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Impacts

Two years ago *Oxford Magazine* (No 270, Eighth Week MT 2007) attempted to raise concern and energise discussion regarding the topic of climate change within the University.

Apparently we failed. There has been an increase in climate change research but, as far as one can tell, no collective coordination or prioritization within the research community. But the subject is surely even more urgent, at the moment when the prospects for the imminent Copenhagen conference on climate change seem poised somewhere between outright collapse and a limited fudge.

Our failure perhaps illuminates, on a tiny scale, a quite general feature of the world's approach to climate change. There is considerable polling evidence to show that in many countries, including the UK, the public is increasingly inclined to believe the "climate sceptics". This is all the more surprising and alarming given that the scientific consensus on the certainty of rising temperatures due to man-made CO_2 emissions is formidable and the arguments of the few remaining sceptics are increasingly contrived. Moreover, despite the lack of public backing, governments throughout the world appear to have accepted the scientific arguments: indeed Copenhagen may, hopefully, mark an important development in showing that national governments, without exception, at least acknowledge the need to act, however inadequately.

Who is to blame? Why are governments so hesitant? Can Oxford help in any way at all? The public cannot be blamed for being thoroughly confused. It cannot be expected to evaluate the validity of the sceptics' arguments. It cannot distinguish between degrees of uncertainty about the climate predictions themselves and the nature of scientific method which entails contested claims, and necessary degrees of uncertainty. So, when e-mail exchanges are hacked into (as they recently have been at the Norwich Climate Research Unit) and published, the public can readily draw the conclusion that scientists manipulate the data and are in disarray as to the basic case for climate change.

This situation threatens the high degree of trust that the public traditionally has for scientists, especially university scientists. Ideally governments would take the lead in explaining and interpreting scientific evidence in an authoritative way and in communicating it widely to the public at large. In that way the public might be "educated" about the true situation. But, as the David Nutt affair illustrates, our government is in no position to do this. It itself is perhaps less trusted than ever before.

We face the greatest threat to humanity in recorded history. Even the sceptics must plan for the possibility that they are wrong. We need vastly improved mechanisms of informed public engagement.

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In some quarters Oxford seems to regard itself as a national centre on climate change research, as well as on policy making. Some one hundred University colleagues are going to Copenhagen. Our graduate courses on the environment send out large numbers of talented international students each year: they are increasingly active and influential in the field around the world. A number of senior members of the University advise the UK government directly. Yet, as we noted two years ago, the various contributions to tackling the climate crisis are widely spread around Oxford and there is little sense of communication, coordination or focus on the most im-

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…and much more

portant issues. The laudable aim of provision of lectures on climate change to the undergraduate body as a whole did not succeed two years ago, another symbol of a lack of strategic ambition.

The Director of the Environmental Change Institute has recently resigned. She was offered a job in the USA to set up a new institute (with a $90m building) which will integrate activities spanning, according to the website, "the natural and physical sciences to the social and behavioural sciences, and from engineering to business, health and law". One senses ambition *there* to lead in a field that will only become more and more important through this century. There are no doubt many models for creating such collective efforts, but surely Oxford's rare distinction as a world-class university offers unique opportunities. The priority in the re-filling of the Directorship ought to be to catalyse the coordination of the University's environmental credentials.

It seems doubtful that Oxford should regard itself as any different from a number of centres in the UK and beyond, in terms of producing important research in the climate field. We need as many contributors to the complex, global effort as we can get. But where Oxford can perhaps take a lead is in defending scientific and academic integrity, and in devising ways - where the press, media and government have clearly failed - in which the public can be better educated and informed regarding scientific method and credibility. Hence the recent emphasis on the problems of academic freedom and government interference in the *Oxford Magazine*.

Not only does the University – individuals as well as institutions – have to plan *now* for the coming, inevitable modifications in the way we conduct our work in the face of climate change, but we have the possibility of creating a new model of trust and public understanding of science. A university like Oxford is the ideal source for such a model.

We don't need HEFCE's impact agenda. What we need is the means to convey the impact of climate change.

T.J.H.

Aran Keening

i.m. Tom Hernon d. 17 November 2009 aet 87

My friend sent me a photo of his coffin
lying in state at Onacht, with his cap on.
. . . People from 'the islands' and
two sisters from America, the whole island,
came to pay their last respects.
I should have joined them, sent regrets?
But they barely waited and he was in
the airy ground, the moment gone.
I can see them though, in that wake of rain
and sudden break and gash of sun,
opened to order, over the graveyard,
and the 'huge' crowd of mourners gathered,
above the bay at Cill Mhuirbigh where
the hero of my hour lived and died.
I was two weeks in at this anniversary,
my forty-first, a Tuesday to the day
he breathed his last: a 'dole-day', for irony.
His only holiday, his mother said.

ANDREW MCNEILLIE

Andrew McNeillie is Professor of Archipelagic Studies at the University of Exeter

Generosity

It's funny how fast the heart wears out.
I'm not sure if it was the pain

that wore me down. The way you kept pulling
the tube out of your mouth.

I heard you screaming, and still
I walked down the hospital corridor.

There was a moment
when I thought I had to be selfish,

because I had nothing left to give. But maybe
it was the chorus.

It's only a fool who gives things away.
When your hair curled by the water's edge,

you reminded me of the light. *Alisa, you're wonderful,*
my father said, as I walked him through nursing

home halls. And my niece wants to know
if I can come visit her tomorrow.

ALISA MALINOVICH

Alisa Malinovich lives in New York City, where she facilitates creative writing and arts workshops through a variety of non-profit institutions.

The First Noël

MISAKO HIMURO

OXFORD: Christmas 1967. That was my first Christmas in England; I was new to Oxford, having arrived as a graduate just in time for the start of the Michaelmas Term. It was also the first time I had ever left my own country. I lived at Holywell Manor, then just inaugurated as the Balliol–St Anne's Graduate Centre, where Russell Meiggs, Fellow and Tutor in Ancient History at Balliol College, was Praefectus. My room was in the Martin Building, the new annexe across the road, commonly called Holywell Minor, which was still undergoing the workmen's finishing touches. It consisted of three storeys, the middle one assigned to women: eight from St Anne's and two from St Hilda's – my next-door neighbour and I – to fill up the vacancies for the first year.

The graduates were going home one after another; on Christmas Eve there were none left on my floor except Marilyn, a Canadian girl who lived a few doors down from me, and myself. Although a friend had suggested that I should come to stay with her family in Southwold, I was too shy to accept their hospitality. It suited me better to keep my own company in the deserted building: I loved my room and there was a pot of yellow chrysanthemums brought in by another friend. Moreover, I was going to Christmas dinner at my supervisor's house: a grand occasion to look forward to.

Having put my simple supper (a chicken and mushroom pie from *Marks & Spencer*, as it happened) into the oven in the kitchen at the end of the corridor, I came back to my room and poured myself a small glass of sherry to celebrate my first Christmas in England. A quarter of an hour later, I got up to go to the kitchen for my pie – but I could not open my door. There was something wrong with the doorknob. After trying it a few times, I realised to my horror that I was shut up in the room with no means of getting help. These were the days before mobile phones or personal computers with e-mail facilities. My next-door neighbours on either side had left the day before: I was completely cut off from the outer world. Everybody I knew seemed very far away. I had not been informed of Marilyn's movements; nobody was likely to come in, neither graduates nor scouts, until well after Christmas. I was aware of all this, but my mind refused to register the significance of the fact, or rather, it froze at the magnitude of the matter.

I continued more desperate attempts at the knob, only producing empty metallic clicking sounds, when, as luck would have it, I heard pattering footsteps, which stopped, and Marilyn's voice: 'Misako, what are you doing?' 'I can't get out,' I said. 'Did you lock the door?' 'No, I didn't. I just shut it. The doorknob doesn't work.' 'Just wait. I'll get the porter.' She meant Mr Andrew, the elderly resident in the Lodge. She was about to go out but would first walk across the road to call him. With a surge of immense relief, I was sure I should be shortly released from my imprisonment – provided he was available at this time on Christmas Eve.

After a few futile attempts at the knob from outside, Mr Andrew went away; he soon returned, to appear on the plot of ground below my window, carrying a solid long ladder, and with him no other than the Praefectus himself, an imposing figure with his grey frizzy hair reaching his shoulders, magnificent bushy eyebrows almost shading his shrewd – and perceptive – eyes, and large prominent nose. They stood side by side in the gathering darkness; I slid open the wide window and turned the reading lamp towards them. Now Mr Andrew was climbing the ladder with surprising agility for a person of his bulk and years. When he had arrived at the top of the ladder, he stopped before taking a stride over the window-sill; poking his head into the room, he looked me in the face and asked, 'Miss Himuro, do you know what we call this in English?' 'No, I don't.' 'This is wooing,' he said without any flicker of a smile or even of a grin. 'Oh, my Romeo!' I addressed him as tenderly as possible. The idea of a daring nocturnal suitor, particularly coming from Mr Andrew, was so astounding that it dispelled all the strain I had been under. He was a gruff matter-of-fact man, always curt in words and blunt in manner, even intimidating on occasion – at least so he had seemed to me, a still vulnerable newcomer.

He sought for some tool, found my Japanese knife, and with it tried to prise open the door; this only resulted in a chipped point. He then climbed down without a word. After a short discussion between them, Mr Meiggs called up to me: 'Miss Himuro, we'll leave this ladder here and you'll have to use it when you want to go out – until the workmen come back.' I flinched: did I dare? Had I not been the clumsiest child at school sports? At that instant it flashed on me that that was the moment to act dramatically to appeal to the renowned gallantry of English gentlemen. 'But then there will be a lot of climbing-ups and -downs,' I ventured, 'I've got to go to midnight mass at Cherwell Edge, and tomorrow I'm going to Christmas dinner at my supervisor's house in my kimono,' putting emphasis on the ultimate word. The first was my true intention, but the latter, which I believe was what really worked, was, I confess, an improvised variation on the truth. For I had pondered for a considerable time the day before over the pros and cons of wearing a kimono (which is not a comfortable garment to be in unless you are used to it) for a big feast, and had concluded against it. Mr Meiggs exchanged a few words with Mr Andrew and called up again to my great relief: 'All right. Mr Andrew will go and fetch a hatchet.'

With a few blows the wood gave way. As soon as the faulty knob was removed, the door opened. A gust of fresh night air passed through the room, blowing down every Christmas card on the shelves. Mr Andrew did not stop to listen to my words of gratitude but said: 'I'll leave the hatchet with you. If someone walks in, use it.' Mr Meiggs was considerate enough to say, 'You have had enough excitement this evening. Come to coffee later.' Thus ended my adventure on Christmas Eve.

In the kitchen of the Praefectus's residence, Mr Meiggs made coffee for me, saying he had cleaned thirteen pairs of shoes that afternoon. He seemed content with his

contribution to the domestic chores on this special day of the year. Mrs Meiggs was as affectionate as ever. Her mother, who was staying with them, was in a hilarious mood: 'How very interesting,' she chortled. 'Anybody could say, "I went to the country for Christmas", or "I went to stay with my friends", but no one could say, "I got locked up in my room for Christmas". Oh, how fantastic!' 'You were lucky to have Marilyn around,' Mr Meiggs said, 'otherwise the scout might have found your skeleton on the floor in the New Year'. It was good to be linked again to the peaceful quotidian life from which I had been temporarily debarred earlier that evening. I went to midnight mass, and slept soundly overnight, the hatchet lying idle by the bedside.

The workmen came back after Christmas. They managed to do an excellent job on the damaged door: hardly a trace of the destructive act on Christmas Eve was visible even on a close inspection. Mr Andrew reverted to his old humourless self. And I, more than forty years on, still cannot pull a door shut behind me without a slight tinge of uneasiness.

Against Impact

JAMES LADYMAN

There are concepts that by their very nature are corrupting and falsifying. Repeatedly thinking about the world in terms of racial epithets (ethnophaulisms) is almost bound to lead to theoretical and practical error. Contemporary academia resounds with the inane and embarrassing, and debased and debasing language of 'research themes', 'knowledge transfer', and 'outputs'.

Most recently and most chillingly this managerial contagion has infected the funding policy of HEFCE and the Research Councils in the form of 'impact'. It is supposed to refer to the effects that research has on society, but it focuses our attention on the most narrow and short-term results of research and undermines the values essential to scholarship. It is proposed that in the REF 25% of funding be allocated on the basis of the assessment of impact. The positive effects of research-led teaching and the influence of researchers on the scholarly agenda of their peers worldwide do not count as impact, however. It is as if one were to assess the effect of doctors on society without regard to the healing of the sick.

The fruits of academic research pursued for its own sake have transformed society for the better time and time again, and intellectual enquiry undertaken in the spirit of curiosity is responsible for much of what we value in civilization, but this is all because researchers pursue truth and knowledge for their own sake. Those who would encourage us to pursue research with high impact are as misguided as the patron of the arts who makes it a condition of financial support that the artist concentrates on producing expensive paintings. Ultimately, the financial value of art is best predicted by its artistic merit. Similarly, the impact of academics is based on the fact that we do not pursue impact.

