing place: hardly there at all. Just a railway line, a collection of modest houses and, as the train beat its inexorable way, a river crossing as the Beult slid noiselessly under the rails.

Nelly and Mrs T stowed with me in First, we had entrained at Folkestone en route to Charing Cross - thence I would repair to my metropolitan pied-à-terre, and so on to Gads at Rochester. Not to be.

Sometime mid-afternoon, a good thirty miles of track having unravelled behind us (billowing clouds of steam; the racket of the wheels; the whistle as we screamed through the sleepy village) a signalman positioned on the track waved a red flag. On with the brakes. And then a sound like iron rivets dragged across a chalkboard - all screeching and ear-splitting howls as the train lost momentum. And then a feeling of being held motionless in mid-air. And then the fall.

Ten deaths, many injured. I did my best for two or three - applying a handkerchief dipped in river water to one forehead; pressing a poor soul on the verge of death to sip a little brandy; holding the hand of one (though I didn't know it at the time) only recently expired. I will never forget the expression on the face of this last: so utterly at peace, the hair befouled by grey blobs of brain, which I took at the time for river sludge.

Having hurriedly packed of N. and mater in a hansom to a local inn, there to await my arrival, I bethought myself to go back to the carriage and retrieve the blessed manuscript: nearly lost in the wreckage, and found wedged behind a wooden panel pressed hard against the fat upholstered cushions of our seat. *Our Mutual Friend*.

And that was five years ago tomorrow. It might as well have been yesterday. But enough.

'The Signalman' helped, but I think that my *Drood*, to which I now return, will perhaps help me to put this ghost to rest.

A drink, then to work: Cloisterham my thinly veiled homage to dear old Rochester.

I will have Drood killed by

END OF ISSUE

If you want to submit your own articles, please email any of the below:

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