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Notre NEWS

Notre Dame Sixth Form Newspaper



HANNAH GREEN

With a very busy past few months, the newspaper group has welcomed fifteen new talented writers, editors, and thinkers. This term we have created another diverse range of articles written by our enthusiastic editorial team. I hope you enjoy reading this edition, and from all the team, have a Happy Christmas and a prosperous new year.

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FUNDRAISING UPDATE!

As a team we aim to run a fundraising event each term in support of a chosen charity. During the week of 27th November, the Newspaper Team organised a Bake-Sale. This was a real team effort with members baking at home each evening and offering a variety of cakes and cookies during the week ... raising an amazing £110.

THANK YOU so much to everyone who helped us achieve this (and we hope you enjoyed what you bought!)



As a team we had a range of charities we wanted to support, but all agreed on finding a way of supporting the survivors and displaced families of the conflict taking place between Israel and Palestine. We selected CAFOD – the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development – who reach out to people in poverty with practical help whatever their religion or culture. If you want to find out more about the work of CAFOD follow this link - <https://cafod.org.uk>

If you have a charity you want to propose as a focus for fundraising next term, please mention it to anyone in the Newspaper Team.

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Have Aliens Already been on Earth for a Thousand Years?

MARTHA JONES

On the 12th of September, the congressional meeting heralded by Mexico City was not only an unprecedented event for Mexico, but for Earth itself. Hundreds gathered, including politicians and journalists, to witness the unveiling of the two three-fingered corpses of allegedly extra-terrestrial creatures, and a briefing on UFOs. Since then, the scientific community have scrambled for answers – and some may have been found.

The two bodies were found in algae mines in Cuzco, South-Eastern Peru, one of the oldest inhabited cities in the Western Hemisphere, circa 2017. Presented at the congressional meeting by Jaime Maussan – a Mexican journalist and UFO enthusiast – the ‘aliens’ were claimed to be over a thousand years old. Maussan, however, having been publishing sensationalist UFO theories for nearly fifty years, has a history of reporting on later debunked conspiracies and other cases of specifically three-fingered humanoids; the most notorious of these was in 2017, when he participated in a video report showing alleged non-human remains, which he found also in Peru two years prior. This was posted on the website Gaia.com, which is frequently scrutinised for conspiracist content, where it was also later debunked as actually being the corpse of a human child. Also involved in the report was José de Jesús Zalce Benítez, Director of the Scientific

Institute for Health of the Mexican Navy, who also presented scans of the bodies at the briefing; these scans allegedly showed retractable necks, no teeth, large brains, and eyes capable of “wide stereoscopic vision”. Maussan made a point of proclaiming that over a third of the creatures’ DNA was “unknown”, and not part of our “terrestrial evolution.” He said according to Mexican media that “they were not found in a UFO crash,” and instead were “found in diatom (algae) mines and subsequently became fossilised.”

Maussan told the Mexico City delegation that the specimens had been examined by the Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM). Scientists used radiocarbon dating to date the corpses back to roughly a millennium ago and gather DNA evidence which supposedly supported his earlier statement. X-rays also showed ‘eggs’ in one cadaver, a few of which were in gestation. These claims were made under oath.

Within days, global scientists have already debunked Maussan’s and Benítez’ work. Professor Brian Cox, the physicist and broadcaster, argued they were “way too humanoid” to be genuine: “it’s very unlikely that an intelligent species from another planet would look like us.” Cox calls for samples to be sent to 23andme, the biotechnology company, to provide independent verification– to this day, the only people to have examined the ‘aliens’ have been UNAM.

Julieta Fierro, a scientist at UNAM’s Institute of Astrology, further criticises the

sensationalist attitude Maussan took to these findings; Fierro suggests that the presence of the carbon-14 isotope, which is absorbed and decays over time, in UNAM’s studies prove the presence of brain and skin tissue from different mummies who died at various times. She indicates that the proportion of carbon-14 in different atmospheres would not necessarily be the same as on Earth. Following the briefing in Mexico, NASA performed a report into anomalous UFOs chaired by David Spergel, where Spergel argued vehemently that samples from the specimens should be made available for the scientific community world-wide.