The impoverished minds responsible for the impact agenda would obviously not understand the old joke about the party held by utilitarians where everybody tried to maximize their expected utility; no fun is likely to be had under such conditions. It is astonishing that the ostensibly intelligent and knowledgeable people who are responsible for higher education policy should evince the combination of philistinism and ignorance responsible for the ridiculous and deplorable ideology of impact now being foisted upon us. Do they not recall the famous fact of Faraday being chastised for pursuing arcane research that would have no practical benefit? His discoveries, of course, led to the electric motor and the possibility of electricity generation. Have they so little learning as to be unaware that computers and information technology owe their existence to the recondite concerns of Frege or Russell and Whitehead who in seeking only to describe the foundations of mathematics for his own intellectual satisfaction ended up inventing modern logic and paved the way for artificial languages? Where precisely do they think that everything we see around us came from if not from thought often pursued only because the thinker was curious?

It is not as if evidence of the value of curiosity-driven research is lacking. In November 2008 the Russell Group produced a report based on a study of the commercialisation of eighty-two projects and found that the so-called 'blue-skies' research produced an average return more than twice that of the applied research.

Indeed, every time the elite universities, which are among the realm's most precious treasures, have been asked about the 'impact' agenda they have warned of grave consequences if it is pursued. Opposition to the impact agenda has united scientists and arts and humanities academics. Many thousands of academics have signed petitions calling for the abandonment of the policy. An open letter to the Research Councils (in *THE*, 5th November) was signed by ten Nobel laureates and twenty-six members of the Royal Society. However, those running HEFCE and the research councils have ignored the obvious absurdity and danger of the impact agenda because they can't stand up to their political masters (and, one suspects, the civil servants in the Treasury). A leaked document from the EPSRC makes it clear that all talk of impact is primarily intended for government consumption – which would be fine if they didn't then propose to make it a key determinant of funding (*THE*, 22nd October 2009). One of the captains of the sector was reported as saying at a recent meeting that he or she had "completely bought into the impact agenda", but was having trouble persuading those who actually do the research (*THE*, 5th November). It would be funny if it weren't so serious.

Of course, if the government was pouring money down the drain by using the criterion of research excellence for funding in the existing system, one could understand the need to make radical changes. However, as

things stand British universities number about twenty in the top one hundred in the world according to the league tables. No matter how flawed the latter are, we know that Britain punches well above its weight in academic affairs and hosts many more journals and scholarly presses than is proportional to our population, even among only advanced economies. Hence, we attract many overseas students and visiting academics and the net benefits to the economy are enormous. A Universities UK report launched on 3 November claims that the personal off-campus expenditure by international students and other visitors to British universities from overseas amounted to £2.3 billion in 2007-2008. These people come because of our deserved reputation for intellectual quality. Squandering the latter will even damage the economy in the short term. The AHRC estimates that every pound of research funding, currently distributed according to academic excellence, delivers a ten-fold return even in the short term and much more in the long term. Even if all one cares about is narrow economic impact the active pursuit of it will produce less of it. The absurdity of the impact agenda is that it will be counterproductive even with respect to short-term instrumental goals.

Impact can include the dissemination of academic research to the wider public and 'users', but why insist that scholars engage in knowledge-transfer and public-engagement events? There are plenty of people doing that sort of thing. Journalists and public intellectuals, popular science writers and commercial authors all work to good effect mediating between the academy and the wider public. There may be good academic reasons for partnerships with museums and galleries, but they do not apply to everyone. Furthermore, all the time one is engaged in knowledge transfer one is not carrying out research. When it comes to the sciences, there are venture capitalists and others who are always looking out for an opportunity to turn the results of research into a marketable product. There is no reason for academics to have to do so.

In the case of the arts and humanities the insistence on demonstrating impact and value for money is particularly unwarranted given that in public policy terms the amounts of money are so small. My department did very well in the last RAE and hence receives a relatively large share of the QR that amounts to the princely sum of about four hundred thousand pounds for a year. This for the research of up to twenty staff and the intellectual culture in which eighty plus postgraduates and about three hundred undergraduates study. What other part of the public or private sectors produces so much of value for such a little investment? The total budget of the AHRC for a year is less than the cost of the average completely worthless IT initiative in the NHS. It is of course completely negligible compared to the vast sums invested in the economy by the government in the recent economic crisis.

What is most infuriating about the debate about impact is the way its advocates have sought to characterize its opponents as people who want to be funded by the taxpayer to pursue their hobbies while being happy to contribute nothing to society. There are two points to be made in this regard. First, of course, we do not believe that the impact agenda will help universities contribute more to society than the vast contribution they currently make. Secondly, there is a sense in which universities *ought* to be ivory towers, because only people who are relieved of the pressure to make a fast buck can pursue the research goals that are so important for future, as-yet unforeseeable benefits to society.

The absence of any mention of teaching in the context of discussions of impact is also bizarre. Students at research-intensive universities are exposed to subjects taught by those actively engaged in advancing them. More importantly, academics exemplify for them the ideals of critical thinking, free and open enquiry, and the subordination of belief to argument and evidence. Many students are transformed by this process, and the effects of it stay with them as they pursue their careers. Can it be doubted that staffing the professions, the civil service and corporations with such people is of positive impact? Of course, many academics are far from perfect exemplars of the ideals of truth and objectivity, but the impact agenda will only further distance them from these noble goals as they instead seek sensational results, court publicity and otherwise prostitute their minds and their research in order to stay employed.

How did we get to this point? Blame must surely be laid at the door of the enthusiasts for the managerial initiatives and quality assurance processes that have progressively falsified the nature of academic research and teaching. Too much ground has been conceded to those who would have us believe that marking requires the explicit articulation of assessment criteria and who have marginalized academic expertise. Hence, we have arrived at the situation where the government calls for 'users' to play a role in setting curricula and assessing academic research–their complete ignorance about the discipline in question notwithstanding.

The way the managerial tail wags the academic dog is also in evidence in the decision by HEFCE radically to cut the number of subject panels in the REF from sixty-six to thirty by merging them and proposing single submissions from merged units of assessment. It is as if one declared that there are simply too many species of bat to remember so a simplified taxonomy must be introduced. The number of academic disciplines is not an exact matter and disciplinary boundaries are often vague and contested, but nonetheless distinct disciplines have different methodologies and forms of expertise. For example, philosophy and religious studies are very distinct subjects that will be merged on current plans. Many philosophers work exclusively in logic or philosophy of science and have effectively nothing in common with those studying theology or religious cultures and practices. If HEFCE do not back down, we will be assessed together and funded accordingly. Doubtless before long, some universities will decide to merge philosophy and theology and religious studies departments to match the funding regime, and appointment decisions in each subject will be distorted to strengthen the new combined unit of assessment at the expense of one or possibly both subjects.

The most fundamental values of scholarship and science are threatened. Academic freedom and intellectual autonomy cannot be taken for granted. Is it paranoid to imagine the people behind the impact agenda arguing that if you are paid by the taxpayer to do research, the taxpayer should be able to tell you what you should be researching? At a recent meeting of learned societies at the British Academy, David Sweeney, a senior figure in HEFCE, said that academic freedom is not a right but

a privilege. Apparently he is not aware of the Education Reform Act (1988) according to which "academic staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom and put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions". We should be grateful to him for making explicit the values of those behind impact and letting us know where all this is going. If we do not take a stand against the impact agenda and all it represents we betray reason and truth.

The impact agenda is often justified in terms of the need for academics to be accountable. Those of us who oppose it are caricatured as having an illegitimate sense of entitlement and a lofty contempt for the poor tax-payer's simple request to be assured that their hard-earned taxes are not being wasted. The idea that accountability is an innovation in academia – being introduced to universities by the impact agenda – is an egregious canard. We have been held to account and our department's publicly judged by the RAE for years. Then we have the QAA, subject review, external examiners, internal quality assurance procedures, the National Student Survey, league tables, and of course student evaluation questionnaires. How many of the bureaucrats regularly face a class of extremely bright, independent-minded students ready to call them on every infelicity of expression or argument? Facing criticism is part of our daily lives as we are held to account by our students when we teach, and by our peers when we give papers and submit articles or manuscripts. The constant invocation of the need for accountability ought to be directed instead at those who constantly meddle and tamper with academic affairs with their strategies, reorganizations and managerial fads.

I have campaigned against the impact agenda and other aspects of HEFCE and RCUK policy in the press and at meetings with the AHRC at which I represented *The British Society for the Philosophy of Science*. In October 2009 I posted a petition about the issue on the no.10 website (***petitions.number10.gov.uk/REFandimpact/***) that has had more than two and a half thousand signatories to date.

Commitment, Challenges and Creativity

JENNY EKELUND

AS speculation mounts over the likely success or otherwise of the Copenhagen climate talks, due to get underway next week, I have some sympathy for the negotiators aiming to thrash out a successor to the Kyoto protocol. One hundred and ninety-two countries have signed the climate change convention and each nation has its own particular set of challenges in relation to tackling climate change. Achieving agreement will be a fine balancing act.

The scientific consensus is that the world must stop the growth in greenhouse gas emissions and work towards a cut of 80% below 1990 levels by 2050 in order to limit global warming to a 2 degree average rise- the level the EU defines as "dangerous". The key questions remain. How will the burden be shared? How much are industrialised countries willing to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases and how is the help needed by developing countries to engage in reducing their emissions going to be financed? Simply put, who is willing to commit what and by when? As these critical talks are played out on the global stage, it is important that we as a University community do not lose sight of our own environmental responsibilities and reflect on what we are willing to commit.

Oxford's challenge, albeit on a smaller scale, is also complex. Through its Environmental Sustainability Policy, endorsed by Council in 2008, the University has adopted government targets to reduce energy-related building and process carbon dioxide emissions by 34% below 1990 levels by 2020 and 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. These are hugely demanding targets for a research intensive institution which has grown in size by 58% since 1990. Oxford's newer buildings, whilst built to a higher environmental specification than ever before, often consume more energy than their predecessors simply because they contain more advanced research equipment and cooling systems. This means that Oxford's carbon emissions per head are higher than less research intensive institutions- in part explaining our mid-table ranking in the 2009 People and Planet Green League of universities. This is not to say that improvement is not possible, just that we will need to be more inventive in our solutions.

As the newly appointed Head of Environmental Sustainability for the University, my role is to coordinate the University's environmental initiatives and provide strategic direction. Over the coming year, this will involve reviewing the existing policies and targets we have in place. The University's newly formed Sustainability Steering Group will take ownership of policy development and targets and will in turn advise the collegiate University of actions required to achieve these stated aims.

I join the University's existing team of Sustainability Officers focusing on energy, waste and sustainable travel. We will continue to work alongside departments and staff to implement the University's Environmental Sustainability Policy and provide practical advice and support. From January 2010, staff will also be able to access our new Sustainability website.

In order to meet carbon reduction targets the University community as a whole will need to think creatively about how to maintain excellence in learning, teaching and research whilst minimising environmental impacts. There can be no denying the scale of the task, yet Oxford is home to many of the world's leading researchers in the environmental field and it is clear that there are many staff and students keen to engage on this issue.

Like those meeting in Copenhagen Oxford must balance the aspirations of all its component parts when working towards environmental goals. Whilst the University's devolved structure may make it more challenging to set common objectives and targets our diverse composition also brings many rich perspectives and ideas. There is an opportunity over the coming years for Oxford to take a stronger lead in sustainability and as I settle into my new position, I very much welcome views from all those keen to see a more sustainable university emerge.

The Biographical Art

CONRAD KEATING

"Does Richard Doll have any vanities?" This was the intriguing question put to me by the writer Humphrey Carpenter in 2004 when we were discussing my biography of Doll*. I had not thought to ask it myself, but come to think of it, yes he did. He liked flamboyant ties and the bohemian style of dress he favoured in his communist days had been jettisoned for a sartorial elegance that has all but vanished from our dress-down amorphous fashion culture. Doll, however, saw it simply as "keeping up standards."

Socrates' declaration that "the unexamined life is not worth living" might well stand as Doll's epitaph. Certainly, while it is true that he went to great lengths to examine how others lived their lives, he also scrutinised his own with an equally dispassionate self-discipline. He did not live with illusions. Doll was not a naturally warm person and genetically he was well suited to epidemiology, which of all the medical disciplines is perhaps the most cold-blooded. Doll was a serious man and he used science to prevent premature death; he was engaged in serious work and there was no false modesty about whether he was the most capable person to carry it out. While remarkably free of intellectual snobbishness, he emanated an aura of being, in David Weatherall's words, "a superior kind of person."

For George Orwell, writing a book "is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness." For me, being a writer is like doing any other job in that it has its own problems and rewards. What *is* true is that it is not for the faint hearted. Writing should be fun and if a writer does not enjoy the process then clearly he should be doing something else. Nevertheless, there are still years of effort, worry and struggle. No freedom, no relaxation, no Sabbath, just endless stomach churning and after all of that there is still the question: "Did I get it right?"

I remember those far-off days when I started writing Doll's biography, I was infused with a sense of curiosity mixed with optimism, only later to discover that he was far from being an open book. Richard Doll was a public figure and a private man who used good manners to keep the extraneous world at arm's length. He camouflaged his emotions with an almost impenetrable layer of English reserve. This made the writing of his biography a far more difficult task than I had first imagined. Every biography is partly fictional in that it is impossible to know or write a complete life, the story is necessarily partial and selective. Even so it must follow the documented record and the obligations to history; it cannot be made up. Thomas Carlyle said that to write a life should be an act of sympathy, and "to have an open, loving heart" was the right way to begin. Many of the great biographies have been acts of love and friendship, but this wasn't how I could describe my relationship with Doll. I liked and respected Richard Doll while realising we had little in common, and why would we?

