

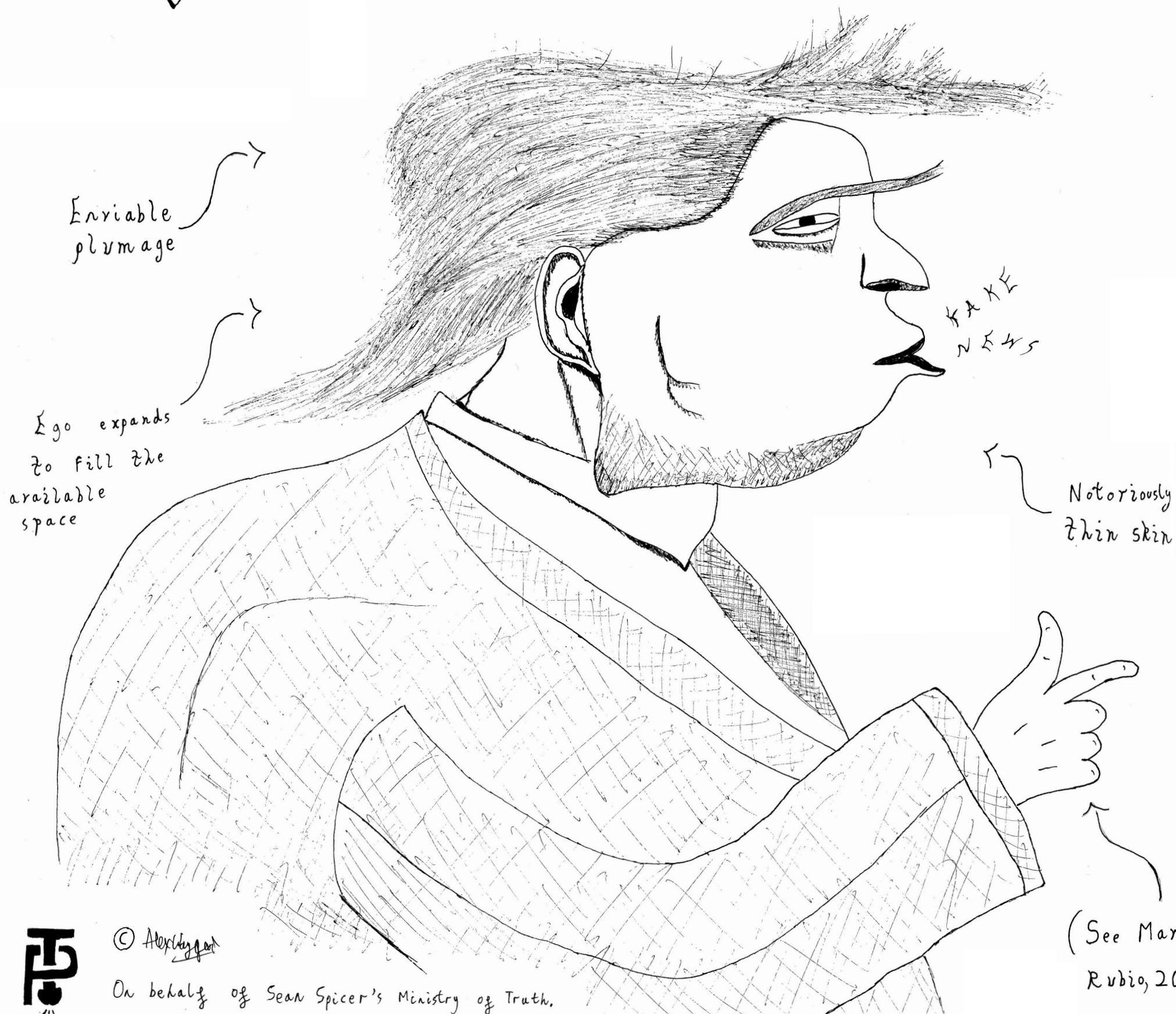
FROM WAYGOOD & CHIVERS'
POOR PRINT



FANTASTIC TRUMPS



AND WHERE
TO FIND THEM



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On behalf of Sean Spicer's Ministry of Truth.

(See Marco
Rubio, 2016)



ISSUE 18 | 28/04/17

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Media & Journalism

Careers Event

We are excited to announce the first ever **Poor Print careers event**, as part of **Oriel Arts Festival 2017** and in collaboration with Merton Street JCR Careers Officers.

On **Tuesday 9 May** (Trinity Term Week 3), a number of Oriel and Corpus Christi alumni working in **media and journalism** will be coming to Oriel to give talks on their experiences in the industry and give careers advice to current students.

The speakers will be **Adam Raphael, Daniel Hinge, Sian Cox-Brooker, Robert Rea, Robert Katz and Candida Evans**. Any current members of Oriel can attend.

The event will be held in the **Harris Seminar Room**, and will run from **4:45pm-7:00pm**. Doors will open at 4:30, and tickets can be bought via Eventbrite on a **first-come, first-served** basis.

Attendance to the talks will be **free of charge**. There is, however, also the option of paying for a ticket allowing you to join the speakers at **Charity Formal** afterwards. Proceeds of this will go to **Oxford Homeless Pathways**.

Executive Editors: Alex Waygood & Aidan Chivers.

Redesigned header by Charlie Willis.

This issue designed by Alex Waygood.

Visit www.thepoorprint.com for the full *Poor Print* team.

The Stuff of Myth & Legend

Myth and Folklore from Around the World

Once Upon a Time...

Kryssa Burakowski

A phrase often used at the beginning of fairy tales in Russian is ‘в тридевяти царстве’. The closest marker used in English tales is probably ‘in a land far, far away’. This conveys the meaning, but understanding the Russian phrase literally is a little more problematic. Google seems to have been watching a lot of Shrek recently

because it suggested using ‘in the kingdom of Far Far Away’ as a translation. Царство does mean kingdom, but the adjective is made from the Russian words for ‘three’ and ‘ninth’. So maybe 3 x 9 = 27 kingdoms away? (Wiktionary’s suggestion.) I don’t know the answer, but the point is that it’s really, really, far away – incomprehensibly so. And so it needs to be. The fact that fairy tales in general are set so far away encourages readers/listeners to suspend disbelief and forget the

laws of nature they know to be true in their own kingdoms in order to believe the fantastical happenings of the stories, while offering a glimmer of hope and magic that such things might just be possible. But this idea is a little bittersweet, since so many fairy tale motifs are associated with reaching goals, finding true love, ending suffering, gaining riches beyond our wildest dreams... Phrases like a ‘knight in shining armour’ (in the Russian idiom, the knight rides a white horse) and ‘they

lived happily ever after’ spring to mind. Or, taking the wealth example, the goose that lays golden eggs which Jack finds atop the beanstalk. Such tales can inspire and create hope that somewhere – even if it is very far away – or somehow dreams do come true and problems do get solved. But on the other hand, taking a more skeptical view, these stories being set so far from reality in both time and space could be interpreted as an implication that achieving dreams and finding happiness is a largely unattainable myth. That it is something that can only happen in the 27th kingdom, to a special hero or

heroine, with the help of a fairy godmother. This leads me to another idiom: ‘счастье не за горами’. This phrase is very much in my mind since it is written in giant letters by the banks of the river Kama here in Perm. I suppose our equivalent would be: ‘happiness is just around the corner’. Word for word, it means: ‘happiness isn’t beyond the hills’. I like that idea a lot better. ■



The Lost Stories

Anna Wawrzonkowska

It is short. It is easy to read.