Despite the incredibility of those close to the creatures and the barrier between the aliens and the rest of the world (and some possibly illegal activities concerning the transportation of the bodies), the UFO community and others globally call for further investigation into other UFO incidents, and not the total rejection that was seen from the US Congress. Ryan Graves, a former US navy pilot, who reported UFOs sightings in July, urged Congress to take more time to investigate the situation, saying that ufology is “grossly underreported”. Whilst that may be true, the creatures ‘found’ in Cuzco give us no reason to rush. **Earth is alien-free – as far as we know.**

Parlez-vous Français?

ALECIA WHITWORTH
FREYA GOODWIN

French, along with English, is the only language to be spoken across all five continents. It is the international language of cooking, fashion, theatre, the visual arts, dance, and architecture.



A knowledge of French offers access to great works of literature, as well as French being the third most important language for business, after only English and Chinese. So, why is it a minority A-level subject?

“IT’S TOO HARD”

French is generally presumed to be a difficult language to learn and pronounce. Most often than not, French words sound completely different to how they are spelt; Miss Jimenez-Montez suggests this is the “first challenge” of learning the French dialect. Immediately, Spanish appears easier – words look how they sound. Yet, the Foreign Service Institute places French in the top ten easiest languages to learn for English-speakers, supposedly as a result of it having the same alphabet, there being a history of French usage in England and that the language is more embedded into British culture than you may expect – in fact 45% of English words have French origin!

Russell Group universities class French A Level as a “facilitating subject”. Wendy Piatt, director general of the Russell Group, said its universities wanted to see more students studying languages at GCSE and above. *“If the UK is to engage fully with the wider world in business, diplomacy and academia,*

then many more young people need to be studying languages.”

On average, more students can achieve higher grades in French than in English. This table shows proof of English being a more difficult subject than French. For example, in 2022, only 20.2% of students achieved an A in English, whereas 30% achieved an A in French. This shows that contrary to popular belief, French is not in fact impossible to succeed in.

“FRENCH WON’T BENEFIT ME IN DAILY LIFE”

Since Spain has become a top tourist location for British people, it arguably outshines French and German – which were traditionally the most popular languages to learn in the UK. Culturally, many families choose Spain as a holiday destination; perhaps giving students more motivation to learn a language you often see and hear in real life. However, French is also prominent in daily life; there are over 97 million native speakers of French worldwide and over 300 million people who use French in daily life nationally.

The real problem is language learning after GCSE level, when students are given the option to carry on their linguistic studies further. In the increasingly employment-driven climate we live and study in, language and culture are seen to be disregarding; Guillaume (our Québécois language assistant) suggests that if we do not see a language as “professionally enriching” we do not view it as necessary or useful.

There are however many job roles that can be enriched by knowing a second language – even job roles you would not imagine! Despite all the positives of studying a language beyond compulsory study, half of sixth forms in schools and colleges have been forced to drop A-levels in modern languages because of “totally inadequate” funding of post-

16 education. Research on the UK Government website indicates that 35% of sixth forms have had to stop teaching French.

“EVERYONE SPEAKS ENGLISH, SO I DON’T NEED TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE”

Another, more apparent stigma is that most people in the world can speak English, so why worry about learning another language? This is factually untrue; only 6% of the world’s population are native English speakers. If we compare this to the 75% of people globally who cannot speak English at all, this stigma is reduced to a problematic myth. There is however proof that people are still interested in learning French despite these “presumptions.” French is more accessible than most believe, it is everywhere: media, culture, sport, luxuries.

Guillaume (our language assistant from Quebec) says that ‘French is still a popular subject,’ suggesting that there are a lot of language assistant opportunities to teach French still. Arguably, we are also cutting ourselves off from culture and language politically, making ourselves more geographically remote. Brexit and other recent political events are making it harder to communicate, making us wonder ‘why we are going this way’ into our own ‘bubble’, as Miss Jimenez-Montez questions. This is shown in statistics – The European Commission’s Flash Barometer Report found that in April 2018 32% of UK 15–30-year-olds felt confident reading and writing in two or more languages, compared to 79% in France, 91% in Germany, and 80% on average across EU member states. This is alarming, considering England prides itself on having an elitist education system.