Others wanted to write his biography but what swung it for me was that we were compatible in our views of politics, history and literature. We both believed that I would be a sane narrator of his life. From the outset he said that he would co-operate fully in the project, even though he realised that the biography would inevitably uncover some painful truths about his life. Perhaps this was why he insisted that the book would only appear after his death. My one regret, although in retrospect it didn't alter the biographical story, was that I agreed to leave out certain events which he felt would be embarrassing for his family. He wasn't seeking personal exculpation. Perhaps of greater interest to the reader was that while excavating Doll's life, I uncovered some stories that I subsequently discovered he did not want me to find. Of course, these uncomfortable truths are in the book. He once told me, paraphrasing Oliver Cromwell, that he wanted a "warts and all biography", and I feel sure that he would have respected me less if I had not written about them.

Any biography needs a clear narrative thread running through the subject's life. Therefore I decided on the title *Smoking Kills: The Revolutionary Life of Richard Doll* because smoking forms the main theme of Doll's story as a scientist. The most important discovery in the history of cancer epidemiology was the carcinogenic effect of tobacco – a thesis with which Doll's name will be irrevocably linked. He perpetuated a beguilingly simple idea: Smoking kills. Lung cancer is the world's most common fatal cancer and almost 90% of the disease is found within those who smoke cigarettes. Most people will never have heard of his name, but by demonstrating how smokers could avoid premature death he deserves to be remembered with respect and gratitude. Doll's science was true and good and it has gone beyond the frontiers of Britain.

Doll was the opposite of parochial, more than any other physician he compiled data on cancer incidence from around the world and offered a scientific way of thinking that continues to guide medical investigators today. His findings give encouragement to all, and form the central pillar of Doll's general theory of carcinogenesis. "No cancer that occurs with even moderate frequency, occurs everywhere and always to the same extent." What Doll was saying, is that the principal causes of cancer are not genetic; they are environmental and therefore they are, in principle, preventable. It is a very simple line of inference indicating that wherever a particular type of cancer is common, it need not be, and every type is rare in some parts of the world.

You learn a lot about yourself writing a big biography over a long period of time. Your heart gets broken, friends die but the reality that life is well worth living remains unshakable. Of course Doll, even after his death, was always there beside me offering encouragement. His resolution and dedication to the task in hand was my inspiration and I remembered what he had once told me - that as one got older the ability to organise one's work becomes more important than pure intellect.

Biography is a response to the restless search for authenticity, putting an inbuilt narrative structure to the

**Conrad Keating's book is entitled* Smoking Kills: The Revolutionary Life of Richard Doll.

chaos of life around us. I didn't attempt to put Richard Doll into a prescribed straitjacket, but I did seek to understand how the age he lived through had imprinted itself on him and how he in turn had made such an extraordinary contribution to that world. The biographical art explores the fascinating question of what we can know about each other and how we can write about it. I also believe if you are going to write the biography of someone it is worth trying to understand them. What is undeniable is that anyone who reads my book will be able to judge if Doll achieved his life's ambition – "to be a valuable member of society." The world would probably be a better place if we all embraced that unselfish aim. Vanities notwithstanding of course…

The "Ultimate Fate of Oxford Medical Women" revisited*

MARGARET TURNER WARWICK

There are few longitudinal studies of women in medicine (Goldacre et al., 2009) and even fewer attempts to cover their entire working lives. I have not found any studies on whether women studying medicine at Oxford pursue similar or different careers to those from other medical schools. In 1962 Robb-Smith (RS) reported a 10 year follow up on a cohort of women who had been included in the rigorous quota of just 7-10 women per year who studied medicine and matriculated at Oxford between 1941-1950. He found that 29 of 89 (33%) had dropped out of medical work He also calculated that if they continued at the same level for the rest of their working lives they would contribute about 8 years full time equivalent (FTE) compared to 35 years FTE for men. Because of these disappointing figures his wife persuaded him to undertake a further follow up five years later with the proposed title of 'The Ultimate Fate of Oxford Women', but in spite of great efforts this has not been traced.

Since these calculations depended on an assumption of continued work patterns, it seemed important to establish what this cohort of women actually contributed to medicine throughout their working lives and the challenges this presented. In addition the opportunity was taken to contact a subset of some of those still living–now aged over eighty years–to obtain their personal views and experience of the changing medical profession and an evolving NHS over its 60 years. This is particularly relevant to the NHS today when the majority of medical students and qualifying doctors in the UK are women and have the same problems of balancing their professional lives with family commitments.

Methods

The names of those in the RS study or of those matriculating by subject were not available. However the Oxford Archives were able to provide the maiden names and their Colleges of all women who passed the 1st BM BCh between 1943 to 1952, which should reasonable correspond to those matriculating between 1941 and 1950. These data (125) will be referred as the Oxford Archives Data (OAD). This qualification was selected because, in these war years, not everyone took a third year to obtain an honours degree in Natural Sciences (physiology) and not everyone doing their clinical training in London returned to Oxford to qualify with an 2nd BM, BCh. Individual womens' College Registers were able to provide some career details and crucially were also able to provide most of their married names. This allowed further details of their subsequent careers to be traced through the 1976 *Medical Directory*. 1976 was selected because the Oxford women would have been about 45-50yrs and should therefore have obtained their senior definitive post, but would not yet have retired. If they were still working in the UK they were likely to retain an entry in the *Medical Directory*.

Obtaining data on those dropping out of medicine is notoriously difficult (Elston, 2009; Goldacre et al., 2009). However an attempt to get some reasonable estimate of those no longer practicing in the UK was based on the following assumptions; that there was no information on their medical employment in their Oxford College Register and there was no entry in the 1976 *Medical Directory* under either their married or maiden name, when both of these were known.

National data on womens' medical careers and 'drop out' rates were obtained through data provided by the NHS Information Centre, the Royal College of Physicians report (Elston, 2009) and Goldacre et al., 2009 .

In order to obtain more details on time committed to medicine over their entire career, and the experiences and views of some of those who were still living, the Oxford Medical Alumni were able to provide the married names and addresses of a sub group (57) of OAD which is referred to as the Oxford Medical Alumni Survey (OMA). This list included eleven who had died. Of the 46 living, 2 were known to have advanced Alzheimer's disease. Thus an introductory letter was sent to 44 women asking them to join the project. In order to jog their memories and give some focus to the study, they were provided with a 'semi-structured checklist' to obtain more systematic information of their experiences throughout their careers. These experiences will be published separately in Part 2 of this article. In particular they were asked how many years they had undertaken medical work, what combination of years of full time or part time work they had done and the average number of part time sessions/week. This was transformed into Full Time Equivalent (FTE) years.

** From a paper delivered to the Oxford University Alumni Reunion, September, 2009.*

Careers and Attrition Rates of the whole group (OAD) including the subgroup (OMA)

Of the total 125 medical women in OAD, career information was available on 96 (77%). Six died while still in training. Nine others were untraced for various reasons: four are known to have dropped out. It is unclear why we have been able to find more names (125) than Robb-Smith (93). This may have been due to marginal difference in the exact years studied (see methods). However it is reasonable to assume that most of his cohort has been included because the range of definitive career appointments are very similar in the two groups although the latter showed rather fewer senior hospital appointments and more junior hospital ones, probably reflecting those still in training and not yet achieving their most senior post. (Table 1)

However in marked contrast, the career specialty of 96 Oxford women in the 0AD differ substantially from the national data for women for 1976 (Table 2) with fewer Oxford women entering General Practice and more achieving senior hospital posts and entering Public Health and various types of Community Medicine.Notably similar to national trends, very few OAD entered acute general medicine or surgical specialties, preferring paediatrics, pathology and especially psychiatry and other special fields with more predicable hours. The distribution within hospital specialties is shown in Table 3.

An estimate of those 'dropping out' of medical practice before retirement age

In the OAD there were 23 (18%) who were either untraced (19) for a number of reasons, or who were known to have 'dropped out' (4) of medicine. It is recognised that this may be an overestimate because they may have gone abroad or have elected not to make an entry to the *Medical Directory*. However in spite of these factors, this estimate are about half that of 33% reported by Robb- Smith.

Table 1. Definitive career appointments of those in practice

Post	**OAD**	**RS* 1962**
General practice	20 (21%)	16 (27%)
Medical Consultant, Professors &/or Senior Research Posts	39 (40%)	19 (32%)
Public Health, Community Medicine and Government appointments	22 (23%)	14 (23%)
Associate Specialist/Clinical Assistant	15 (16%)	4 (7%)
Junior hospital or other		7 (12%)
Total	**96**	**60****

* Robb-Smith **Those in practice

Table 2. Career specialty comparing data from Oxford Alumni, Oxford Archives and national data for women doctors.

Category of doctor	**Oxford Alumni (OMA)**	**Oxford Archives***	**TOTAL (OAD)**	**%**	**%Adjusted to compare with National headings**	**National 1976****	**National 2007*****
	n=49	n=47	n=96			n=4638	n=28393
General Practitioner	14	6	20	21%	**21%**	**72.0%**	**51%**
Consultant/ Academic	20	19	39	40 %			
					49%	**23%**	**41%**
Associate Specialist/Staff	5	4	9	9 %			
Clinical Assistant	2	4	6	7. %	**7. %**		**4.%**
Public Health/Community Medicine	8	14	22	23%	**23%**	**5%**	**3.0%**

* i.e. OAD excluding OMA ** Estimated from Day (1982) *** NHS Information Centre (2008)

Table 3. Hospital specialties of Oxford women compared with national data

Specialty	Oxford Alumni & Archives n=96	%	1976		2007	
			Female n=4638	Male n=29106	Female n=28392	Male n=50694
Hospital medicine						
General Medicine	1	1%	4%	11%	**11%**	14%
Other Hospital *	23	24%				
			7%	2%	**11%**	12%
Pathology	8	8%				
Psychiatry	15	16%	5%	4%	**9%**	**7%**
Surgery	0	0%	**1%**	**8%**	**4%**	**16%**
Anaesthetics	**2**	**1%**	**5%**	**5%**	**6%**	**8%**
Paediatrics	5	**5%**	**1%**	**1%**	**5%**	**3%**

* including rheumatology, dermatology, anaesthetics, genetics, biostatistics, haematology, epidemiology, pharmacology, neurology and allergy and immunology

National data on attrition rates are very difficult to obtain (Elston, 2009). However in the recent review by Goldacre et al., (2009) 81% of women were working in the NHS after 25 year implying that 19% were not. This is remarkably similar to our estimate of 18%.

Time committed to medicine over the professional lifetime of the OMA group.

These data are difficult to compile because many individual records include various combinations of full time and part time work, the latter often including varying numbers of sessions over the years. In spite of these reservations reasonably accurate data have been obtained from the OMA survey.

The mean years in medical practice from qualification was 34 years (Table 4) and the mean FTE is 24 years (Table 5). Robb-Smith (1962) calculated that his cohort would be expected to work 8 FTE years (i.e. 24% of 35 years) of a full time professional life. Our follow up study (albeit on incomplete numbers) shows that they actually worked 68% (i.e. 24 FTE years) of full time 35 year career.

The majority continued to work until retirement; 73% working for 30 years and more. One is still in practice at the age of 83, as a Missionary in Pakistan after 60 years. Another is still in general practice (albeit for only a small number of sessions), after 50 years. Two consultant psychiatrists continued to undertake some work into their eighties. Around a quarter of the cohort worked full time and three quarters part time.

Summary and Conclusions

Lists of names obtained from the Oxford Archives (Oxford Archives Data-OAD) allowed data to be collected on the life time careers on 125 Oxford women obtaining 1st BM,BCh between 1943 –1952. This was used to ex-

Table 4. Years of professional medical work (Full and Part time) from qualifying

Years	OMA n=42	%
Less than 5	4	10
5-9	0	0
10-19	3	7
20-29	4	10
30-39	22	52
40 and over	9	21

Table 5. FTE/Years of professional medical work

Full Time Equivalent years	Number n=42	Percentage
Less than 5	4	10
5-9	3	7
10-19	10	24
20-29	13	31
30-39	10	24
40 and over	**2**	5

tend the 10 year follow up of Oxford women matriculating between 1941-1950, reported by Robb-Smith (RS) in 1962. For technical reasons the cohort was not identical to, but almost certainly included RS's original cohort (93).

As anticipated, the choice of careers in the RS cohort was similar to OAD, with 27% v. 20% entering General Practice, 24% v. 23% entering Public Health and Community Medicine of various types, 32% v. 40 % appointed to Hospital Consultants or Senior academic posts and 19 v. 16 % Associate Specialist/Clinical assistant or Junior hospital posts.

These preferences however contrasted markedly with national data for 1976 where, 72 % women were in General Practise, 5% in Public Health and 23% in hospital posts (including consultants, academic of staff grade).

On the other hand the selection of hospital based specialties in OAD shows very similar trends to national data for women compared to men, both in 1976 and 2007. Fewer women entering specialties involving unplanned hours e.g. acute medical, surgery and Obstetrics and Gynaecology and more selecting those with more regular hours e.g. neurology, psychiatry, rheumatology, dermatology, etc.

RS reported that 33% were no longer in medical practice at 10 years compared to an estimated 18% in OAD, suggesting that over half the original cohort returned to work.