I travelled along the winding roads of coastal Victoria, Australia, I was reading a book by a man called Big Bill Neidjie – as the last speaker of the now-extinct Gaagudju language and the elder of Kakadu in Northern Territory, he is a man of incomparable experience and wisdom regarding the Aboriginal ethos, culture, and history. The book is a small, A5-sized hardback, with a photo of an old man and a child on the first page – a story being told, knowledge freely given. When I picked it up, it felt like just another coffee table book, something sweet and short and easy, perfect to start and finish on the road.

But what I did not know was that the book – *Gagudju Man* by Bill Neidjie, with an informative introduction as well as a biography by Ian Morris and Stephen Davis – is more than just another book – it is a testimony and a confession and a secret, shared by someone who’s all too aware that he might be the last one to tell it. For all that we - outsiders, Europeans, white foreigners – know about Australia, no-one ever tells the stories of the Aborigines, of the genocide and tragedy and the sadness of immense cultural loss passing mostly unspoken. There is vast silence surrounding them, and with every generation more is lost: to the point where Big Bill Neidjie’s secrets were at risk of dying with him.

Aborigines do not record their history. It lives and breathes with the land, each tree a myth, each billabong a reminder. But with the land changing, and the stories surrounding the world of native Australians incessantly depicted on paper and screen, Big Bill Neidjie did what no Aborigine had done before: he recorded the secrets of his tribe on paper, in English. What Bill Neidjie has done is forbidden: no-one can call out a man’s name after he is gone, for fears of recalling his spirit from the land of the dead. But faced with the choice between provoking the endless restlessness of his spirit, and forgetting the secrets of the land and tribe, Bill Neidjie has chosen the sacrifice: he has given permission to record his name and make it endure along with his writing, so that his words – his story – live on.

In beautifully simple, broken English, in lines that look and sound more like poetry than anything else, he speaks about the land and the law of the land. The law is unchangeable; the people will once return to the land, bones will become soil. The pain you inflict on a tree will come back to you once you’re old and grey. You cannot sell land because it is not yours to have – you belong to the land. No matter your ancestors, all humans are bone and blood, and they all belong to the land. Fire renews; detachment is illusion, and so is death. And after this dictation of tenets, Bill Neidjie writes something that freezes me to the bone: *you know it now, the ways of my people. You know it – and it is your responsibility now.* Up until that point, it was simply a profound read. But when he says that – and you’re aware of why, of what he’s saying – a weight of ten thousand years falls on your shoulders, and stays there. This is a personal sacrifice of an old man who

surrendered the peaceful rest of his spirit, given in full, so that the story lives on, and is inherited by a new generation. Not only is it yours now, but it is yours to remember and carry forward; through an act of faith, you, the reader, are now a spiritual heir of Big Bill Neidjie and his people. And the way of life that he has striven to protect and preserve – it is now yours to do so. From the pages of a short, simple book, and from decades and continents and cultures, an old man speaks about the secrets of his people; and because you know now, it is *your responsibility to make them live on.* Big Bill Neidjie died in 2002. Every time I type his name on my keyboard, his spirit stirs restlessly, denied its peace. But fear not, spectre; your sacrifice is not forgotten. You, as no Aborigine before you, carried the secrets of your people to all the corners of the earth, including the land of your invaders, and Oxford where they were taught; you have withstood the slaughter of your people, and even though you have lost an unimaginable wealth of tra-

dition and land, your words will still be coursing the world like a Westerner’s remorse, like a reminder, an impulse to help and salvage and preserve, a call to remembrance. ■ *‘Gagudju Man: Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory, Australia’ (Bill Neidjie, 1986) can be purchased on Amazon, with prices starting at £11.37. The Bodleian Library also has an electronic version of ‘Old Man’s Story: The Last Thoughts of Kakadu Elder Bill Neidjie’, which everybody should at least skim through.* You can find charities supporting Aboriginal land rights, communities, and culture here: http://www.didjshop.com.au/links_SupportingAustralianAborigines.html And a handy list of (Australia-centred) activities that would help the Aboriginal communities can be accessed here: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/what-can-you-do-to-support-aboriginal-culture>

Selected excerpts from *Gagudju Man* (Bill Neidjie, 1986)

Rock stays,
earth stays.

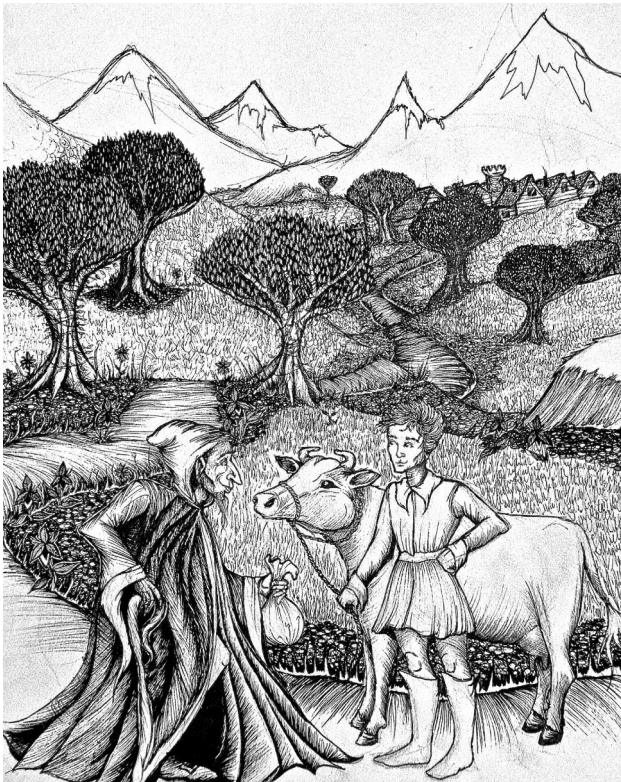
I die and put my bones in cave or earth.
Soon my bones become earth,
all the same.
My spirit has gone back to my country,
my mother.

...

Dreaming place,
you can’t change it,
no matter who you are.
No matter you rich man,
no matter you kind.
You can’t change it.

...

I feel it with my body,
with my blood.
Feeling all these trees,
all this country.
When this wind blow you can feel it.
Same for country,
You feel it.
You can look.
But feeling...
that make you.



‘Jack and the Beanstalk’, by Charlie Willis.

Poor Print Regulars

THE COLUMN

Cut-Price Cuisine

Orange-Scented Salmon

Alice Correia Morton



Apologies for the repetition of the salmon theme from last issue, but it is consistently reduced and so worthy of the feature. However, this recipe would work equally well with any oily fish, such as trout or mackerel. Although it may or may not be a fad, the omega oils found in oily fish are probably good for brain function, so that might have a nice placebo effect if you're revising for Finals.

The key ingredients here are salmon fillets (£2 reduced from £3.50 for two) and an orange (reduced to 15p). I've tried to use vegetables that are usually not too expensive, such as beetroot (70p for a pack of three) and lentils (really cheap if you're getting them from Tahmid's on Cowley Road). And if you're really strapped for cash, oranges are the kind of thing that might be vulnerable to theft from, say, an MCR fruit bowl (not that I'm suggesting that you should do that kind of thing, of course).