Miss Jimenez-Montez says learning other languages is the ‘beauty of who we are as humans’.

Curriculum Violence: Is it Finally Time to Separate Black People from Slavery?

VIA PALMA

Year after year, it becomes abundantly clear that educators often tend to teach whitewashed historical narratives through a focus on segregation, slavery and (if feeling adventurous) the seemingly miraculous success of a Black woman despite countless adversity faced at the hands of her white peers. Education is fundamental to social change; if the realities and breadth of Black History are not educated on, how is change towards a greater equitable society achievable?

When we discuss Black History taught in school, it becomes critical to recognise that Black British citizens have separate lived experiences to that of their African American counterparts – in short Black people are not a monolith. In recognising this we can attempt to dismantle the notion that the history of African Americans contains Black subcultures, however still maintaining and recognising its importance in the curriculum. Stephanie P. Jones guides the conversation of Black History Month towards education of the entire story including Black achievements, unsung heroes, and livelihoods, as opposed to a central focus on racial trauma. It is important to extend the discussion of Black History beyond curriculums and modules that misguide or focus on areas of immense racial oppression.

Despite what a Eurocentric lens will tell you, Black people were not invented with the arrival of Africans in the 15th and 16th century to the Americas. Yet we are reduced to the centuries of American slavery and the continuous adversity faced after it. Indeed, it is a crucial part of our history but not the entire history;

being told every October, that “your direct ancestors were considered subhuman and subject to [lists every truly evil act ever]” can only contribute to a traumatic school experience that fuels the insecurities of black students.



Benjamin Zephaniah (1958-2023)

Erhabor Ighodaro and Greg Wiggan, coined “curriculum violence” defining it as a “deliberate manipulation of academic programming” which “compromises the intellectual or psychological well-being of learners.”, Who Jones cites in her 2020 works, “Ending Curriculum violence” where she develops this concept in saying “Curriculum violence is indeed detrimental, but it does not have to be deliberate or purposeful. The notion that a curriculum writer’s or teacher’s intention matters misses the point: Intentionality is not a prerequisite for harmful teaching. Intentionality is also not a prerequisite for racism.

Curriculum violence occurs when educators and curriculum writers have constructed a set of lessons that damage or otherwise adversely affect students intellectually and emotionally.” Jones makes a solid point: it’s not just about someone trying to cause harm with the stuff they teach. Often, biases or oversights in what we’re taught can still hurt us, even if nobody means it. Education isn’t just about cramming facts into

our heads; it’s about shaping how we see the world. By fixing the stuff that might be harming us, teachers can help us think critically and understand different perspectives. Black History Month should serve as an exciting opportunity to fill in the gaps left by textbooks and curriculum standards. It’s a chance to motivate educators to extend this learning throughout the year, enlightening both Black and non-Black students about acknowledging and honouring the significance of Black lives continuously. So, what is Notre Dame actually doing?

Despite there still being a long way to go there are arguably efforts to be made thanks to the efforts of the Notre Dame English department. The Department at Notre Dame staff are constrained under the secretary of state for education and the diversity of the syllabus only worsens under a current Conservative government. Who govern what is taught and, more importantly, what is not. With the power that they do have, the English department opt for a more inclusive syllabus. The school uses the ‘Telling Tales’ short story anthology as a modern text for some KS4 students and introduces a poetry anthology for teaching in Y9. These selections successfully introduce diversity into the curriculum within the confines of the KS4 and KS5 exam courses.

Jones urges educators to contemplate two questions when evaluating if something is curriculum violence:

“What historical events or situations am I asking that students examine and experience? Are my lessons focused primarily on Black and Brown histories when faced with trauma, pain, or death? Why?”