RS predicted that if their time commitment at 10 years extended over their whole careers his cohort would contribute a mean of 8/35 (25%) full time equivalents (FTEs). In the OMA survey where details of working patterns had been recorded they contributed 24/35(68%) FTEs. While working times varied considerably throughout their careers, overall about 75% of OMA worked part time throughout their lives and 25% worked full time for at least a major part of the careers. 73% worked over 30 years, albeit many working part time. Thus the current study provides supportive evidence that the 1941-1950 cohort of women contributed substantially more time to medicine and many remained in medicine until their retirement, than suggested in the RS report.

Acknowledgements

Above all I would like to thank all the Oxford women who contributed data and responded so fully to my request for information about their long and interesting lives. I am also grateful to all those who helped me trace this group; particularly Jayne Todd, Director of the Oxford Medical Alumni, Staff of the Oxford University Archives, and those at the Oxford womens colleges who searched their Registers for data. I am also grateful for help from the Workforce Unit at the Royal College of Physicians, the NHS Information Centre and especially to Mary Elston, who collated data for the RCP report on Women and Medicine, and provided additional data and advice.

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“Not One”

MAX HAMMERTON

During the last academic year, I gave a series of lectures to a first-year class at a university. It is a genuine university, not a metastasised Poly, and, I understand, is in the top quarter of the ‘league table’. The degree course to which my lectures were attached is a popular one and, again I understand, the minimum entry requirement is AAB at A-level. I shall not be more specific, as I have no cause to suppose that my observations would have been any different at any of the universities ranked, let us say, from 6 to 40. The class numbered between 70 and 80 and thus constituted a reasonable sample of the better-prepared school leavers.

Early in the course I remarked that a craving for certainty is a widespread human characteristic, and that until well into the 19th century, it was generally believed that geometry provided such certainty about at least some aspects of the world. My first surprise was to find that *not one* of the class had heard the name of Euclid. I pressed my query, explaining that I was thinking of the man who produced a logically constructed summary of geometry around 300 BC, and whose book was the standard text for over 2000 years. Nothing doing: one student guessed Pythagoras and another Archimedes, but that was all.

Since I was covering the history of my topic, I had occasion to refer from time to time to the general historical background. I was in for some more surprises. *Not one* could tell me the centuries – not just the years, be it noted -- in which either the Spanish Armada or the battle of Trafalgar took place. (Since the bicentenary of Trafalgar had been celebrated only three years before, I had expected that someone would have noticed and recalled.) Whilst most, though by no means all, knew that Bach and Mozart were composers, *not one* would even hazard a guess as to the century in which they worked. By the time I came to refer to Edward Gibbon, I was not surprised that his name and that of his great work were alike unknown.

I was, however, surprised, and not a little shocked, when I found that, although about a quarter of the class had A-level maths, *not one* could tell me what a limit was, or state the expression for simple harmonic motion (s.h.m.). I wondered whether it might be simply a matter of nomenclature, which can happen, and that they knew both under different names. But no, they had never heard of either; and when I stated the expression for s.h.m., they gazed in wild surmise.

After this, it was a pleasure to find one student who had heard of St. Augustine. My pleasure was qualified when I found that it was the missionary saint of Canterbury, not the brilliant though repellent bishop of Hippo who was remembered. Still, it was something. I was surprised again, though, when I found that *not one* had heard of that very nasty, but very gifted man, John Milton. I came to realise, however, that, save for a few who had heard of Larkin, it had not been thought necessary to burden their minds with any poetry.

Enough: let me simply set down, in alphabetical order, some of the great thinkers and writers of whom *not one* had heard. Berkeley, Galton, Harrison, Helmholtz, Hobbes, Hume, Johnson (Sam of that ilk), Locke and Zeno had all become unpersons.

Yes, you may tell me that a similar number of my contemporaries would have been hard pressed to recognise all of these. True enough; but some of us would surely have known many, and perhaps most. You may say that some of the class may have known but were too shy to speak up. Maybe, although I have not noticed shyness to be a salient trait of today’s undergraduates. You may say that it ‘does not matter’ that some, or perhaps any one of these names should be forgotten; but all of them? You may certainly not say that it is acceptable that an A-level in maths can be gained without becoming familiar with either limits or s.h.m.

It is a great comfort to learn from our ever-truthful government, and from the educational establishment, that standards in secondary education have never been higher and are still rising.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Misako Himuro is Emeritus Professor at Waseda University • **James Ladyman** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bristol • **Jenny Ekelund** is Head of Environmental Sustainability • **Conrad Keating** is at the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine • **Margaret Turner Warwick** was President of the Royal College of Physicians • **Max Hammerton** is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Newcastle University • **Walter l. Meagher** is an American freelance biologist who lives in Deddington • **Anthony Edwards** is Emeritus Fellow of Caius • **David Palfreyman** is Bursar of New College • **Peter Schofield** is a retired Physicist • **Chris Sladen** is a retired Civil Servant • **Bernard Richards** was Fellow and Tutor in English at Brasenose • **Keith Gore** is an Emeritus Fellow of Worcester

On the road in Texas

WALTER L. MEAGHER

The border is a boundary of hope and agitation. Each person can be interrogated, only a few are searched, most are allowed to pass. Cars arouse suspicion more than persons – they are moving caverns of concealment. What are my rights? Can I call my lawyer? I suppose not – I travel light.

The great river (Rio Bravo, Rio Grande, proud names for one small river) is a piddle; a border without architectural or topographic presence. Dramas enacted here – 'Step out of the car, sir' – are not elevated by their surroundings. Guards, police and soldiers represent each nation, stand ready to stop, check and turn back or imprison the citizens of the other. Or their own.

Yet, even when the porosity of the long border is an issue, when Mexicans are being hated (they lower wages, they compete with American labour, they live in squalor, they worship statues), there is a free daily flow between the two nations: a hurry and a rush of hundreds, thousands, who walk across the border at Laredo – Nuevo Laredo, going both ways, mainly Mexicans. They live divided lives, riven by a river, buying clothing, food and toiletries in the USA, cooking tortillas on a comal and eating salsa and frijoles in Mexico.

I drove my car, stopping as bid. I was questioned – dogs sniffed round the vehicle. The Irish in me fanned rebellion, but I remained submissive. Alcohol? Agricultural products? How long have you been in Mexico? I was waved through, the next car motioned forward. Welcome to America!

Mexicans say it is not 'America'; Mexicans are Americans too; the proper name is *estados unidos*, they say. *Estados unidos* has clean water. I was on holiday, in my own country, no longer vigilant about protozoans and bacteria. 'En Guanajuato, el principal problema sanitario es el cólera...." I went to a hamburger place,not *McDonalds*, but the same idea, with clean toilets and fast service.

I took my place in a queue. She wore a special uniform and took my order. When I said, 'I'll have a hamburger', she said, 'Want somthin more?' 'A coffee, please.' She waited. 'That's all?' I said 'yes.' Efficiency had simplified language. The transaction was calculated airlessly, she said, '$7.89.' It was not service, but it was quick.

Following the prescription of Lawrence Sterne, author of *A Sentimental Journey*, I chose to give myself a treat, not to hurry on and drive straight to the herbarium of the University of Texas at Austin; I would putter along 'the Valley', a distinct area of south-east Texas, known for its warm climate in the winter months. I would cut the state into a small piece of itself. I refused to be overwhelmed by its size or the tedium of the part I would traverse. I might, as Lawrence Sterne would have hoped, meet someone and have a chat.

Once one is on the road in Texas, you can't stop, except for gas, and to pee, and for food and sleep, not otherwise. Each time you come to a historic marker or monument, you think, I'll see that, but I won't stay long. One may get a sense of this, the power of the road, in Larry McMurty's book, *Roads*. This is true of any nation with highways and motorways, but in Texas there is this difference: the landscape moves toward the road, the air and the heavens lift the car and propel it along.

Left alone, I travelled like a mollusc. Countryside doesn't have to be interesting to be noticed. People change it, even the Apache and Cherokee changed it. Texas wasn't what it was when the Apache were there, and it will change again. I ambled along Rt 83, next to the Rio Grande, and saw the cultivated fields of The Valley. Then turned north on Rt. 77 to Rt. 59.

On what basis is there solidarity in a nation? Is solidarity a goal more than a state or condition? Texans have a way of saying, We're Texans! Does that include all of them? Quite possibly it does. As you ride by, landscapes are 35mm slides in a home slide show with an automatically rotating carousel.

* * *

I met a man in Zapata. He crossed the Rio Grande in the dark, an illegal alien, a wetback, a long time ago. He became a farm labourer. Like a man who was in the army and fought on the front between the Bosch and the tommies, he wanted to tell his story, remembering the front more than his life afterward.

This naturalized citizen did what Americans do, what they have always done – he tried to move up a step or two on the ladder toward success. We didn't sit down, there was no shade in Zapata. He told his story with self-satisfaction. He went to technical school and became a carpenter. Then he became a building inspector, then a plumber. Unexpected horizons arose before him, gift of his courage, courage that had led him, long ago, to wade the Rio Bravo in the dark.

I didn't ask, Do you miss Mexico? He had put that behind him; the heart hardens to what it cannot have. Still, Mexicans miss Mexico. It is axiomatic. Even if they weren't born there, they miss Mexico. The nation implants in every child a fervent love of the homeland; no matter how poor a man might be, he thinks fondly of the land he has not seen since moving to Chicago.

When I met Pancho he was working in an architect's office and owned a coin-operated laundry in The Valley. He may yet rise higher. There are Mexican-American mayors and officials in all the settlements along the river. The Valley is an agricultural hotspot, producing asparagus and tomatoes earlier than anywhere else. Farms are large and labour cheap. Where winter never comes, couples from cold climes retire or come for the season with their 'mobile homes'.

A friend would be good. Long distance truck drivers have CB radios. They talk to each other, coming over the mountains of Tennessee. Even ciliated organisms spend time touching; ants do too, checking each other's tribal affiliation along a foraging trail. That's what conversation is for, swap tales and affirm one's tribal identity. When John Steinbeck went forth to 'check out' his country, he took his French poodle, Charley. I didn't have a

dog, but I wasn't on a long journey: Texas made it seem long, with mile after mile of scrubland along my way north. Land that thrilled settlers. Land! And more Land!

* * *

I appreciated the richness of The Valley but in principle I didn't care for an agriculture founded on cheap labour; yet one must be realistic. Mexican labour, cheap labour, is essential for low-cost vegetable production; poverty and plenty bed together, as in *Grapes of Wrath*, but not so bad that it is better to be in Mexico. It is not. So I headed north from Harlingen on Rt. 77 toward Kingsville, 90 miles north and 25 miles inland, running parallel the whole way with the Gulf of Mexico.

The entrance to Padre Island National Seashore, the largest remaining stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the world, is at Corpus Christi; but I wouldn't go that far. It was enough to know that 130,434 acres had been set aside for wildlife, for protecting the migratory birds (380 species documented) and the sea turtles that nest there. Doubt not my enthusiasm for the scale of their country – Texas – and the vigoiur of their effective wish to safeguard it. Lady Bird Johnson cajoled the public works department of the state government to plant bluebells (lupines) and manage hundreds of miles of highway verges with wild flowers.

Texans talk about space. You would too, if you felt you belonged to a state bigger than some nations. Speaking of space, W. P. Parker, on a government expedition in 1849, wrote of the savannah country of the Brazos River (Robstown is just about in Brazos country):

> *'The view was the most extensive and glowing in the sunset, the most striking that we had enjoyed in the whole trip, combining the grandeur of immense space - the plain extending to the horizon on every side - with the beauty of the contrast between the golden carpet of buffalo grass and the pale green of the mesquite trees dotting its surface.'*

You will not tire of bigness once you are here, except possibly driving west from Austin to El Paso after leaving the Hill Country, or from Austin to Dallas, or between Houston and Dallas. I am partial to scrubland, to mesquite trees, to road runners and scissor-tailed flycatchers; I like back roads, roads west from San Antonio, the road to Rio Hondo and west across the Pecos River: the country Billy departed for Mexico in Cormac McCarthy's book, *All The Pretty Horses*.

The King Ranch is fabled as the largest ranch in southeast Texas. Founded in 1853, it almost expired in the 1890s when cattle died in the drought; but then water was found at 523 feet, a bonanza that revived the ranch, growing to 1,250,000 acres. It is still very much a leader, breeding cattle fit for dryland conditions., notably the Brahman breed.

Town-making is an American saga, the nation's history a succession of frontiers moving from east to west, first over the Appalachian Mountains. Kingsville had about 400 residents before the first passenger train came in 1904; the ranch, then the town. To attract settlers it was necessary to boast about the advantages of a site where a town could be built. Today Kingsville is a going concern with 20 restaurants,12 motels and 10 churches; it has one golf course, 5 estate agents, 5 dentists and 4 mobile home parks. But the cinema is gone.

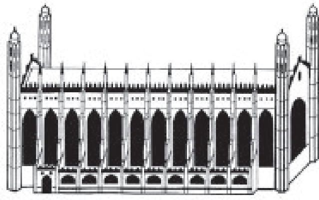
I drove on, past Kingsville, and finally stopped at a pre-modern *Texaco* station, in Robstown, population 15,000. I thought of Edward Hopper's painting, '*Gas*' (1940), a picture I love: an elderly man in a tie and waistcoat with a long-sleeved blue shirt stands at a gas pump; it is late in the day; there is no car at the pump, it has just pulled away leaving the empty evening behind; the man is possibly the proprietor; this was his stake in the expanding nation; worn by age, worn by isolation and the lapse of optimism, we wonder, Did he vote for the New Deal? Will he vote for going to war?