- Ingredients:**
- 1 salmon fillet
 - Half an orange
 - Handful of spinach
 - 2 tablespoons lentils
 - Splash of garlic olive oil/normal olive oil, with the addition of a peeled and crushed garlic clove to the pan
 - Half a head of broccoli, chopped into small florets
 - 1 salad beetroot, chopped into small chunks
 - Tablespoon crème fraîche
 - Balsamic vinegar
 - Sprinkle of salt

- Method:**
- Place lentils in a saucepan with cold water, bring to the boil, and then simmer for 15 minutes.
 - While this is going, heat up the garlic oil (or oil with a clove of garlic) in a small/medium frying pan.
 - Place the salmon fillet skin-side down in the pan (it should make a soft sizzling sound).
 - Turn the heat down to medium. Then, carefully squeeze the juice from a wedge of the orange (avoiding any spitting) into the pan, tear the wedge in two, and add to the pan.
 - Leave the salmon to cook with the orange on a medium heat for about 7 minutes.
 - Add the broccoli to the saucepan with the lentils to steam.
 - After the salmon has had its 7 minutes, flip it over to cook it through for 5 minutes from the other side.
 - Add the spinach to the saucepan to steam just as the salmon starts to look cooked.
 - Take the salmon off the heat and place to the side.
 - Drain the vegetables and stir through the beetroot and crème fraîche.
 - Turn the vegetables onto a plate. Place the salmon on top with the pieces of cooked orange from the pan.
 - Sprinkle with salt and drizzle with balsamic vinegar.
 - Garnish with orange slices if the mood takes you (but to be honest this is unnecessary, just eat the remaining orange). ■

Slow Travel: Myths of the Arctic

Tobias Thornes

A vast and varied wonderland of unimagined splendour. Such new, dramatic sights had few parallels on the pages of sweet, well-tempered Europe or sun-scorched North Africa's well-thumbed manuscripts. It's no wonder the dumbfounded explorers, stumbling upon this immense set of scenes unseen, this blank book far, far across the Western sea, called it a 'New World'. Only trundling by train, east to west for many days right across North America's extensive girth, can the fantastic magnitude of this impressive continent be somewhat understood. Such great excitement this discovery must have instilled: a fancied dream become reality, a lost land leaping out of legend onto the empty edges of the map.

On my own cross-Canadian journey in midwinter, I fancied the scenery was no less splendid than in summer's leafy garb. For me, the sturdy evergreens were dusted with snow; ice-white mountains encircled murky pools of mystery, wide lakes brimming with the silver blood of glaciers made molten by many summers' heats. To experience the full gravity of these magnificent places, I travelled slowly, breaking up my long train journey to walk deep into mountain vales and hear the snow-white silence and breathe the cool, clean air.

Gradually I wended west and north, in the footsteps of those first explorers of my ilk who discovered these lands but a few hundred years before me, in the opposite direction to their distant predecessors, the first human feet to tread these stones countless generations before. I was headed for the Bering Strait, the narrow tempestuous torrent that forms the hair-fine fissure between two colossal continents which, in a younger, colder Earth, were linked by an arc of ice.

But first, to cross Alaska. My Canadian train brought me not to the Alaskan land border, but to Port Arthur where, though the snow and ice were gathering and the trees and birds less numerous than further south, the inhospitable Arctic did not quite have dominion and the sea wasn't frozen shut. There, it was possible to transfer to a train ferry – an old-fashioned means of transportation quite new to me – and, rolling by rail straight onto a boat, we made a short and sunny crossing to American shores, before rolling off again to continue on our way. Similarly seductive scenery awaited me and, carried by train, I at last briefly crossed the Arctic Circle, coming – not long before the winter solstice – to the very edge of the land of perpetual winter dark.

Another beautiful aurora burst to life before me on that first nearly never-ending night, a mesmerising spectacle

brought on by sparkling streams of stardust, but said in Norse mythology to be the sheen of the armour worn by Odin's Valkyrie army as it marched across the sky. I witnessed too the strange sight of high, eerie polar clouds glowing in the dim twilight, with the sun's light gently growing almost to the dawn. The hidden fire hung tantalisingly just beyond the horizon, but withdrew again, his promise unfulfilled. I paused there, in that starlit land, while the deepest dark of winter idled by, alleviated, even there, by the joyful festivities of that special time of year. Then, as the final embers of 2018 began to fade away, I boarded another train to continue on my way.

This journey would have been impossible even a year before. But in contrast to the tightening noose being tugged on all of America's other borders, here I was favoured by the sole migration loosening effected by its ersatz president: the bridging, at last, of the cold chasm betwixt the United States and her near Asian neighbour, Russia.

Though it is possible to cross the Bering Sea by foot, if one is willing to take one's chances over the shifting ice-floats that wobble like sliding stepping-stones throughout its stormy, wind-swept breadth, this border has been closed for decades to travellers from afar. A manned military Russian base oversees Big Diomed Island in its midst, and the few who have made it in recent years to the far side have been met by arrest and expulsion. But my journey came soon after the completion of a project dreamt of over a century before, and brought to fruition at last by the mutual friends that lead these once-warring states: a great train line linking, by bridge and tunnel, Russia and America. So it is that I can return the way those ancient humans came, albeit by somewhat swifter means. Looking out from the safety of a railway carriage, I beheld the swelling waters of one of the most dangerous straits in the world, and passed safely across.

How long this cordiality will last is anybody's guess in such uncertain times. Arriving in the Russian province of Chukotka, it was as though I peered beneath a veil into a secret, forgotten corner that had been, until so recently, still in the shadow of the Cold War.

There were no roads here, no shops, no restaurants in a society not spoiled by streams of tourists. Apart from brief arrivals on the new cross-continental train, this is Russia's 'last closed territory', with no free travel and strict entry requirements that each visitor obtains a special visa and a sponsor from amongst the inhabitants, who must promise to keep watch on them night and day.

This bitter landscape, with temperatures at this time of year swaying between 15 and 35 degrees below zero, was inhabited by an ancient Chukchi people long before the Russians arrived in 1641. They remain a society steeped in Shamanic ritual and myth, telling strange stories of ancient battles and Earth's creation, seeing spirits in animals, forests, rivers and stars. To me and my fellow travellers – set down but for a few hours by the train – they showed generosity and welcome, offering us food and shelter in their traditional yarangas or more modern wood or concrete soviet-era single-storey blocks. Most of the people are reindeer herders, fishermen or whalers, carrying on long-lived ways of life that Russian influence could not quite dispel, refreshingly at odds with the rest of the world that seems in some respects more like a separate universe.

But there are signs, inevitably, of a grimmer reality stamped upon the province, carried here by the greedy machinations of the USSR. Here and there the landscape is pocked by the blight of industrial complexes, designed to extract and process the gas, coal, gold and tungsten treasures that hide beneath these hills and perhaps in some way compensate for the great reserves of oil which Russia lost unknowingly to America when she sold Alaska.

Somewhere, also, in that bleak expanse, disused rails run to hidden horrors, the gulags of the Stalinist Terror where political prisoners from across this huge country were forced to face the winter, freezing in slavery and suffering for their supposed sins. Despite the warmth of the locals, something more than the chill Arctic breeze was making me shiver inside, and it was not with regret that, the short sojourn over, I was asked to re-embark the train and continue on my way. ■

Contribute to *The Poor Print*

The Poor Print invites your contributions for our Trinity 2017 issues:

Issue #19—Fracture. (Deadline: Sunday, Week 3.)

Issue #20—Bodies.. (Publication Week 5; submissions now closed.)

Issue #21—Growth. (Deadline: Sunday, Week 7.)

Submit your pieces via thepoorprint@oriel.ox.ac.uk.

Letters to *The Poor Print*

Responses to the print edition are welcome, and should be sent to thepoorprint@oriel.ox.ac.uk.