The Doctors Strike Back

SHREYA SHAIJU
NIAMH IGOE

Over the past few years, several groups of NHS staff have organised nationwide industrial action due to dispute over pay. Walkouts began with Nurses' strikes which took place in late 2022, after being averted and pushed back for nearly a year. Since then, both junior doctors and consultants have joined them, forcing the Government to act. **But how ethical really are these strikes, and why was the government unable to prevent them?**

When asked why doctors are striking, the most likely response from the public would be that it is a result of pay, and for the most part, this is correct. Both junior doctors and consultants, similar to other NHS Staff have not had pay rises in line with inflation since 2010. This is partly due to the impact of Brexit, COVID, the rising inflation and, most of all, the government's failure to manage the economy effectively. Though many have seen salaries dropping, junior doctors and consultants feel that they have had a significantly higher cut in terms of pay to inflation ratios. This, however, is not the primary reason why most doctors are striking. Long, unsociable hours are commonplace in the NHS, which takes a toll on them both physically and mentally, and leaves staff feeling overworked and undervalued. As a result, Doctors feel that they are not being fairly compensated for the skills required to work effectively.

Having said that, junior doctors earn significantly more than the average UK starting salary especially considering they are required to

engage in a hands-on profession with very little prior experience, from day one. And consultants remain in the top 2% of earners in the UK despite below inflation pay rises over the years. This has led to Doctors' strikes becoming broadly unpopular with the public, with 44% of people being opposed to the junior doctor strikes and 58% of people opposed to consultant strikes.

This unpopularity is due to people doubting the morality of strike action being carried out by healthcare professionals. Medicine has always been considered, above all else, a vocation rather than a profession and despite it being hard work it can be highly rewarding. These strikes are bringing to light how medicine may have changed from a calling to just another high-paying job. It is for reasons such as these that many people have the same question: **Do these professionals really need to strike?**

Another reason so many are against the strikes is due to the nation-wide effect on the general population. In a country where many rely on free healthcare, strikes have increased number of people on waiting lists, and on-going support has become increasingly limited, especially post-Covid. Since strikes have begun, more than one million bookings have been rescheduled, with many patients having treatments or appointments cancelled for a second or third time. So far, industrial action has contributed to more than 7.7 million people awaiting hospital treatment. Even so, once this conflict has been resolved, the lives lost, and the families affected cannot be undone.

The blame for this, however, does not solely fall on the striking doctors. Instead, the government

should have taken steps to try to prevent the situation from escalating

to the severity it has. At the start of June, after six months of both nurses and junior doctors striking, the government announced pay rises of between 5% and 9% for NHS staff, however, this falls short of the 17% inflationary pay cut that junior doctor experienced over the last 10 years and is even further away from the 35% they were demanding. Later again in July, just before consultants started striking, they announced a 6% pay increase, which did little to impede further industrial action. At the same time in Scotland however, strikes were called off after a 17.5% pay increase was offered to junior doctors. This leaves the question: **What has been done to prevent the situation from escalating any further?**

NHS England has worked with providers and others to ensure that some contingencies were in place during walkouts to ensure patient safety as it is 'the priority'. These include maintaining safe levels of cover and prioritising those in the most urgent need of care and derogations were agreed nationally with the British Medical Association (BMA). More recently, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) have sat down with BMA committee members representing both consultants and junior doctors, have agreed to pause strike action, for the moment, under the condition that both parties will have their requests looked over by the DHSC, in the hope that a solution can be found to end the dispute.

As striking medical staff are working towards a solution, public perception remains that they are putting patient lives at risk for a pay rise, yet if they didn't have the right to strike, where would this leave our public sector staff?

“If you don’t do politics, politics will do you” – An Interview with Paul Blomfield, MP for Sheffield Central

HANNAH GREEN

As the prospect of a General Election draws closer, I wanted to connect with my local Member of Parliament (MP), Paul Blomfield, to understand more about the role of our MP, his personal convictions, and his hopes for the future of party politics in the UK. For many of us in Y13 this will be our first opportunity to take part in the selection process of our next Parliament.