Robstown, and Texas, is the repulsion of Hopper's emptiness. Life is buoyant here. The gas station in Robstown was a social centre, truckers and ranch hands drove in to fill up and chat, Texas at its 'downhome' best, a place that is held up every now and then, but not by local boys. There's beer in the fridge and party ice in the ice chest. Girlie mags and knives for sale, and a competitor across the way. There's a restaurant next door, a *Denny's*. The food was as cheap as in Mexico, and there were Louisiana hot sauce and toothpicks in a small Tabasco sauce bottle.

* * *

I mentioned Mexico to the man next to me. We sat on revolving stools. Faster service at the counter, you can see the pies, and the waitresses are more chatty. He said, 'Hell, I aint got nothin ginst Mexicans. They're all over the place up here. Slow but steady, good workers, in their own way. But they haven't got a brain in their heads for business', I told him about the man down in The Valley who had his own coin-operated laundry. 'Sure, some makes it, but most don't. You from the East?', he asked, with a touch of suspicion, suspecting me, as well he might, of 'liberal thoughts and liberal inclinations.'

The editors welcome letters and responses to material published in the *Magazine*. Please address all correspondence to Tim Horder at *tim.horder@dpag.ox.ac.uk*.



Notes from Cambridge

Showing visitors round the Old Courts of Caius requires a certain humility. Across a narrow lane to our north lies Trinity Great Court, into which one could probably fit our entire Old Courts, whilst to our south sit the 1730 Senate-House and Cockerell's magnificent University Library built in 1837, now the Caius Library. Behind the Library, and actually joined to it, is the University's ancient Regent House from 1400.

After their tour of our Old Courts I take visitors to Trinity, but never through the Great Gate. I guide them through the gate opposite the Caius kitchens and through a little passage in the south-west corner of Great Court. Even after sixty years the explosion of space as one enters the court still takes me by surprise. It is a stunning entrance.

Unlike the Sheldonian, the Senate-House is permanently shut to visitors, so after the Caius Library (no need for humility there) I take mine straight to the Regent House, the first-floor room built as the meeting-house and chapel of the combined Regent and non-Regent masters. The Victorians had planned to pull it down as part of the rebuilding of the Old Schools of which Cockerell's vast Library was the first phase, and the two buildings are like siamese twins. Entrance to the Regent House is through a modest doorway on a landing of Cockerell's grand staircase which leads on up to the Caius Upper Library.

Once again there is an explosion of space as one enters the famous room. The doorway is near the end of one of its long sides, ensuring an unforgetable impression as one sees the room for the first time. It is not the medieval entrance, but one created by Cockerell out of a window embrasure. The medieval entrance is still visible diagonally across the room, a small doorway, long bricked up, originally reached by an outside staircase.

Ironically though, Caius does have the best view in Cambridge. Dr Caius insisted that his pretty court should be open to the south to let in the air and light, and from a particular point in it known to every photographer one sees his renaissance Gate of Honour, and beyond it, framed by the Senate-House on the left and the Cockerell Building on the right, the great horse-chestnut tree, then King's Chapel, and then the east front of the Old Schools with the original wall of the Regent House just visible behind it. I do not know why, but the tree is known as the Registrary's tree; Dorothy Needham (b.1896), wife of Joseph, the Master of Caius, once told me she remembered it being planted.

During the last long vacation (except we are not allowed to call it that any more) the University refurbished the Regent House, used since the 1950s as a Combination Room for members of the modern Regent House (= Congregation). Caians going up and down to the Library noticed that to the left of the entrance, part of the dais had been removed, and we supposed that some problem had been found, dry rot or leaking plumbing perhaps. One Monday morning in September I met two friends coming from taking coffee in the renovated room who told me that the work was actually preparatory to the installation of a lift planned to erupt through the floor into a box the size of four telephone kiosks tight-packed in a square in the north-east corner of the room. I could hardly believe them, and was as appalled as they were.

The Regent House is the most beautiful, the oldest, and, in the words of Willis and Clark in their *Architectural History*, 'the most important' room belonging to the University. Purpose-built as meeting-house and chapel, it was licensed by Pope Boniface IX, who also licensed the Caius chapel, and I have seen no evidence of it ever having been deconsecrated. It came into use in the year 1400, and was described in 1438 as being of 'surpassing beauty'. Though it does not quite match your Divinity School in splendour, it is older, and is historically the most important room in the universities in the English-speaking world. It is the cradle of our democracy, our Westminster Hall, built at exactly the same time that Richard II was rebuilding Westminster Hall with its fabulous hammer-beam roof, and miraculously surviving the construction of the Cockerell Building just as the Hall had survived the Westminster fire of 1834 three years earlier. Its first recorded event was in September 1401 when the Archbishop of Canterbury and his entourage made a visitation to the University during which the Chancellor, Doctors, and Masters assembled and rendered obeisance. The Archbishop then questioned the Chancellor as to whether the Statutes were being observed. (Our Board of Scrutiny should arrange a repeat.)

For its first three centuries all the business of the University was conducted in the Regent House, all the Congregations of the Regents and their discussions, votes, and disputations, as well as their Commencement ceremonies, until these grew too large and had to be moved to Great St Mary's. But that was hardly a permanent solution for the growing University, and in 1730 the long-planned Commencement House or New Regent House was inaugurated, later to be called the Senate-House.

Pressure to build anew had also come from the need for the Library to expand into the Regent House, and for the next two centuries it held part of the growing collection of books, finally ending its library duty in 1934 as the Catalogue Room when the new University Library was opened and the Regent House could once again be seen in all its uncluttered beauty. Once again it became the House of the Regents. Under the 1923 Oxford and Cambridge Act, most of the powers of the Senate were to be transferred to a House of Residents, and happily the framers of the 1926 Statutes adopted the term 'Regent House' instead, which is the usage that comes most readily to mind today.

It is unthinkable that the symmetrical open space of the Regent House should be despoiled by a lift structure,

but the unthinkable was actually happening. Nobody had told the members of the Regent House that their designated Combination Room was to be altered; no plans had been laid on their table; no notice had appeared in the *University Reporter*; and no-one had remembered the statute that requires the Regents to approve by Grace any 'substantial alteration' to a University building.

When challenged, the University maintained that the work was too insubstantial to require a Grace and declined to call a halt to it. Ten members of the Regent House then called for the matter to be put down for a Discussion as 'a topic of concern to the University' (in the words of the relevant Ordinance). This was unaccountably delayed until 10 November. The Registrary declined a request to display the plans for the Discussion. The speeches made were published in the *Reporter* of 18 November (***http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/current/weekly/6167/section8.shtml***), and contain more of the story as well as some trenchant opinions and a helpful comparison with the saga of your Divinity School statue by Professor Evans.

It is depressing to trace the bureaucratic trail. It starts, quite properly, with the Joint Committee on Disability, from where it is taken up by the Minor Works Review Group. Once it had been designated a 'Minor Work' nobody took much notice of it, and the Resource Management Committee approved the lift without seeing any plans (a committee unknown to Ordinances which seems to have usurped the function of the Buildings Committee of the Council and General Board which is in *Ordinances* and is supposed to keep an eye on these things), and without any minute to the effect that a room of huge historic significance was at risk, or that a Grace might be required. Whether that Committee works under delegated authority or via the Council I know not, and the Council minutes do not mention it, but it is said that the lift was on a list the Council saw, again without any plans. From there the proposal went directly to the City Planning Authority without approval by the Regent House. The Conservation Officer is reported as having suggested that the project should only be approved if a staircase was constructed at the same time. English Heritage said no to a staircase, but nevertheless the project was approved as a 'Delegated decision', so the Planning Committee did not see it either.

So ends Act I of *The Disgraceful Lift*. Once a Minor Work, always a Minor Work. Act II starts with the hole in the floor followed by the rumoured news that it is for a lift, and continues with the Registrary's defence that it is a Minor Work. It culminates in a statement by Professor A.D.Cliff at the Discussion that 'The decision not to promote a Grace is consistent with all similar decisions taken over the last decade as regards minor works projects'. But that is economical with the truth: there never has been a *decision* not to promote a Grace. No-one ever looked at Statute F, I, 2. They are only minor works after all.

Act III is in progress as I write. Its ending should not be in doubt, but it will be a skilful playwright who extricates the University from its predicament without embarrassment. And if he scripts the unthinkable instead, what a monument to the octocentenary celebrations it will be, a plastered sarcophagus containing the remains of both Regent Houses.

A.W.F. EDWARDS

The Sacred Peepal Tree, *ficus religiosa*, in Bihar, India

The Bodhi tree at Bihar is unwell.
The great Tree of Wisdom,
where Lord Buddha saw the light,
is shedding its springtime leaves
and happiness. Experts will arrive.
Before, it was the mealybug
or carbon soot from candles,
votive tokens by the thousand,
now relegated to a room nearby.
Perhaps the £5 *per* leaf
the monks charge could be the cause
of moral indignation in Gautama.
Or is this a graver warning to the world
from the re-Awakened One?

ROY DAVIDS

Roy Davids was formerly head of Department of Books and Manuscripts at Sotheby's. His book White noise *was published in 2006.*

TO THE EDITOR

ERIH

Sir — I read with interest the items in the Fifth Week *Oxford Magazine* discussing the European Reference Index for the Humanities ('Journals under Threat' and 'A reply to criticism'), in which a consortium of journals in History of Science, Technology and Medicine announce their withdrawal from the scheme.

I was interested in the claim amid responses from the ERIH executive office that they had not received 'any other request for withdrawal except from the History of Science journals'. Unless that claim was made very early in 2009, it is mendacious. Already in its first issue of this calendar year, the *Scottish Historical Review* announced that it was also withdrawing from the scheme, and I commend to your readers the eloquent denunciation of the ERIH there published at pp. 1-2 besides that already published in your own esteemed magazine.

By a decision of the Board of the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, of which I am co-Editor, our Journal is also letting the European Science Foundation know that we are withdrawing, and we will publish an announcement to that effect in our issue of January 2010. I urge all those who edit journals in the Humanities to follow suit. It is important that we sabotage this ill-considered attempt to provide some bureaucratically-assessed standard of excellence among Humanities journals, by treating the scheme with the contempt it deserves.

Yours sincerely

Diarmaid MacCulloch

St Cross College

Committee – Speak

Sir — As a retired academic I am not personally affected by the plans proposed by the European Reference Index for the Humanities, but past experience leads me to note the evidence for Committee-Speak in their "Reply to the Criticism" (*Oxford Magazine,* No 293). It is not difficult to identify Committee-Speak, for it is normally distinguished by three characteristics:

1. Reliance on the passive voice. This suggests that there is no agency involved in various actions and decisions but rather that some unidentified impetus propels matters forward.

2. Excessive abstraction. Abstract language suggests that mighty and impressive things are under way, so mighty and impressive that only a petty pedant would seek the particulars.

3. Absence of any clear lines of authority or responsibility. This absence follows from 1 and 2 above.

I don't want to prolong this letter with excessive citation, but perhaps readers will be patient enough to allow me a few:

1. The passive voice: "...was thus not conceived..." (p. 21, col. 2, l. 4). "...were contacted..." (p. 21, col. 2, l. 11). "...expert panels were appointed..." (p. 21, col. 2, l. 16). "Great care was taken..." (p. 21, col. 2, l. 19). "...was avoided..." (p. 22, col. 1, l. 1). "... were then verified..." (p. 22, col. 1, l. 2). "... was validated..." (p. 22, col. 1, l. 3-4). And so on. I'm sure readers can find many other instances.

2. Abstraction: "...scientific production in the Humanities..." (p. 21, col. 1, l. 6) = research papers? research papers in refereed journals? lectures? TV appearances? articles in the popular press? "... a bibliometric tool..." (p. 21, col. 2, l. 4) = a tape measure/ruler for books? a means of measuring the content of books? "...solid scholars with an international reputation..." (p. 21, col. 2, l. 21), who they? "...scientific integrity of the process..." (p. 23, col. 1, 3 lines up) = invoking science in the service of what will prove an exercise in subjective judgment, whether by an individual or a group. "Humanities scholars are being presently evaluated in many different fora (!) on the basis of inadequate instruments" (p. 22, col. 2, ¶ 5, ll. 1-2) = This petty pedant is hugely gratified to see the plural of forum used in an English sentence, but the vagary of the assertion impresses me too. Authors whose work is valuable to me I respect. Equally I respect scholars of whose work I know only the bare outlines but whose reliability is asserted by those I respect. I rarely consult any printed or web reference to see if Prof X or Dr Y is a respectable scholar. And so on.

3. Authority and responsibility: ESF seems to be the parent body (p. 21, col. 1,), though it is not itself responsible to the EU (p. 23, Q 8). To whom is it then responsible? Who funds it and does it not submit a report to the funding body? Does the funding body have any authority over its activities? The ESF evidently appoints the Standing Committee of the ERIH (= European Reference Index for the Humanities) (p. 21, col. 2, point 3). This Standing Committee in turn appoints (perhaps, the passive verb is 'were appointed') fifteen expert panels (p. 21, col. 2, l. 16). Presumably the panels report/make recommendations to the Standing Committee who in turn report to a higher body in the ERIH? to the ESF itself? Who directs the investigations of the fifteen panels? And so on.