On Narrative & Storytelling

Fantastic Trumps—and Where to Find Them

Alex Waygood

The exhibition currently showing at the Christ Church Picture Gallery, *Fabulous Beasts and Beautiful Creatures*, documents the human fascination with the animal kingdom. Combining depictions of real-world creatures with those of myth and dream, the collection stands in marked contrast with much of the rest of the pictures on display at Christ Church. A horse, reduced to barely a few lines on paper, feels as

though it moves before your eyes; a sketch of a lion hunt overwhelms in a cacophony of colliding bodies and spears. The beasts on display are *alive*: many are depicted in scenes of epic battle where confusion of lines prevails but the spirit is captured. The immediacy and mess of these pieces (primarily pen, pencil or chalk on paper) could not be further apart in some respects to the stylised intricacy of the canvas paintings on display elsewhere in the gallery.

A special in-focus display case gives information on the seminal British animal artist Francis Bar-

low. Subtly exaggerating the key aspects of the animals portrayed, his work lies on the border between naturalism and caricature. A trio of treetop squirrels is lovingly sketched as they call to each other, with special attention (naturally) given to their tufty ears and bushy tails. As with the rest of the exhibition, the emphasis is on the movement and vivacity of the natural world – the innate beauty and strangeness of the creatures around us.

The timing of the exhibition, naturally, comes as no coincidence. It doesn't take a sleuth to suppose that

the topic of the display (running from 18 February to 29 May 2017) was chosen to coincide with the latest film from J.K. Rowling's wizarding world, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. In many ways, the collection of pieces has most in common with the original 2001 book *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, the inspiration for the development of the recent film. Taking its name from a textbook mentioned in passing in the original *Harry Potter* book series, Rowling's spin-off tome took the form of a catalogue of information and drawings of faux-fauna

from the realm of *Harry Potter* – detailing both those mentioned in the series (such as Hippogriffs, Flobberworms and Kappas), and also newer inventions such as Chizpurples and Lethifolds.

The newer film finessed the original material by adding a backstory (including a mandatory love-interest) to the writing of the book by the renowned magizoologist Newt Scamander. Yet the emphasis on the wonder and quirkiness of Rowling's world was retained – a welcome relief from *Harry Potter*

Continued on page 6

In an Age of Storytelling, Why Do We Continue to Undervalue the Creative Writing Degree?

Rebecca Slater

When I tell people I'm doing a creative writing degree there are two questions that people usually ask: the first is 'Why?' and the second, 'How?'

The 'how' is an interesting place to start. With university course fees rising and incomes for writers falling, the financial outlook of a creative writing degree is at best optimistic, and at worst downright crazy.

In the USA, the popularised Master of Fine Arts programme at institutions like Columbia or New York University will set students back between \$50,000–120,000 (£40,000–96,000). In the UK, programs like those at the University of East Anglia, Cambridge or Oxford cost around £12,000–15,000 for two years, or £20,000–30,000 for international students. In Australia, a masters in creative writing will put local students between AUD\$18,000–\$50,000 (£11,000–30,000) out of pocket in total, or up to \$65,000 (£40,000) for international students.

A 2016 European Commission report showed average yearly earnings for UK writers to be below minimum wage at just £12,500, and in Australia the prospects are even gloomier: a 2015 Australian Book Industry report estimated annual earnings of less than AUD\$13,000 (£8,000).

And that's for writers who have 'made it' – writers who are published, who call themselves professionals. It doesn't take into consid-

eration the thousands of writers who are yet-to-be-published, who are stuck in that perpetual limbo of 'aspiring' or 'emerging' – or indeed, the writers who never make it at all.

For a debut author presenting their first manuscript to a publisher, advances can be as low as a few thousand dollars, with no further money paid until sales exceed that amount. For many as-yet-unknown authors looking at modest sales for a first title, that's it.

Poor sales will also affect the author's chances of a publisher taking on their second book. With economic uncertainty hanging over the publishing industry, multi-book deals and high-risk projects are becoming a rare species, as publishers are forced to play their cards cautiously.

I may be a writer, but my maths is good enough to see that those figures don't add up. Years of work and a whopping student debt, for an income that doesn't even come close to covering living costs. The trope of the struggling artist is nothing new, but the real-life financial and mental health implications of entering into such a field are surely cause for serious caution.

Which brings me to the second question: 'Why?' Why, knowing all this, would I – or the next young, hopeful writer – sign up to the creative writing course? Are we simply being played the fool? Or does this incompatibility between cost and gain signal a systemic problem with how writing is valued?

As a writer who values my craft, to have people continually question my desire to improve it is at best tiring, and at worst incredibly dis-

heartening. To be viewed with scepticism by curious adults and potential employers, and looked down on in universities by students or teachers of 'serious' disciplines, is an insult to the practice and the time and effort its practitioners put into it.

It's simple enough to see creative writing degrees as merely a matter of indulgence; to say that we students enter into these courses 'for the love of it', because 'there's nothing else in the world we could be doing'. And while this is true of many of the passionate students I've met, it's also dangerously reductive.

For many of us, there are a lot of other things in the world we could be doing. We have students in our midst who were clearly 'born to write', but there are also those among us who have wilfully chosen and fought for the right to be here, and many who already are doing other things to support their passion. In my course alone, I have diplomats, school teachers, lawyers, academics and filmmakers, all fiercely trying to carve out the time and means to hone their writing.

To say we're here to learn is also true, if not equally problematic. There's the strong view from many quarters that creative writing can't be taught – that you've either got it, or you haven't. And in some sense, I agree: there's certainly an element of 'natural' creativity, lyrical flair and imagination that seems at the heart of all great writers. But just because good writers appear effortless doesn't mean there's no skill involved – skill that can be harnessed, and built on. By ignoring that skill, we contribute to the devaluation of the craft itself.

We wouldn't suggest a great musician could simply play without instruction or practice, nor the painter. Just as one is taught to read music or use a paintbrush, one learns to write and, like any skill, it can always be improved.

Time is the other major factor calling students to the writing degree. At a very basic level, writing takes time. A whole lot of it. In an age devoid of patronage, the opportunity to take the time out from work or other commitments to focus on one's writing is a rare privilege, and unfortunately not one that everyone can afford. Of course, this raises other questions about the ethics of writers' programs, which are available only to those voices which can afford to support their practice – but this is nothing new to the arts, nor higher education, where universities must make it their prerogative to extend opportunities to writers from all social and economic backgrounds.

Scepticism around writing degrees is fuelled by the underestimation of the time it takes to write. There's a prevailing sense that writing should be something 'done on the side', in one's 'spare time'. For many students, the value of writing degrees lies in their acknowledgement of the work it takes, and the structural framework they provide for carving out that time.

For many writing students, signing up to these courses is also about taking ourselves 'seriously' as writers. It may seem ridiculous to pay this kind of money for a boost of self-confidence, but in a society that at once reveres and under-values the writer, it's important to have spaces where writers can declare their dedication to the craft.

And not just as a writer in isolation, but as a writer working within a community of other engaged, serious writers. The practice can be lonely at the best of times, and being a part of a supportive and driven community of writers – both emerging and established – is perhaps one of the greatest gifts of the writing degree, not to mention the opportunities for networking with publishers and agents that an institutional body provides.

But at the end of the day these questions asked of the aspiring writer really boil down to how much one values storytelling. What keeps drawing so many students and practitioners to these degrees is the unfailing belief in the power of writing as a valuable contribution to society. In turbulent times, the need for stories is greater than ever, both in their capacity for change and for escape. And telling great stories takes time, it takes skill.

So instead of questioning our means and motives, why not be thankful for those of us willing to face financial instability and uncertainty in order to improve our craft? Those of us who value storytelling, and are willing to put in the hard yards to deliver the best stories we can tell. We continue to face economic instability, as well as judgement and scepticism at every turn, but in return we ask very little. Simply that you sit back and let us do the thing we love: tell you a story. ■

Originally published by The Guardian on 13/03/2017 under the title: 'The sums on creative writing degrees don't add up. So why do we do them?'