Elected as MP for Sheffield Central in 2010, Paul’s political experience has been one of working in the opposition party during a turbulent period of changes in our country – including austerity in Public Services, Brexit, economic challenge, the cost-of-living crisis, and a rolling programme of strike action in our NHS, schools, and other public service sectors.

Before becoming an MP, Paul was involved in social action movements, and played prominent roles in the National Union of Students and the Anti-Apartheid Movement (1979-1994), but he was less interested in party politics:

“I got involved in politics at school but not in party politics. ...the 1960s was a time of political change, and my imagination was caught by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Martin Luther King and the extraordinary injustice which was being challenged with such maturity and confidence. At University I was involved in my student union and spent some time in South Africa at the request of the African National Congress after the Soweto uprising in 1976.”

Paul later accepted that joining a political party was a key route to achieving change, leading him to join the Labour Party, as *“a mechanism through which you could achieve things,”* though he had never really planned to be an MP.

Paul’s ‘Annual Conversation’ with his constituents has been a successful way of engaging with people to understand their issues, concerns, and experiences, and this helps to shape his *“personal priorities.”* As he says:

“It’s a very special privilege to be able to stand up in the House of Commons and speak on behalf of ... something like 140,000 constituents. It’s also a little bit nerve wracking the first time. I try to ensure I live up to [my constituents] and remember the weight of responsibility.”

While Paul clearly has enjoyed his time in Parliament, he also feels that only experiencing life as an opposition MP has been *“less rewarding ... it’s difficult in opposition as there is a limit to what you can achieve”*. The last decade has clearly been challenging in many ways and Paul reflects he has seen changes he never thought possible such as the election of Trump in the US, and UK based turbulence such as the decision to leave the European Union (Brexit).

But he has strived to effect change and be part of a strong Opposition to the Government. Working closely with Labour’s leader, Kier Starmer, as a Shadow Brexit Minister, Paul has also had opportunities to work on a *“cross-party basis”* to find solutions to a range of issues, for example, setting up an all-party parliamentary group for students to ensure their voice in Westminster. As Paul’s constituency of Sheffield Central has the largest proportion of university students in the country, student-related issues are a key concern of his. On student finance for example, he says:

“One of the things I’ve tried to do for students now is to open up a debate

about the student funding regime and look to the period post the election when a new government coming in might be able to make the repayment regime fairer and also to reduce and provide a little bit more financial support at the point where it’s needed.”



I asked Paul about the prospects of a Labour Government at the next General Election, and what key issues that Government would face. Paul suggests that *“there’s no bigger issue facing us than the action necessary to keep the planet sustainable”* and the need to work at rebuilding confidence in democracy. As an advocate for electoral reform, Paul also remarks that the next Labour Government is intent on devolving power further to regions and local areas, and personally, he would like to see fair representation in future structures:

“I’ve been a long-term advocate of proportional representation ... meaning instead of having two big parties’ people would have an opportunity to vote for parties closer to their personal views. We also need to have more honesty in the dialogue between politicians and the public on issues like taxation and immigration.”

Acknowledging that the new government will have significant challenges inheriting a *“broken economy”*, Labour’s aim (if elected) will be to focus on economic growth

to delivering extra wealth for the country, which can fund and rebuild good public services. As Paul says, with real feeling:

“It’s about improving people’s living standards; it’s about rebuilding public services; it’s about living in a fairer society.”

With the next general election on the horizon, the power to decide what the future of politics holds rests partly on the shoulders of younger people like us. Paul points out that there are consequences if you do not vote, and that under the current government, *“younger people have been treated poorly by a series of policies.”*

Paul is passionate about the need to get involved in politics, to join local and national debates, and exercise the right to vote. When asked why we should do this, Paul has a simple, powerful message:

“If you don’t do politics, politics will do you!”

In other words, Paul tells us that if we want decisions to be made that reflect our perspectives and our interests, we must be informed and get involved. I was inspired by Paul’s ethical approach to politics and his strive to understand the issues affecting us. Whilst he has announced that he will stand down at the next General Election, I hope our next MP has the same principled approach to representing us in Parliament – and the lesson I take from Paul is that younger people have a vital role in making sure that is the case.