Reading Committee-Speak is not informative. Several sentences left me wondering just what they meant, like this one: "Furthermore there are specificities in the Humanities in terms of cultures of publication and traditions of citations, which make it meaningless to use many of the methods used in the other sciences" (p. 21, last sentence in ¶ 1). I defy anyone to translate that into English. Reading Committee-Speak exposes the reader to a clunking and mind-dulling prose that obscures the presumed intent – is it meant to put the reader off, inducing his agreement through sheer weariness?

Reading this particular example of Committee-Speak led me to wonder just who these people are. Can they consult a general bibliography? Aren't there bibliographies specific to their various fields? Can they find what they are looking for on the web? Is there any real need for the Index they propose? Or will it rather serve administrators in their judgment of scholarship which they are otherwise unqualified to judge?

Yours sincerely

L.M. Eldredge

Classics

Admin expansion

Sir — Felicity Cooke (*Oxford Magazine* No 293) wonders how I "arrived at" my "estimate" of 30 staff in the Equality and Diversity Unit. By counting names in the University telephone directory for 2008-9. (Sophisticated stuff.) Since then the 2009-10 directory has appeared, with the figure reduced to 25. Good news? Not necessarily, it turns out. Felicity Cooke states by implication that the staff are mostly part-timers, the Full Time Equivalent number being currently 11. She doesn't tell us what it was a year ago. It may have been smaller – in which case, bad news. She also puts a redundant gloss on the Unit's programme for Black History Month: of course advisors or performers are not the same thing as organisers/convenors.

Bruce Ross-Smith's vantage point *(ibid.)* from outside the University leaves him in fact at a disadvantage. He confuses two quite different things. First, the commitment to equality and non-discrimination. Second, the activity of the E & D Unit. It is precisely the embeddedness of the commitment in academic structures and procedures across the collegiate University that puts in doubt the rationale of expenditure on the Unit.

To illustrate. The biggest item listed by Felicity Cooke is: "support for over 1000 disabled students". Much support received by these students is provided by their colleges and departments - which arrange access and accommodation as well as medical and other ancillary services for them - and by tutors and supervisors who guide their academic work (after admitting them to the University in the first place). What material addition to the process is made by 4.6 extra administrators in Wellington Square remains unclear.

To be sure, this situation is not peculiar to the E & D Unit. The past decade's expansion of central administration as a whole has been propelled not by intrinsic need but by the drive to assert central control over departments, faculties and

colleges hitherto imbued with Oxford's culture of decentralised decision-taking.

Yours sincerely
PETER OPPENHEIMER
Christ Church

Radcliffe Infirmary plans

Sir — The University plans for the Radcliffe Infirmary site were shown to members of the public on 15-16 October. They were, for a short while, available for viewing by members of the University at the University Offices. It is, I think, surprising that they have not generated discussion in the *Oxford Magazine*.

The plans for the Woodstock Road frontage of the huge new Mathematical Institute seem ill thought out. The prospective building will dominate the adjacent Green College, literally dwarfing one of the most 'town-friendly' College buildings on the Woodstock Road. The envisaged building has no integral relationship to the Infirmary buildings. Its facade (similar to the new St Anne's building set well back from the Woodstock Road, and orthogonal to it) is utterly incongruous with the eighteenth century Infirmary – presenting to view a series of open boxes, with bronze shutters on one side of altogether functionless north-facing balconies. It will mar the exceedingly pleasant entry to Oxford from the north by presenting a sequence of meaningless repetitive boxes and balconies looming over the Woodstock Road wall.

It is surprising that the University plan does not re-instate the grand horseshoe-shaped staircase that originally led to the main entrance to the building on the first-floor. That was removed in the nineteenth century due to medical exigencies that no long arise. It would surely be appropriate to recreate the staircase as originally designed, which gave proper emphasis to the central block of the building and to the entrance, as well as dignity to the whole courtyard.

The proposed alterations to the nineteenth century county hospital that flanks the Infirmary on the south are incongruous. For they include filling in the whole of the space between the east and west blocks with a large glass construction wholly out of keeping with the rest of the building and with the main Infirmary. This construction destroys the architectural sense of the classical structure of the nineteenth century building that harmonizes with the eighteenth century Infirmary. It is comparable to the disastrous fill-in imposed on Robert Adams' pepper-pot domes building adjacent to Charing-Cross Station in London.

It is unfortunate that the plans for such a large architectural project should be so insensitive to its impact on the Woodstock Road, and so contemptuous of the eighteenth and nineteenth century architecture upon which it encroaches.

Yours sincerely
P. M. S. HACKER
St John's College

REVIEWS

The price of a degree

McMahon, W. W. (2009), *Higher Learning, Greater Good: The Private and Social Benefits of Higher Education* (Johns Hopkins), h/bk, 415 pp.

OVER the Summer Simon Jenkin, the *Guardian* columnist, summed up modern higher education as simply a consumer service, and of no great significance for the economy other than it serving as a consumption good. In this book, McMahon 'sets forth a modern human capital approach to higher education policy in the United States that also [applies] in other developed OECD member countries'; and McMahon unashamedly argues that higher education is a jolly good thing which deserves more spending both by students (and their parents) and also by the taxpayer so as to maximise the volume of higher education and achieve ultimate economic efficiency.

At a time when US State governments are slashing the budgets for their university systems, and when much the same is due to happen in the UK after the impending General Election, McMahon's book is indeed timely, if, one fears, ultimately in vain in attempting to change what looks like the inevitable course of Government policy towards the financing of higher education – that is, ever-increasing taxpayer retreat (in effect, 'the privatisation of the financing of higher education').

McMahon essentially poses the question: 'what is the level of total investment in higher education financed by both private and public sources that is economically efficient for growth and broader development?' A second-order question then arises: 'How far should the degree of privatisation in the financing of public and private education continue to go if higher education is to be economically efficient in serving the greater good?'

Answering these questions is not at all easy – and especially for the non-economist lay-reader! Even for the economist, it involves complicated issues such as placing an economic value on non-market outcomes such as the better health apparently experienced by graduates and their being less likely to indulge in crime (other than perhaps white-collar fraud whilst employed in the financial services industry!). That said, McMahon stresses: 'The book assumes very little or no prior knowledge of economics.' (Those scared of this dismal science that is reduced to graphs and equations should, therefore, carefully avoid the frightening material, especially on page 198!)

The essential thesis is that: the modern economy demands ever-better educated citizens and the USA is slipping behind some other OECD countries (notably in the production of scientists); economic efficiency demands that there is the optimum investment in higher education; market failure to recognise the full value of higher education (taking into account non-market factors) means that there is currently under-investment both by individuals and by the taxpayer; hence there is economic inefficiency in the supply of higher education.

McMahon works his way through the key issues in higher education policy: access/widening-participation, affordability, accountability to the State, and privatisation (as already referred to), along with the emerging major skill deficits for the US economy. He sums it up, however, as: 'all of these policy issues have a common underlying major source: the decline in real terms student public funding' (in UK parlance, the ever-declining 'unit of resource' for the taxpayer financing a year of undergraduate teaching).

McMahon is absolutely clear that higher education contributes 'significantly to jobs and to economic growth'; he is utterly dismissive of the concept of 'over-education' as propounded 'by the sceptics' who 'maintain that education provides only for screening, sorting, and sifting rather than creating human capital that is productive': 'the screening, diploma disease, and signalling hypotheses all deny the productivity of human capital; exaggeration of the scope to which they apply cannot be supported by the evidence. The prediction of over-education, if carried beyond isolated instances, is debatable at best. Instead, the evidence suggests that new technology created by investment in R & D and embodied in human capi-

tal throughout higher education is highly productive and commands a premium on the job market as a result. The effects from new technology or knowledge and the effect from the human capital formation cannot be cleanly separated…'.

In fact, how to decide which bit of higher education contributes what amount to economic growth is rather a problem: the bit by way of research, intellectual property exploitation, technology transfer and all that; or the bit by way of producing chirpy, eager, educated young graduates. McMahon ducks the issue, as indeed do economists en masse, and about the only economist who can be bothered to try and explain all of this to non-economists is Helpmann (2004, *The Mystery of Economic Growth*, Harvard University Press), who concludes that, in fact, it is 'institutions that promote the rule of law, enforce contracts, and limit the power of rumours [which] are important for economic development [insofar as] they determine the ability of countries to accumulate, to innovate, to adopt new technologies, and to reorganise in the face of technological change… For these reasons institutions are more fundamental determinates of economic growth than R & D or capital accumulation, human or physical… [yet] the study of institutions and their relation to economic growth is an enormous task on which only limited progress has been made so far.' So, extra spending on HE may not after all be the panacea for economic growth, even if it may make us all happier, more civilised, more cultured, more tolerant, etc.

One reason that McMahon finds the economic value of higher education to be seriously under-estimated is that he attaches significant value to the private non-market benefits of higher education which 'include better own-health as measured by health status, greater longevity, better-educated and healthier children, smaller families with less poverty, increased probability of having a college-educated spouse, and greater happiness..' He estimates that these non-market benefits are 'equal to or greater than the value of the market benefits', and hence 'the total return on investment in higher education is about twice the standard narrow rates of return based on earnings alone'. Thus, if such narrow rates of return are the ones used by families and governments when deciding whether or not to invest in higher education, 'they underestimate the true return and there is under-investment' – and hence economic inefficiency arising from this market failure.

Moreover, the *social* benefits of higher education in the form of externalities that add to Society are also under-estimated and under-valued. They are only now being properly evaluated via the development of the endogenous growth theory that McMahon's entire book is so dependent upon. These wide non-market social benefits are from citizens who have had higher education and are alleged to include: a greater belief in and support for democracy, a commitment to human rights, the underpinning of political stability, longer life expectancy, the erosion of economic inequality, lower crime-rates, lower welfare and medical costs for society, better attention to the environment, and overall greater social happiness; *and* the development of new knowledge for the economy and society. When attempts are then made to translate all of this into an income equivalent we get to the idea that these social externalities amount to about half of the total benefits of investment in higher education, *and* hence the related idea that about half of the total investment in higher education 'needs to be publicly financed if economic efficiency is to be achieved'. McMahon's figures for the total social rates of return are 'very substantially above the 10% standard benchmark for the opportunity costs of funds', and hence this strongly suggests 'that [public taxpayer] investment in higher education is significantly below optimum'.

Thus, it can be asserted, according to McMahon, that in policy terms the USA (and by implication the UK and most EU countries) is under-investing in higher education in terms of the amount that the taxpayer spends, given the potential return on such investment by way of the socially valuable externalities now, supposedly, at last far more accurately valued.

DAVID PALFREYMAN

Dangerous Liaisons

Guiseppe Verdi: *La Traviata,* Welsh National Opera, New Theatre, Oxford, 6 November 2009. The Holywell Music Room renovation.

THE two extremes of opera production are those where the director sets out to be totally faithful to the ideas and intentions of the composer and librettist, resulting in a completely unified and satisfying operatic experience, to those where the director sets out deliberately to defy the intentions of the composer and to impose his own agenda on the work. Examples of the former extend from most, though not now all, of the productions of the New York Metropolitan to Ellen Kent's Opera International; recent examples I have been fortunate enough to be able to report are Glyndebourne's 2009 *Rusalka* and the Met's *Aida* (albeit in the cinema - but live). At the other extreme, I remember with horror *Don Giovanni* at Glyndebourne in 2000, *Das Rheingold* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Riga in 2006; Wagner seems particularly susceptible for reasons not entirely inexcusable. Most opera productions these days fall between these extremes, from simply moving the action in time or place to making a major adaptation, for example to fill out a plot or other perceived weakness in the opera (the NY Met's recent *Sonnambula* for instance). A common temptation is to seek to add 'significance' by making allusion to related works, themes or historical events. There is a fine line between whether or not such productions succeed but one can usually sense whether it is the opera or the director's ego which has prevailed. A prime example is the talented director Graham Vick who has migrated from one extreme to the other, with the long running Covent Garden *Meistersinger* at one end to the above-mentioned *Don Giovanni* at the other, the watershed perhaps being the highly imaginative production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* for Glyndebourne in 1999. One awaits with trepidation his version of Handel's *Tamerlano* at the ROH in the spring.

This preamble is provoked by the subject of this review, WNO's new production of Verdi's *La Traviata* directed by David McVicar which, in my view, comes close to crossing the line. This is a joint production with Scottish Opera and Gran Teatre del Liceu given by Welsh National Opera on tour in Oxford, replacing in WNO's repertoire that of 2004 directed by Patrice Caurier and Moshe Leiser. McVicar has been responsible for many of the most exciting operatic experiences in the UK in recent years, as well as having had a prolific international career. Outstanding among his credits are Handel's *Agrippina* (seen at ENO in 2007) and *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Glyndebourne 2005), more recently *Salome* at ROH (not uncontroversial) and now, attracting rave reviews, *The Turn of the Screw* at ENO.

Both *Traviata* productions set the scene in a period other than the mid-nineteenth century of the original story. In 2004 we were in the modern world of fashion, in 2009 we are in the turn of the century *monde* of Toulouse Lautrec. This is a fatal flaw: no point is made by the transposition and the music, set against the social life of the period, just does not fit. McVicar attempts to make a joke of this by having a can-can danced to the gypsy music of the second party scene (reminiscent of his Bollywood dance routine to Handel in his *Giulio Cesare*). If a director wants to produce a musical version of the *Dame aux Camélias* story in another time or place he is of course free to do so but he should provide his own music. Not only this but it is also the sort of production where the director chooses to make reference through the sets and staging to other operas, works of art, literature. Some find figuring out such allusions interesting and amusing; to others they are intrusive and a distraction. An unfortunate and unintended case on this occasion was the resemblance of the red button-holes of some of the party guests to Remembrance Day poppies.