FANTASTIC TRUMPS

Continued from page 5

films that all-too-often seemed to sand down the magic and charm of the books into something ultimately far too boring and serious. (Where is Peeves, the parodying poltergeist? Why do we never get to see the Weasleys battling with their garden gnomes? What happened to SPEW, Hermione's Society for the Promotion of Elvish Welfare?)

Rowling's creatures in the film are often wonderful works of the imagination in their own right, and frequently feature her trademark intertextuality. The Thunderbird, a huge North American relative of the phoenix that generates maelstroms merely through flapping its wings, has its origins in the folklores of North American indigenous peoples such as the Algonquians, the Menominee and the Ojibwe. Meanwhile, the Occamy, a winged serpent that has the ability to grow or shrink to fit the available space, has clear roots in the dragons of East Asia that can shrink to the size of a silkworm. In a Chinese legend about the Zen Buddhist sage Huineng, a fierce and destructive dragon is tricked into shrinking small enough to fit into his rice bowl – a scene that has an uncanny echo in Rowling's film.

An extraordinary world, populated by creatures that stretch the bounds of reasonable belief, is fundamental to the definition of fantasy – a nearly facile observation when you consider that 'fantasy' shares its etymology with 'fantastic'. Key to the definition of the genre is an inherent escapism – in the best fantasy works, the plot itself is often incidental; the author draws you in through the sheer intricacy and originality of their imagined world. (By the by, in my opinion this is probably why fantasy and science fiction are often undervalued by traditional literary critics.)

Yet, walking out after my first viewing of *Fantastic Beasts*, the creature that struck me most was neither the Thunderbird nor the Occamy, but the amorphous Obscurus. The writhing clouds of dark smoke, that Newt describes as an 'unstable, uncontrollable dark force', represent the latest manifestation of another key fantasy trope: the inherent, unexplainable evil.

The classic example here is Tolkien. Sauron is evil, because... well, because. In such an extraordinarily long and detailed saga, you'd think there would be some time to probe this a little. But that would be missing the point. The beauty of the fantastic escapism is a fundamental simplicity to the conflict at hand. There's no need to probe such pressing questions as whether orcs have rights (or quite why the tyranny of the kings of Gondor is better than the tyranny of Sauron) simply because the story is better *without* fussing over all that. The conceit of the inherent evil is so successful because, well, shades of grey make

our heads hurt – it's a conceit that the reader is fully willing to engage with.

The Obscurus – shapeless and unreadable – is a particularly elegant employment of this trope. The trope works best when the Inherent Evil has as few human attributes as possible: whereas humans have motivations, reasons and purposes, the Inherent Evil by contrast is unexplainable, unreasonable and purposeless. It is the Unknown, the Other. The Evil that has no meaning behind it, and sins for sin's own sake.

Hence the prevalence of masked and mutilated villains. *Star Wars*'s Darth Vader is effectively faceless; his 'humanity' is only restored to him after he finally returns to the good side of the force at the end of *Return of the Jedi*. At this point, his life-support unit is symbolically removed, revealing a human face beneath. G. R. R. Martin's *A Song Of Ice and Fire* is a series that seems to specialise in shades of grey and set out to pour scorn on this trope. Yet even Martin cannot avoid the allure of the unknown horror: his White Walkers (who are at times even referred to as 'Others') are described as having 'flesh pale as milk'; 'faceless, silent', they have eyes that are 'blue, deeper and bluer than any human eyes, a blue that burned like ice'.

The Inherent Evil frequently works through human counterparts: unseen and working from afar, yet manipulating the whole of Middle Earth through his servant Saruman, Sauron is far more terrifying. Sometimes the dynamic is inverted. Voldemort, Rowling's villain in her original series, was never entirely successful simply because he was ultimately far too human. The Dementors, however, who eventually become his servants, are truly terrifying: faceless, voiceless and cloaked, they feed on fear; in a similar way, *Fantastic Beasts* has both a motiveless Inherent Evil (the Obscurus) and a human antagonist with a purpose (Graves/Grindelwald). In Cornelia Funke's *Inkheart*, the villain is ostensibly the robber Capricorn. Far more frightening, however, is his slave The Shadow:

Sometimes he was red as fire, sometimes as grey as the ashes into which fire turns all that it devours. He leaped from the ground like flame flickering up from wood. His touch and even his breath brought death. He rose up at his master's feet, soundless and faceless, scenting the air like a dog on the trail, waiting to be shown his victim.

And yet—I wonder if problems don't arise when these tropes are applied to real life.

Fantastic Beasts – with its frequent allusions to Grindelwald's dreams of ethnic cleansing, and with the populist political propaganda that is in the background throughout – carries clear reference to the fascist

movements of the 1930s (the period in which it is set). And the Second World War is frequently depicted in just the same way as a fantasy conflict plays out: a clear-cut battle between Good and Evil. The below poster – an anti-Japanese US poster – is representative of the way the fantasy narrative of an inhuman, intrinsic evil was employed in propaganda at the time. Even now, the Second World War is often remembered as the last 'simple' conflict – when you knew who was in the right and who was in the wrong. I'm not questioning the horror of the Nazi atrocities or trying to be an apologist for the Axis regimes in any way – but it's worth remembering that most soldiers in the War were, at the end of the day, just fighting for their country, and atrocities were committed on both sides.



It's hard to talk about the 1930s nowadays without discussing the current political climate, and to an extent this tendency is fair enough. The parallels between the two periods are clear: far-right parties are on the rise across Europe; the US have recently voted in a nativist, isolationist president; and supranational unions such as the EU seem increasingly fragile. *Fantastic Beasts*, whether it was intended or not, can't help but seem as though it is making reference to current regimes in Hungary, Poland, and the US.

To look at a lot of political rhetoric at the moment, the fantasy narrative of Good vs. Evil also seems as though it is being employed in just the same way as it was in the 1930s. Trump has become an image of Evil Incarnate for many, with Democratic activists – despite their political impotence in Congress and state legislatures – determined to obstruct and resist at every turn. A *Poor Print* article in November spoke of the need to 'fight against the darkness and coldness that people like Trump and Pence bring'. To an extent, I agree.

Yet the issue is that the great works of high fantasy usually climax with an epic battle, such as the culminating scene in *The Lord of the Rings*; or the great battle against the forces of the White Witch at the close of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

This is where the metaphor can no longer be applied to reality. Bernie

Sanders, the hero of so many left-wing students, is no Aslan. Neither he nor any other Democratic politician is ever going to lead a cavalry charge against the Trumpists of the US.

As politics grows ever-more divisive, liberals (and I use the term in the loosest sense of the word) increasingly appear to be fighting arguments on the basis that to disagree with the liberal point of view is already a moral sin. Too many liberals no longer appear to try to persuade those of differing opinions. Political campaigns are focusing more and more on increasing voter turnout by railing against the Other Side rather than attempting to convince naysayers; more and more activists appear to be complaining that they're 'tired of making the same arguments time and time again'. The implication is that when those who disagree are just *wrong*... why should we have to engage?

That's no way to win this war. Political battles are won in a different manner to those of folklore and fable. Far from annihilating a horde of alt-righters, instead the end goal *must* be to change the minds of the horde. To rewrite the Tolkien narrative, the orcs of Mordor *have* to be persuaded to vote for Aragorn (...or whatever 2020 Democratic challenger comes closest). Shouting at Trumpists will only get us so far. Calling those of differing opinions a 'basket of deplorables' will never persuade them to your way of seeing things. The righteous indignation of a political minority is utterly useless.