“So, I can get married, but I can’t vote?” Lowering the Franchise for 16-year-olds

**GIANCARLO MEMPOUO
MARIELLA BOATENG**

In recent years, the question of whether the voting age in the UK should be lowered to 16 has sparked much debate. Proponents argue that lowering the voting age could engage younger citizens in the democratic process, fostering a sense of political responsibility and participation from an earlier age. While some politicians, mostly in the Conservative party, raise concerns about the maturity and political understanding of 16-year-olds, evidence suggests that this age group is more politically aware and engaged than ever before. Lowering the voting age to 16 in the UK could empower the next generation of leaders, fostering a more inclusive and diverse political landscape for the future.

Lowering the voting age to 16 could be a crucial step in encouraging political engagement among younger citizens. At 16, individuals are often actively involved in their communities, schools, and local issues, demonstrating a level of understanding and awareness that is not reflected in the current voting age requirement; allowing them to vote would give them a greater voice in shaping the policies and decisions that will inevitably impact their futures. By engaging them early on, the democratic process becomes more inclusive and reflective of diverse perspectives, ensuring that the voices of the youth are not overlooked in the political discourse. Proven in places like Scotland in which when 16- and 17-year-old are given the vote the voting turnout increases drastically, the suggestion that young people do want to be involved in political discussions can be made. Lowering the voting age could also serve as an

educational tool, fostering a deeper understanding of civics and political processes among younger individuals. It may encourage schools to incorporate more comprehensive political education, teaching students about the importance of their vote and how it contributes to the functioning of a democratic society. Such initiatives would nurture a culture of active citizenship, leading to a more politically informed and responsible generation.

This argument may however be flawed, 16-year-olds are suggested to lack political maturity and a broad political education. Many young people who are pushing to extend the franchise typically indicate that 16-year-olds are well versed in current affairs and have a good understanding of both historical and contemporary society i.e., the capacity to vote well. For every politically aware 16-year-old, however, one could expect there to be 5 other 16-year-olds who would not know the House of Lords from the House of Commons. The lack of political maturity is a structural fault, and we must strive to make the English education system provide a more comprehensive study of politics from Year 1 (one that does not result in 18-year-olds who do not have a basic understanding of government) before allowing the right to vote. Other countries have made hours of civic education mandatory (e.g., Estonia and Finland), and young people are more engaged politically there overall.

Numerous countries have already embraced the idea of a lower voting age, demonstrating its feasibility and success. Countries such as Austria, Scotland, and Argentina have all lowered the voting age to 16, reporting positive outcomes in terms of increased youth engagement and a more diverse political landscape. For instance, Austria’s experience has shown that allowing 16-year-olds to vote has led to a more inclusive political environment, with a considerable number of young individuals actively participating in elections and making informed

political choices. In 2013, 63% of Austrians' 16- and 17-year-olds said they wanted to engage in the vote, which rose in the 2019 European Parliament elections.

Despite some critics arguing that 16-year-olds may lack the necessary maturity and understanding to make informed political decisions, educational campaigns, workshops, and interactive programs aimed at enhancing political literacy among young voters may provide the necessary education to ensure this age group are able to make informed political decisions. Enthusiasm and fresh perspectives that younger individuals bring to the table can invigorate political discourse and encourage a broader consideration of issues that directly impact their lives and futures.

Social media allows us to see how incredibly impressionable 16-year-olds still are, suggesting their unsuitability for suffrage. Virtual bandwagons are frequent, consisting of engaging in trends and ideas on the search for likes and comments that feed the dopamine craving, no matter how stupid or dangerous. Apps like Twitter use algorithms to curate a timeline which is content which you have proven to enjoy, this makes echo chambers. Echo chambers had a detrimental impact on Corbyn's Labour campaign as ideas about his antisemitic stance festered. Protests and riots have been planned using Snapchat alone and while some events had good intentions and outcomes, what is still clear is that 16-year-olds are easily impressionable and may lack the maturity to see the seriousness of the situation. There may be some who vote for candidates who are objectively an irresponsible choice for 'banter' or engagement and a boost on the algorithm. Or, in a darker sense, it would be easier for extreme candidates to groom 16-year-olds to vote and support them. For example, the sudden rise of Andrew Tate is an example of the type of political candidate that could be in our Houses of Parliament should we let 16-year-olds have the vote.