In spite of all this I was, as ever, moved by the opera – Verdi usually wins, his music and drama swamping directorial excesses. The story, in one sentence, is of the consumptive courtesan Violetta who gives up her career to

live with the provincial, Provencal Alfredo until his father Giorgio Germont persuades her for his family honour to return to her old milieu, where she is publicly humiliated by Alfredo who is forced to leave Paris after a consequent duel with her current protector, returning for her to die in his arms, all forgiven. The black and white décor is effective and the party scenes, Act I and Act II Scene 2 were well stage-managed, though the chorus was rather crowded in a production designed for the larger space of the Wales Millennium Centre. The intimacies of Act II Scene 1 and Act III were powerfully and movingly presented, once one overcame the distractions, although the singers, individually good, did not totally relate to one another in their exchanges. Violetta, sung by Katia Pellegrino, having recently taken over the role, did not quite convey the character's vulnerability: at Flora's party she looked far too healthy in her flaming red dress with its awe-inspiring *décolletage*. Alfie Boe was an unremarkable Alfredo and Dolario Solari was a rather light-voiced Giorgio Germont. Of the minor characters, the sympathetic portrayal of the maid Annina by Joanne Thomas stood out. The conductor Andrea Licata drew a rousing performance from chorus and orchestra and well supported the singers but we missed that extra heightened sense of excitement of which we know this company to be capable under the right baton.

As a replacement for the 2004 production in WNO's repertoire, this is a disappointment. It repeats the mistake of thinking that because the story can be meaningfully transposed forward in time so can the opera. The music fits neither 1900 nor 2000. It is perverse to try to make it.

* * *

Phase I of the project for the extension and renovation of Holywell Music Room is now almost complete at a cost of £175,000. A sizable fraction of this cost was for urgently needed repairs, including the replacement of water-damaged bricks, discovered behind the concrete facing, by modern engineering bricks. Passers-by in Holywell Street are impressed by the external results including the new door case, though the reintroduction of railings is not universally popular. Patrons will welcome the repairs to the outside steps and the new handrail as well as the now more spacious entrance hall and user-friendly box office. Still outstanding are the carpeting of the entrance hall and the re-hanging of the curtain which was taken down the last time the Room was redecorated.

So far the HMR Appeal Fund, officially launched in October 2008 has raised £110,000 from individuals, Trusts, some Oxford Colleges (principally Wadham, owners of the Room), the Music Faculty and local organisations, leaving a shortfall of £65,000 for Phase I alone. Clearly the funding of Phase II, estimated at £2M in 2007, requires a different order of magnitude of fund-raising and one wishes well the Appeal Committee under Roger Gifford in their search for serious private, corporate and public sponsors. Recognising that this is not an auspicious time to be seeking funding for such a project, Wadham's Governing Body at a meeting at the end of October decided that, while retaining the long term aim of improving the Music Room further, they would not embark on Phase II at this time.

Readers will recall (e.g. *Oxford Magazine* No 290, p30) that Phase II in its original form was the provision of Green Room and Reception areas as a basement underneath the building. To general relief, this was rejected by Wadham during the summer and an alternative suggestion made of constructing underground space outside but close to the existing walls. This was under active consideration when the decision not to proceed was taken; it is probably unlikely that this will continue.

This turn of events will come as a great disappointment to all, particularly to architect John Melvin and to all who have been concerned with the extensive promotion of the project. Do not give up yet! Holywell Music Room is a concert venue of supreme importance not only to the University and City, but to the UK, Europe and internationally. Ask anyone who has attended concerts there as performer or listener. It deserves these improvements.

Stop press: *I am now informed by Wadham that while they will continue to accept donations for Phase I, they are not continuing an active campaign. The Appeal Committee has disbanded itself. Any major fundraising would only take place if, in the future, the College wishes to make further improvements.*

PETER SCHOFIELD

Sounds observed

Susan Philipsz: You Are Not Alone, MAO/ Radcliffe Observatory

One of the loftier art events this Autumn, Susan Philipsz's 'installation' entitled 'You Are Not Alone' offers a mixed experience of sound, vision, architectural history, philosophy and not a little physical effort. Specially commissioned for the Radcliffe Observatory at Green Templeton College, the work comprises recorded radio signals broadcast from FM transmitters on the roof of Modern Art Oxford, in Pembroke Street, picked up by receivers at the college and relayed through four speakers on the top storey of the Observatory.

Or so the programme notes assure us. But they also quote Marconi's belief that sounds, once generated, never die, but continue to reverberate as waves across the universe (cynical readers may consider that Marconi, having patented a radio receiver, may have had a vested interest here). How then can we be sure that the weighty-looking electronic equipment, having been carried up the Observatory's spiral staircase is being used in the way Philipsz says? Could we perhaps be hearing sounds from radio's distant past? Or something yet more remote: the music of the spheres; the song the sirens sang; or that bane of stage managers everywhere, the ghostly twang that punctuates *The Cherry Orchard?*

How could the half dozen of us atop the Observatory last week be sure we were all hearing the same sound? Or any sound at all? Having toiled up the Observatory's 98 steps (visitors are asked to be 'confident' that they are up to this task) I was past worrying about such existentialist niceties. What I think I remember hearing is a succession of brief musical sequences, the sort of signal which used to be played during breaks in transmission (not so common, apparently, since the arrival of digital radio). Whether these signals can be called music is massively more in Peter Schofield's line than mine. As a musical illiterate I could only guess that it was probably the sort of thing for which 'plangent' might be apt: sexy single notes on the vibraphone, dying falls and other twiddly bits (arpeggii?) dropping into the silence, resonating and disappearing – or not. Count Orsino would have loved it.

Meanwhile, having got their breath back, visitors could savour a rare chance to enjoy the views from the Observatory's 18th century windows, including, thanks to the clearance of the former Infirmary site, aspects of Oxford's buildings not seen for generations – the apsaidal chancel of St. Paul's church and the adjoining school in Walton Street, the rear of the Infirmary building itself and the sweeping view south towards the dreaming spires.

Green Templeton promise two further artistic commissions for the Observatory. On the evidence of the first, they are worth getting into training for.

CHRIS SLADEN

Pictorial Intertextuality

Turner and the Masters. Tate Britain

Blair Worden doesn't think that 'intertextuality' is a useful term. I'm not so sure; I think it's more than a fancy word for 'allusion'. Allusion tends to be a glancing thing, as a small element in a work reminds us of its parallel in a previous work. Intertextuality is more ambitious and full-bodied, as a complete work goes purposively head

to head in an overall and ambitious confrontation with a previous work. Traditionally, intertextuality has been a term to do with literature, but I see no reason why its operations should not be extended to the fine arts.

In the Tate Britain exhibition one sees such intertextuality fully in operation. This is one of the most interesting exhibitions I have seen for a very long time. David Solkin, Professor the Social History of Art at the Courtauld Institute, is to be congratulated for organising it. The accompanying catalogue is really excellent, and makes a permanent contribution to Turner studies. I learnt something I did not know: that the *topos* of Turner tied to the mast in a storm to get an in-depth experience is not confined to him; Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789) did it, and Horace Vernet celebrated it (1822) – although the result is not as exciting as *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*... (no. 101). The title of the exhibition is not far off Ruskin's *Turner and the Ancients* (which *Modern Painters* was almost called), and it continues the Ruskinian habit of pitting Turner against his predecessors, although the catalogue does not go in for Ruskinian knock-about vituperation.

The general public, in so far as it interests itself in Turner, considers him as a revolutionary, forward-looking artist, so innovative as to have anticipated Impressionism, and even Expressionism. Hardy saw him in this light ('the much decried, mad, late-Turner rendering'), to be spoken of in the same breath as Wagner. His main supporter in the Victorian era, John Ruskin, proposed him, similarly, as forward-looking, engaging with the facts of Nature as no one had ever done before. This is all very well, but it's not the whole story. Ruskin recommended that young artists should go to nature 'selecting nothing, rejecting nothing' etc. That would seem to lead to the cultivation of 'the innocent eye', and to some extent the Pre-Raphaelites managed just that: to paint pictures that appeared to have no predecessors – including, paradoxically in many cases, the artists who lived before Raphael. It was in line with this that Ruskin wanted to cast Turner as a kind of Pre-Raphaelite. But those of us who know better understand that 'the innocent eye' is an organ impossible to realise. We might begin life with innocent eyes, but by the time we come to painting and drawing age, the prison-house of custom, has closed round the growing boy, and girl, and the habits of perception, in which the painting of the ages plays its part, make direct looking and direct painting impossible. It was unfortunate that just as the Romantic movement put great stress on the cultivation of originality, the cultural conditions and general belatedness were making its realisation impossible.

Faced with this artists could either give up in despair, or make a virtue out of necessity, and self-consciously build this belatedness into their art. Here there are ample parallels with literature and the culture of anxiety which Harold Bloom has identified, although painters have tended, for some reason, to be less anxious than writers in contemplating the awesome prospect of their great predecessors. Turner referred to a '*con amore*' treatment of Claude in a letter to Lord Egremont – a long way from Bloomean angst. Painters have either continued as workmanlike imitators, or risen to the challenge to go one better. Turner knew his predecessors, and got to know them more as his career developed, and he had the chance to travel abroad and see more of their work. They influenced the way he painted, and the way he saw. This is why one feels that Ruskin's account of the boyhood of Turner (which is compared with the boyhood of Giorgione) in *Modern Painters* leaves a good deal out. It wasn't simply direct engagement with the external concrete world that got Turner going, but a host of habits and resources derived from the traditions of painting. Rembrandt, Poussin, Claude Lorrain, Piranesi, Watteau, Cuyp, Ruysdael, and, in Ruskin's words 'the various Van somethings and Back somethings ... who have libelled the sea' (*Works*, 3.85) inspired him, and he paid them respectful tribute. But he also wished to show that he could surpass them, and deal with the visual material of the world more accurately than they.

This is why he wanted certain of his works, such as *Dido building Carthage* (no. 94) to exhibited alongside them; in this particular case Claude's *Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* (no. 93). Often he does succeed, and makes an advance. Ruysdael's sea-scapes are magnificent, but Turner's have the edge. Still, it is amazing that Dutch artists achieved what they did well over a hundred years earlier in some cases. This exhibition provides us with the opportunity to compare Turner's paintings with his predecessors in a way which will never be repeated in our lifetimes.

He does not always come out on top though. His Jessica (no. 44) is a sorry thing next to Rembrandt's *Girl at a Window* (no 43), which really engages with us, and he was ill-advised to try and compete with Watteau. I have been saying over the years that Turner's figure painting is very weak, and this exhibition provides any number of salient instances. He did not have accomplished figure-drawing behind him in the way that Watteau did. He was also ill-advised to take on Titian. Turner's *Holy Family* (no. 32) is a sad spectacle alongside Titian's *The Virgin and Child*...(no. 31). Since this exhibition is dominated by Turner's relationship with the past it is inevitably packed with what Kenneth Clark used to called 'machines' – that is grand, elaborately constructed pictures. Some of these are grotesque – such as *Venus and Adonis* (no. 36). One of the biggest machines is *Rome from the Vatican. Raffaelle, Accompanied by La Fornarina* (no. 63). But, but, but .... isn't the presence of Bernini's colonnade in the background a gross anachronism – as gross as all those wretched costume dramas on T.V. about Henry VIII, which will insist on showing the dome of St. Peter's (finished in 1590) every time a visual signal is needed to indicate that we are in Rome. The catalogue does not mention this. There's a similar problem in no. 68: how can Bellini's three pictures (died 1516) be installed in Palladio's Redentore (consecrated in 1592)?

Intertextuality is always conscious, and is always part of the desired effect. As is allusion. It's sometimes tricky to decide where intertextuality stops and plagiarism and outright theft begins. Are the overlapping trees in Turner's *Crossing the Brook* (no. 34) a tribute to Claude's *Landscape with Moses*... (no. 33) or a piece of purloining ? It makes one doubt, very slightly, whether the trees in Devon were precisely like that. Is Turner's use of the 'motive' (as Kenneth Clark used to call it) of the stark white house in *The Lauerzersee with the Mythens* (no. 87) a tribute to Girtin's famous white house (no. 86), or a stolen motive? Surely William van de Velde the Younger (no. 19) provided Turner with a motive, in the large ship at anchor, seen from the side, in what Seamus Heaney in '*Squarings*' calls the 'offing' ('the visible sea at a distance from the shore'), imperturbably static in contrast to the restless activity in the foreground. He taught him to notice such things, just as, probably, he taught him to notice the way in which rigging casts shadows on sails. This is difficult territory: did Cuyp teach Turner to record the line of light on the edges of cows when the sun is behind? Or was Turner's beautiful treatment in his *Abingdon* (no. 47), with the church of St. Mary's beyond the bridge a ghostly presence, independently observed? Certainly this painting puts the *Gainsborough* (no. 56) in the shade, where the cows against the sun exhibit no such subtle effects.