It's easier said than done. Changing minds is hard – Confirmation Bias is strong, meaning people will always more easily agree with something that chimes with existing beliefs than with something that fundamentally change their outlook. Social science research shows that reasoned argument generally has no effect on people's outlook when it comes to polarised issues – and indeed, it often causes a 'backfire' effect that causes people to dig in deeper into their preconceptions.

But people's opinions can, and do, change – even on polarised issues. The steady increase in support for same-sex marriage in the US – from 31% in 2004 to 55% in 2015-16 – is testament to that. The rapid change in attitudes on this issue – both in the US and across much of the West – is incredible.

The roots of the liberal success on the same-sex marriage argument are complex, but nonetheless contain lessons for political campaigns on other issues. Key to the increase in support was a steadily increasing number of people coming out as LGBTQ to their family and friends – causing the issue to become normalised; causing people to learn more about the issue; and creating a multiplier effect by encouraging others also to come out. In a similar way, some advocacy groups have reported that open, non-confrontational discussions with

people on doorsteps have far more persuasive potential than conversations where activists actively try to change views. The idea is that these generate less hostility and may be more successful in normalising arguments. (Thorough research on this is currently inconclusive.)

Many will find the takeaway here slightly depressing. Though I'm not endorsing fake news, facts are somewhat useless when it comes to changing minds on divisive issues, since our moral reasoning is rarely based on evidence in these situations. Rather, it is more usually dependent on the opinions we perceive to be acceptable among our personal social group. The crucial year in the same-sex marriage debate in the US was in 2009, when for the first time support for same-sex marriage started rising among Republicans at the same rate as among Democrats.

The real mystery, however, is why so many mainstream political candidates still struggle to grasp this. Remainers can cry foul at the conduct of the Brexit referendum all they like, but the truth is that the argument had been lost long before the referendum campaign even started. Whereas tabloid newspapers and UKIP had unfailingly screamed at Europe for decades, pro-Europe politicians had been notably timid. No debunking of false facts on Brexiteer buses was ever going to make up for the years of silence, or the failure to create a convincing Europhilic emotional narrative. The fantasy narratives have one thing right – much as G. R. R. Martin's 'Battle for the Dawn' is repeated every few millennia, the battle of ideas is never truly won. Political success is rarely permanent; liberal arguments must be repeated again, and again, and again.

So rather than shouting at the alt-right and bemoaning the end of the world, the lessons for liberals are clear. Don't give up the argument. Don't be disheartened where you fail to persuade – we have to be in this for the long run. However much you hate their opinions, try to restrain your gag reflex when dealing with those with whom you disagree. And an emotional narrative is crucial. Facts are important—but don't rely on them to make your case. ■

'Fabulous Beasts and Beautiful Creatures' is showing at the Christ Church Picture Gallery until 29 May, 2017, and free of charge to students at Oxford.

'Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them' is no longer showing in cinemas, but can be bought on DVD from Amazon for £10.

The Trump presidency has a forecast expiration date of 20 January, 2021.



The Myth of Rhodes

A Special Report on Rhodes, Rhodes Must Fall, and the Oriel Statue

Editoriel

Aidan Chivers

Over the course of 2015, debates about imperial legacy and race relations within universities became a prominent topic of debate. Questions about the commemoration of Cecil Rhodes caught the world’s attention and attracted a huge amount of discussion in the media. Issues about black experiences in academic institutions and the impact of colonialism have undoubtedly been brought to the fore on a global scale. Meanwhile, on a local level in Oriel, the consequences of the Rhodes-related media frenzy of late 2015 were for a time extremely significant. The future impacted both the college’s image and atmosphere, and for a time resources were strained simply in responding to the press attention.

At the height of the media attention, by an obscure paradox Oriel seemed to be presented by the supporters of Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) as racist, imperialist and oppressive; yet Oriel’s response to the discussion simultaneously left it branded as weak, overly liberal, and unconcerned by issues of history and tradition. With over a year separating Oriel from its decision not to remove the statue, the college and its members can

now have some perspective on the protests, discussion and consequences of December 2015.

Now that it has the space to breathe, Oriel has been holding a series of meetings and forums to establish how it should respond to and better contextualise Rhodes’s legacy. At this point in time it is worth reflecting on the events leading up to and surrounding the protests in Oriel Square, and the attention that they received across the world.

The RMF movement’s origins in the University of Cape Town (UCT) are both widely recognised and yet also often misrepresented. Although the campaign shot to prominence in March 2015, it was not – as is often supposed – born out of a vacuum or simply from the whim of a small number of individuals. Unveiled in 1934, demands for the UCT statue’s removal date back to at least the 1950s.

There had long been discomfort at the huge statue of the colonialist gazing proudly out over the land he had invaded, and debates had been ongoing for some time. The international media’s attention, however, was only really attracted to the issue when a group of students gathered around an activist named Chumani Maxwele, who triggered the modern wave of protests on 9 March 2015 when he threw human faeces at the statue. The protest was small, but the event prompted a surge in the prominence of the issue.

Within less than three weeks, following a series of increasingly aggravated protests, the decision was made to remove the statue. Unwilling to erase any evidence for its existence, students used black paint to create the impression of the shadow the statue used to cast.

The national and international publicity relating to the UCT protests was highly ambivalent, as increasingly hostile and aggressive tactics lost the movement much of the early favour it had won in the media. Reports of RMF’s apparent hatred of whites spread widely; practices such as impeding the entrance of non-blacks into the university cafeteria and using the anti-apartheid chant ‘one settler, one bullet’ often seemed to detract from the discussion they wished to provoke, leading to a frequently questionable media presentation. Nevertheless, interest in the movement grew rapidly. Protests spread across South Africa in the universities of Stellenbosch (Pretoria, Free State), and Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape Province.

Thousands of miles away, the anti-Rhodes feeling was also taken up in Oxford by Ntokozo Qwabe and others, causing a fascination on the part of the British media and sparking a range of discussion across the UK and beyond in relation to how the

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Rhodes: a Perspective

Joanna Engle

Cecil Rhodes, the man at the centre of debate, was a colonial politician, businessman and ardent white supremacist. He grew up in Hertfordshire before being sent to South Africa at the age of 17 to find a profession for himself. While there, his company De Beers gained near-complete domination of the world diamond market, with brief pauses in 1873 and 1876 for Rhodes to study at Oriel College, Oxford.

A keen imperialist, Rhodes entered politics in 1880 and became Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in 1890. While leader, Rhodes oversaw the formation of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe and Zambia) in the early 1890s, but was forced to resign in 1896 after the failed Jameson Raid, an attempt to incite an uprising among British expats in Boer-controlled territory. Rhodes died in 1902 and is buried in Zimbabwe.

Rhodes was, and remains, a controversial figure because of his fervour for British imperialism and belief in racial hierarchy. Brian Kwoba of

RMF argues that Rhodes was responsible for ‘stealing land, massacring tens of thousands of black Africans, imposing a regime of unspeakable labour exploitation in the diamond mines and devising pro-apartheid policies’. While the term ‘apartheid’ was probably not used during Rhodes’s lifetime and was South African policy only from 1948 onward, it hardly seems contentious to acknowledge his oppressive policies that laid the groundwork for these later laws.

Rhodes remains divisive, however, to the lingering colonial pride that seeps through British society. Perhaps this is a result of the lack of thorough education about the British empire, as it almost vanished from the curriculum in the 1960s after flawed attempts at decolonisation. Less forgiving, however, is the reality that pro-Rhodes views are most likely a reflection of the racism that still thrives throughout the country.

Rhodes’s colonial visions were reinforced during his Oxford years. As the intellectual heart of the British Empire, it is unsurprising that his time at Oxford influenced his worldview, with lectures such as John Ruskin’s ‘Imperial Duty’ re-

maining a favourite of Rhodes. His admiration for the Oxford system – ‘wherever you turn your eye... an Oxford man is at the top of the tree’ – inspired Rhodes to develop a scholarship scheme. The Rhodes Scholarship was founded in 1902 under the conditions of his will and funded by his legacy. The goal was to promote ‘young colonists’, and to continue the Oxford traditions of producing colonial world leaders and furthering British domination.

The Rhodes Scholarship was not open to women until 1977; obstructions to black South Africans gaining scholarships remained in place until 1991. (While Rhodes’s will states that ‘no student shall be qualified or disqualified for election to a Scholarship on account of his race or religious opinions’, scholarships were for a long time exclusively available to white-only private secondary schools.) Recently, the Redress Rhodes group was created by a group of Rhodes Scholars, to make ‘reparative justice a more central theme for Rhodes Scholars’.

Rhodes also left Oriel College £100,000, used in 1911 to build the Rhodes Building (featuring the infamous statue). Inscribed beneath is ‘e Larga MUnIfiCentIa CaeCILII rhoDes’ – ‘by means of the generous munificence of Cecil Rhodes’. ■

Rhodes Must Fall: a Timeline

9/03/15: Chumani Maxwele, a student of political science at the University of Cape Town (UCT), picks up a bucket of human faeces on the kerbside at the town of Khayelitsha and brings it back to UCT. He throws it into the face of a bronze statue of Cecil Rhodes that has stood prominently on the university’s rugby fields since 1934, shouting ‘Where are *our* heroes and ancestors?’.

12/03/15: More than a thousand students gather on the stairs of Jammie Plaza, the focal point of the UCT Upper Campus, to discuss the statue and Rhodes’s role in colonising Africa. After the meeting, protesters return to cover the statue in white and red sheets. The RMF Facebook page posts its first post.

15/03/15: The statue is again covered by protestors, this time in black bin-bags. RMF begins a week of daily sit-ins at the statue.

19/03/15: Two Oxford students, Annie Teriba and Bi Kwo, organise a ‘Solidarity Action’ in support of RMF UCT on the High Street in Oxford.

20/03/15: Students march on the UCT administrative building, the Bremner building, demanding a date for the removal of the statue. They begin an occupation of the building which lasts several weeks, supported by students, academics and members of the public, who supply the protesters with food. They ‘rename’ the building ‘Azania House’ (an older term which refers to parts of South-East Africa without the colonialist associations of ‘South Africa’).

25/03/15: Rhodes Must Fall publish a mission statement on their Facebook page, calling for an ‘end to institutionalised racism and patriarchy at UCT’.

27/03/15: UCT’s Senate, a 345-member body that decides on academic matters and has representatives from all academic departments, votes to remove the statue.

09/04/15: The Rhodes statue is removed following further disruptive campaigns from RMF.

12/04/15: The occupation of the Bremner Building ends after UCT serves the students an eviction letter.

28/05/15: Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford (RMFO) protests during an Oxford Union debate on the motion, ‘This House believes Britain owes reparations to her former colonies’, which passes by 185 to 56 votes. The Oxford Union later comes under fire from RMFO for serving a cocktail called the ‘Colonial Comeback’, accompanied in adverts by a picture of black hands in chains, after the event.

01/06/15: The Oxford Union Governing Body passes a unanimous motion to acknowledge that the Union is institutionally racist.

17/10/15: RMFO stages a ‘matriculation’ protest, where students wore red while matriculating.

06/11/15: RMFO protests outside Oriel College to demand that Oriel’s statue of Rhodes be taken down.

17/12/15: Oriel releases a statement responding to RMFO’s demands, announcing a six-month consultation period on the statue.

14/01/16: A *Cherwell* survey of 967 students finds that 54% of students favour Oriel’s statue remaining, compared to 37% who think the statue should go. Among BME students, however, 48% thought the statue should fall whereas 45% favoured it remaining.

19/01/16: The Oxford Union votes 245 to 212 in favour of removing the Oriel statue.

28/01/16: Oriel announces that the statue will remain.

03/06/16: RMFO members disrupt a meeting on contextualising the Rhodes statue that was intended only for Oriel members.

30/06/16: RMFO members protest shirtless outside Oriel on an Oxford open day.

02/12/16: RMFO returns to Oriel to stage another protest a year after Oriel’s original announcement of their ‘listening exercise’.

14/01/17: Oriel holds two internal meetings to discuss how to contextualise the statue: one for Oriel alumni and one for current College members and staff (see the report in this feature for the latter).

A more complete timeline can be found at www.thepoorprint.com, as can references for all articles in this report. Our thanks to Professor Teresa Morgan for assisting us with fact-checking across the report.

Putting Rhodes in His Place

Alex Waygood

‘Buccaneer, loose cannon, privateer – see Walter Raleigh.’ So goes one account of Cecil Rhodes – but one perhaps uncomfoting for Oriel College. Controversy around Rhodes has simmered since his death (*The Guardian’s* 1902 obituary lambasted him as a ‘dragon efficient in tooth and claw’) – yet still there is little consensus on how to approach his legacy.

On Saturday, 14 January 2017, Oriel held a meeting on how to contextualise the College’s statue of Rhodes, around which debate has raged since May 2015. Teresa Morgan, Classics Professor at Oriel, opened the meeting by defining its parameters: the purpose was neither to discuss the presence of the statue or the King Edward Street plaque (both of which had been decided on), nor to attempt to come to a single ‘Oriel view’ of Rhodes. Rather, the aim was to explore ways of recognising the complexity of Rhodes’s legacy – adding nuance to a symbol that, for many, appears to indicate unqualified endorsement.

The meeting, therefore, was hardly a concession to RMFO’s demands. (RMFO has yet to respond to repeated attempts by *The Poor Print* to contact them.) All four guest speakers present could be classed as ‘pro-contextualisation’, and the event was exclusively for Oriel members. The resultant demographic of the room was uncomfortable: a nearly entirely white audience. Few members of the JCR chose to attend – perhaps oddly so, given the furious arguments that raged around RMFO in Open Meetings only a year prior.

Yet the discussion was nonetheless valuable. Oriel’s Dr Ian Forrest (Fellow in History) began by ex-

ploring Rhodes’s biography; his connection to Oriel; and the lack of awareness around Britain’s colonial legacy. Dr Gus Casely-Hayford, a cultural historian and broadcaster, spoke on the conflict between heritage and diversity: how can we celebrate the achievements of the past while at the same time looking at it critically?

Anna Eavis, Curatorial Director of English Heritage, spoke intriguingly on two cases with parallels to Oriel: Richmond Castle, Yorkshire; and Marble Hill, Twickenham, an eighteenth-century villa. In both cases, the heritage process is riddled with controversy. Richmond Castle, dating from the Norman Conquest, has cells in which the walls are scrawled with pencil graffiti: relics of conscientious objectors imprisoned there during the First World War. A recently-built commemorative garden for the objectors proved controversial with locals due to Richmond’s military history. Meanwhile, Marble Hill has vital importance to archaeological history as one of the earliest structural uses of mahogany. Yet English Heritage faces the challenge of preserving this site of immense beauty, while at the same time allowing space for the narrative of the Belizean slaves who it is thought must have harvested the villa’s mahogany under appalling conditions.