Turner not only competed with his predecessors but his contemporaries. There is a famous anecdote that in 1832 he added a red buoy to *Helvoetsluys; – the City of Utrecht, going to Sea, 64* on varnishing day, to put Constable's nose out of joint. 'Turner has been here and fired a gun,' complained Constable. Well, the two pictures can be seen side by side. It doesn't seem to me that they really compete. Constable's *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge* is a machine par excellence. The Turner sea-piece is one of his weaker ones, and the bit of red is not that alarming. He competes with Wilkie in doing Dutch realism scenes, and although his contemporaries thought Wilkie superior, I think Turner just about beats him. His interior lighting effects are better, and he avoids the vulgar anecdotage of Wilkie. His answer to Rembrandt's *The Cradle* (no. 41) in the shape of *The Unpaid Bill* (no. 42), painted at the behest of Richard Payne Knight, seems to me misconceived, and not really taking on the Old Master. It's more like Ostade.

Turner fails disastrously alongside Rembrandt in *Pilate Washing his Hands* (no. 40). This picture also has that irritating Turnerian mannerism, which one often sees in his late paintings, of seas of faces looking like

frog-spawn. His mannerism is particularly bad in *Heidelberg* (1844, not in the exhibition). Certainly though he knocks Canaletto into a cocked hat, since Canaletto's treatment of water has long been justifiable reviled, and not just by Ruskin. However, Clarkson Stanfield in *Venice* (no. 84) gives him a run for his money, and Stanfield's foreground figures are better than anything Turner could have managed. Loutherbourg's foreground figures in *The Glorious First of June* (no. 88) are superior to Turner's too in *The Battle of Trafalgar* (no. 89). There is a charming Bonington (no. 65) (an artist associated with the simple lost pursuit of beauty by Hardy, when he observed in 1887 that 'Nature is played out as a Beauty'), and one recalls that he was a master of figure drawing. Ruskin overlooks him, and mentions him but once (in 'Pre-Raphaelitism' (1851)), to complain about his lack of both *aerial* and *linear* perspective. There is a splendid collection of his drawings at Bowood House, which makes one sit up and take notice.

I was beginning to have so many doubts about Turner by the last room that I retreated to the Clore Gallery to reacquaint myself with Turner at his best. It's true that there are some monstrous 'machines' there, but there are also some delectable watercolours and small oil studies where Turner is less competitive, and just getting on with what he can do really well. *Walton Reach* (1805) is real balm to the soul after some of the monstrosities downstairs. And there's the recently acquired *Blue Rigi* – although that, it must be admitted, is a baby machine.

In our time the whole issue of pictorial intertextuality has become more extreme. In Turner's case we have subtle adjustments and respectful rewritings. Nothing as remotely extreme, aggressive and cantankerous as Picasso. Turner produces modifications rather than wholesale parody, travesty and burlesque.

BERNARD RICHARDS

Good Intentions

Days of significance; *The black album*; *Kes*, Oxford Playhouse

ROY Williams, while accepting that Shakespeare's *Much ado about nothing* has some bearing on his play, does not claim that *Days of significance* is a modern version of his illustrious predecessor's comedy – and quite right, too. He may well be dealing with the behaviour of the youth of his day, but he presents us with an image of a particular slice of contemporary society, sunk into social and cultural deprivation, and caught up in the Iraq war. *Much ado* may not always be frankly comic; *Days of significance* has little of the light-hearted about it.

What we see here is certainly – at least in its first act – a collection of young people having 'fun', but it is fun of a particular kind. The acting throughout is excellent, particularly so in the opening scenes, the boys with that curious springy gait that indicates both 'attitude' and the potential for instant violence, the girls in skimpy *cache*-knicker skirts (assuming that they are actually wearing knickers) and that way of looking at the boys with an over-the-shoulder backward glance, indicating that they are not of course interested, even though we all know that the fun will not be complete without 'intimacy taking place', as the *News of the world* used to put it in the olden days. This consummation, as you might say, is announced as soon as they first appear, one of the boys with it all hanging out, a display that a David Attenborough would not consider worth attention as an example of male courtship display. The girls are not all that impressed, either: they have seen it, and possibly many others, before. Whether they remember or not is another matter when you consider that part of the evening is to do with obliterating amounts of drink.

The fun, in other words, is part of the binge-drinking culture, with youths roaming round in packs, more or less indistinguishable as individuals. Even so, other themes emerge. The main one is the war in Iraq, for which Jamie (George Rainsford) and Ben (Toby Wharton) are soon to embark. Why are they doing it? They probably do not know, if only because they have no reason to have the slightest inkling of what it is all about. Perhaps the recruiting sergeants were persuasive, perhaps it is a way of getting a job, perhaps even as a means of jumping at the opportunity to get into a fight for which they will be paid. Dan (Luke Norris), who is against the war, could not be expected to give his approval. And then there is the matter of the girls. Jamie and Hannah (Joanna Horton) look as though they are becoming attached to each other; they show it in a slow dance together, touching in itself but hardly consistent with the general tone of the action going on around them. Similarly, Ben and Trish (Sarah Ridgeway) look as though they are interested in more than the casual one-night stand. However, given that Ben does not appear in the final act, we have no idea where that might have led.

The participation of the boys in the war is the subject of the second act of the play, presented mainly in the form of filmed projection, when, after an 'incident', we see them caught up in a predicament – along with their mortally wounded sergeant – cowering behind a concrete wall waiting for things to calm down or for help to come. The effectiveness of this scene is in the dialogue between these young men facing the possibility of imminent death: part pure fear, part bravado, part the ordinary chit-chat in which men under threat engage. The way out of this situation is neither shown nor indicated in any other way. What we learn is that, during the violence, these men shot Iraqi civilians, including children – and that will involve consequences, at least for Jamie, the only one to return, although not the one most responsible for their crime.

The third act shows him back on the old patch but not a part of the old pack. He is largely ostracised because he is known to be on the eve of his trial. Hannah, however, remains faithful, perhaps because, surprisingly, she is now at a university and much more mature than she was. The context has changed in other ways. Unlikely as it may seem, two of the characters are actually getting married: Steve (Simon Harrison) is tying the knot with Clare (Sandy Foster) – in white, if you please. Lizzie Clachan's set, a sordid club life environment, remains unchanged; again, the drink still flows freely with the one difference that it is now champagne instead of whatever was formerly available. There are even a couple of more or less pretty speeches. Jamie is alien to the proceedings, not only because of his rejection from this oddly transformed social group but also because of the solitude that the threat of his coming trial represents for him. Naturally, we do not learn whether Hannah will maintain her attachment to him any more than we ever know the outcome of his trial.

Days of significance is a curious play, directed with panache by Maria Aberg. It is fragmented and gives the impression of being incomplete. Of course, those who see it entirely as to do with the brutalising effect of the war in Iraq – or of any war, come to that – may view it in terms of unfinished business. But there should be more to it than that and the result is that, although the play holds the audience from beginning to end, it leaves you with a feeling of frustration because of the failure to establish a coherent thread.

* * *

If the Jamie of *Days of significance* finds himself excluded from the society of which he is a part, it does not follow that there are any doubts about the identity of the group of which he was formerly a member: they are all unquestionably British, with little apparent interest in the wider world, including that Islam that is a major concern for the world in which they live, not least in the context of the war in Iraq. In contrast, *The black album* is above all to do with Muslims, whether British born or recent immigrants. Islam and the question of identity are at the centre of their preoccupations in terms of racism, the Muslim religion and their relation to a society of which they are now a part while not being seen as fully paid-up members, including by themselves. *Days of significance* is his own adaptation for the stage of Hanif Kureishi's novel of the same title, and it shows in the ironical humour with which he treats his subject.

Unfortunately, the process of boiling down a novel into a play carries no guaran-

tee of success. That is an obvious remark, but one worth making again. For one thing, the novel makes a much more direct appeal to the imagination than a play ever can; for another, the incarnation of characters is paradoxical in that, by showing them in three dimensions, it has the curious effect of giving them less depth. And what applies to the characters goes for the setting as well. Tim Hatley's is often a distraction, partly because of the staccato projections that separate the scenes, but also because, if you happen not to be in the middle of a row, you cannot see them complete. That, in its turn, relates to the curiously undersized setting: it does not appear to be adaptable to stages of different dimensions, as will always be the case for a show that is on tour. Admittedly, that apparent lack is justified by the end of the play, but precisely at the end – the very end.

The specific time at which the play is set involves the turmoil resulting from the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie on the publication of his *Satanic verses*. The main focus is on Shahid Hasan (Jonathan Bonnici), a middle-class boy up from Kent to follow a course of study in London. At home, his mother fusses over him, reminding him before he leaves, for example, that he must wash his armpits before using the anti-deodorant; from there to his new environment is quite a leap. He appears to have landed in some sort of student residence, where his room becomes a crossroads through which everybody passes, either as a staging post or as a convenient place to gather and to discuss Islam at the various levels of radicalisation that can lead to the fundamentalism with which we are now familiar – and that we experience in the final scene.

With a little manipulation, the room can be turned into the office of Deedee Osgood (Tanya Franks), a with-it lecturer whose principle function, as far as one can make out, it to have designs on Shahid's body. 'Oh, I say!', as the late, lamented Dan Maskell might have exclaimed and evidence, if you like, that the play is not set in the immediate present. Indeed, there are other characters who make sure that we do not overlook the situating of the action at the end of the 1970s. One of them is Strapper (Glyn Pritchard), a local councillor who knows a voter when he sees one and who makes a point of keeping well in with everybody. He actually looks like a spiv of an earlier generation, with his ghastly clothing and his thin moustache – one of those individuals who gets stuck in the period of his youth, rather like those, occasionally seen in Oxford, whose pony-tails, jeans and boots are ever-ageing reminders of those exciting times that began in about 1968. And then there is Chili (Robert Mountford), Shahid's older brother, also on the make, presumably thanks to the drug trade, his increasing wealth in an enterprise society showing clearly in his clothes, as flash and expensive as they are kitsch.

If we are intended to see *The black album* as a description of Pakistanis whose lack of integration into British culture leads them ever closer to a radical and fundamentalist version of Islam, then it does not take us very far. Even Riaz al Hussain (Alexander Andreou), who appears more as the leader of a superstitious sect than as someone who grasps the reality of the young Muslims is more a stage 'character' – even a caricature – than anything more substantial. The undoubted quality of Hanif Kureishi's writing is not adequately apparent in this, even though it is his own adaptation of his novel. He himself sees the point of departure for this adaptation as a response to the approaching twentieth anniversary of the Rushdie affair and adds: 'I thought that my pre-7/7 novel might shed some light on some of the things which have happened since.' The intention, then, was good; but we know that intentions are tricky things to handle in whatever activity we are engaged in.

* * *

Alienation being the order of the day, *Kes* fits comfortably into its place. Again, we are faced with an adaptation, this time by Lawrence Till, from the novel, *A Kestrel for a knave*, by Barry Hines. For those of us who do not know a hawk from a handsaw, it is worth noting that, in the world of birds of prey, the kestrel comes last in the pecking order. Unlike *The black album*, the 1968 novel of which *Kes* is a version was preceded by Ken Loach's successful adaptation for the screen in 1969. That does not imply that Lawrence Till has given us a repeat of the film, but is evidence that the novel could be successfully transposed.

Kes is set in the Yorkshire of the sixties, a time when sons were still expected to follow their fathers down the mine, where the politically correct had not been invented, when headmasters did not hesitate to cane the boys – and had nothing to fear if they did. Billy Casey (Stefan Butler) is a boy who has been abandoned by his father and who lives with his mother (Katherine Dow Blyton) and his bully of a big brother, Jud (Oliver Farnworth). Rather than fitting into this situation, Billy is a boy who is essentially lonely and misunderstood. The theme of the play is therefore that of his survival in what, for him, is a hostile environment. The hostility shows, for example, in the school playground, just as it does in the classroom where his failure to pay attention to what he is being taught means that he makes no progress in his school work – and suffers for it.

Billy, however, is not stupid. He has found his own way out of the dead-end environment in which he is growing up. His success is a combination of imagination, application and a determination to learn what he can thanks to a chance discovery. He has come across a lost kestrel chick, and devotes himself to raising it and training it by the study of a book on falconry. The parallel between the two beings is clear in the sense that both of them are lost souls. Through a relationship based on care, sympathy and a shared project, they will surmount the difficulties of their existence through their success in carrying out their common ambition. When Billy stops paying attention in class, it is not because his head has emptied of all substance; on the contrary, the reason is that his imagination has taken him out on the moors which are both his escape from so depressing an environment and a refuge in the positive experience that he shares with Kes.

Nikolai Foster shows great deftness of touch in evoking the various physical situations: Billy's house, the classroom, the dreary street, the surrounding moors. He is helped by all-round acting ability within Matthew Wright's necessarily all-purpose set, even if the strong Yorkshire accents could pose a problem to unaccustomed Southern ears. Stefan Butler's Billy is excellent in his representation of a boy who has to be a good deal younger than he. Two things in particular stand out: his classroom account, fluent and at ease, of his falconry activities and his behaviour when he is out on the moors in what appears to be his – and Kes's – natural habitat. The genuine sympathy that emerges in the reaction of Mr Farthing (Dominic Gately) to Billy's description of his out of school occupation is in striking contrast with the greater part of the boy's experience with other people. Otherwise, the slice of Yorkshire life represented by the minor dictator headmaster, the mother, the brother and all the others add up to a convincing portrayal of that society at that time. And special note must be made of the contribution of the children from Oxford School who play their part as though rehearsed long and hard.

Whatever the end of the play, *Kes* is a feel-good piece, especially when compared with *Days of significance* or *The black album*. And there can be no harm in that.

KEITH GORE

NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author's name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.

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