The last speaker on the panel was Judy Ling Wong CBE, President of the Black Environment Network, who spoke on how to effect a change in narrative. Arguing that you must ‘bring a *wholeness* of yourself to truly bring about a multicultural society’, Wong reminded the room of the ‘enormous opportunity’ that the college has. As a world-renowned institution, Oriel has a responsibility to lead the way.

Views in the room varied wildly as to how best to contextualise the statue. Many maintained that Ori-

el—as an academic establishment—could not appear to be imposing a single view of Rhodes; some argued that any form of contextualisation was inappropriate, being more suited to heritage sites. Others swung as far in the other direction, arguing that, in order to achieve neutrality, any response by Oriel would have to be as large, solid and permanent as the statue. Some warned against ‘over-privileging’ the name of Rhodes in Oriel’s history, as ultimately counterproductive to any contextualisation.

In practical terms, an array of suggestions was proposed: a clarifying plaque (perhaps supplemented online); a series of lectures/exhibitions; or indeed an artistic installation to visually compete with the statue, either on the High Street or in Third Quad. All are being considered by Oriel’s Rhodes Working Group; the Governing Body will likely adopt some combination of the above.

The Poor Print’s view is that a supposedly neutral consideration of Rhodes (whether on a plaque or online) would be wholly insufficient. While it is true that Oriel has a responsibility to encourage nuanced discourse, the college can neither be pigeonholed as a centre of academia nor as a heritage site. It is also, for many, a community and a home, and so any response must adequately address the fact that the statue has become a symbol of violent oppression to some in Oriel. Oriel has a duty to support those who study here – and if it fails to be a welcoming environment, it may find that the diversity of applicants falls off a cliff. The contextualisation of the statue must be as antiseptic to a wound: antiseptic is never neutral. ■

ALSO ONLINE:
‘Safe Spaces and Student Protest’: an article by Juliet Butcher.

EDITORIEL Continued from page 7

impact of colonialism should be represented and acknowledged. Yet despite the huge interest from the UK press, much of the journalistic response was critical of the movement in ways which consistently misrepresented its aims.

The issue of the statue’s removal was often focused on to the exclusion of all of the other issues that Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford (RMFO) intended to raise in relation to the lack of black students and tutors in Oxford; the underrepresentation of black culture in the more traditional syllabuses; and the broader experience of black students within Oxford colleges. Harry Mount’s article in *The Daily Telegraph* summed up much of the outrage amongst the traditional British media with his article condemning ‘our pampered student emperors’. It became popular for journalists to talk of the movement as aiming to ‘erase history’: a line endorsed by the University of Oxford’s own chancellor Chris Patten, who argued that RMF were attempting to ‘expunge the names (though not the endowments) of those who fail to pass the tests of today’s political correctness’, and argued that students should accept the statue’s place or ‘think about being educated elsewhere’.

These notions became popular despite RMFO’s wider campaign, which promoted fresh discussions about colonial legacies; recontextualisation of imperial history; and more visibility to many of the issues surrounding the experience of black people in Oxford today.

Whilst RMFO found itself victim to attacks from much of the mainstream press, the presentation of Oriel was also at times punishing. The more traditional and conservative response was to condemn not only RMFO but also Oriel for agreeing to discuss and consider the requests of the student protesters.

On the other hand, supporters and sympathisers of the campaign – many of them among the student body – found themselves angered by the college’s eventual decision not to remove the statue and a perceived lack of student input.

The college found itself trapped between sides in an increasingly polarised debate, leaving it little chance to engage in any reasoned discussion. Further criticism followed when a ‘listening exercise’ on the statue (initially planned to be six months) was cut short on 28 January 2016 after just one month. While the early conclusion of this consultation was seen by some as a panicked response under the pressure of powerful alumni, others still condemned them for having begun such a process in the first place.

The perception of Oriel as a whole became a highly negative one. Some drew parallels between the Rhodes debate and other issues, presenting the college as sexist (the last to accept women); classist; conservative and elitist (summed up in the nickname ‘Toriel’); and finally, racist and unashamed by its colonial past (the Rhodes debate).

Even so long after the height of the media interest, the story still captures the attention of many. The protests continue—although in dwindling numbers—and RMF campaigner Joshua Nott’s acceptance of a place to study at Oxford with a Rhodes scholarship has also been widely reported on.

The aims of this special report are to give context to this complex issue, and analyse where RMFO and Oriel now stand. The report includes a perspective on Rhodes’s biography, and a summary of the history of the campaign. Also included is a feature on the recent contextualisation meeting held in Oriel. Finally, this report looks more widely at the context of other iconography and ‘safe space’ campaigns around the world which have been influenced by RMF—both in Cape Town and Oxford. ■

Iconography Campaigns: a Global Perspective

Emma Gilpin

The iconography campaigns that have taken place in recent years remind us of the fact that history is littered with people and things that it would perhaps be preferable, or at least more convenient, to forget. There have been movements across the University of Cape Town, Harvard University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, as well as other universities across Europe, America and Africa, to address some of the iconography across their campuses that still those reflect those times. However, these campaigns have frequently been accused of attempting to erase history, and this in particular was one of the main arguments against removing the statue

of Cecil Rhodes that faces onto the High Street at Oriel.

The RMFO campaign, which took on the college throughout 2015 and 2016 and continues to campaign for decolonisation in Oxford, was inspired by the campaign of the same name at the University of Cape Town, which succeeded in getting a statue of Cecil Rhodes removed from their own university’s grounds. This campaign differed from its Oxford-based counterpart in that students were more demonstrative throughout the campaign, throwing paint and once even faeces at the statue. The intensity of the South African campaign perhaps stemmed from the fact that the statue was more visible to students on a daily basis and it was more obviously a statue of Cecil Rhodes. It may also reflect the sad truth that in the UK it is much easier for us to dis-

tance ourselves from colonialism and the atrocities committed by men like Rhodes.

Attempts to decolonise universities and remove iconography which represents racist values or figureheads have become a global student movement, but RMFO brought the campaign to national attention, forcing many of us to face up to our country’s role in the colonisation of multiple countries and the abuse of so many native peoples. Across America, students have campaigned to remove symbols of slavery that have been ingrained in their institutions. At Harvard, the term ‘house master’ has been dropped for decanal roles due to its connotations of slavery, whilst campaigners at the law school successfully campaigned to have the Royall family coat of arms removed from the college’s crest, as the family are renowned for

their brutality towards their slaves. It seems logical that a modern institution that values diversity and inclusion would not want to seemingly endorse a family like the Royalls, or a notorious imperialist like Cecil Rhodes.

Some people believe that it is possible to support some iconography campaigns and not others. The RMFO debate has sparked discussion about whether we should remove statues of Winston Churchill, who, despite being the Prime Minister who helped to defeat the Nazis, also contributed to the starvation of many Indian people – arguably Great Britain’s ‘problematic fave’. For similar reasons, the Black Justice League at Princeton University has campaigned for the names to be changed of buildings celebrating Woodrow Wilson, a renowned supporter of racial segregation.

It is difficult to justify supporting some iconography campaigns whilst suggesting that others are unnecessary. Though a man like Cecil Rhodes is, to most people, almost impossible to endorse, we print figures like Winston Churchill on our banknotes because we celebrate him as an icon of British history. We can decide who our icons are: who we celebrate, and who we remember less favourably. These issues are complex and multifaceted, but the argument that removing a statue of a historical figure is an attempt to ‘erase history’ is nonsensical. History exists not so we can glorify those who may or may not have served our country well; it exists so that we can learn and not repeat the same mistakes. ■

View Emma’s article online at www.thepoorprint.com for summaries of the various iconography campaigns that have swept across the world in the last few years.