People aged 18 to 24 are the least likely to turn out to vote (47% turnout in the 2019 General Election, a decrease of 7% when compared to 2017). At the most recent German federal election in 2017, turnout for those of a similar age stood at around 68%, much higher than the UK. In 2017 the Netherlands general election had turnout for those aged 18-24 at 66%, and even this figure was low by their standards. In comparison to other countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany, we are underperforming, and should be looking at what we can do to make sure that when children are given the right to vote at 18, they feel able and want to, rather than allowing more people to vote, and allowing those already not voting to become more apathetic. One viable way of increasing young voter participation is through changing our FPTP (First Past the Post) system which has resulted in some safe seats (meaning the young people voting may feel their voice does nothing) and moving to a variation of proportional representation. This would require more resources being put into changing this policy as opposed to focusing on 'Votes at 16' and would benefit more people.

Scotland and Wales are close examples where the franchise has been extended to 16-year-olds, as in both you are required to be 16 and older to vote in local elections (in Scotland you can also vote for Members of Scottish Parliament). However, the decisions Scotland and Wales can make are different to the decisions made at Westminster; in that they affect fewer people. Wales only allows 16-year-olds to vote in local elections, suggesting that they are not willing to allow 16-year-olds full rein, but instead are limiting the power their voice holds, and for good reason. The campaign for votes at 16 should be stopped, and our focus and resources should be on other policies and campaigns, such as reform of the voting system or civic education for under 18s. At most, we could consider allowing 16-year-olds to vote for local councillors and hope that this

would in turn force councils and the government to put time and energy into creating a comprehensive political education package and enforcing it in schools.

Lowering the voting age to 16 in the UK is a bold step toward fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy. Empowering the youth to participate in the electoral process will not only cultivate a sense of responsibility but also encourage a more diverse and dynamic political environment. With appropriate educational support and opportunities for engagement, 16-year-olds can become active contributors to the democratic process, shaping the future of the nation and ensuring that their voices are heard on matters that affect them directly. As we move forward, it is imperative that the UK embraces this progressive change, recognizing the potential of its younger citizens as the architects of a more vibrant and inclusive democratic society.

With the next general election suggesting a change in the Conservative reign, whether we allow 16-year-olds the vote or not, **it is imperative we engage the younger electorate in political discussion.**

The Fleabag Effect: Destruction, Disassociation, Discontent

EVE ILLIEN-
MIDDLETON

Misery – you should try it! (Now comes in pink for the special women in your life!)

It is not difficult to picture a woman ‘in her fleabag era.’ She has slept in her makeup yet retains a flawless red lip, is partial to two and a half cigarettes for breakfast and eternally contends with the feminine urge to self-destruct. She appears to be a danger to herself and those around her, prone to performing her pain as an art form and would rather crumble than clearly communicate an emotion. We know and love her – some of us even long to be her. In her BBC series ‘Fleabag,’ Phoebe Waller-Bridge permits women to be greedy, perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, depraved, and morally bankrupt - unable to even call themselves feminists. This offers an insight into the inner functioning of the increasingly popular, flawed, and nihilistic feminist character. But is Waller-Bridge’s magnum opus an ingenious ‘tour de force’ of women’s liberation, or merely a show for posh girls that paints the dangers of entangling romanticism with self-destruction in a fatally positive light?

Central to the challenges Fleabag faces lies the ‘male gaze,’ a phenomenon that dates back as far as men themselves do. For thousands of years men have controlled art, literature, and cinema, prompting Laura Mulvey to coin the phrase ‘male gaze’ in her 1975 essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.’ She defined this as the act of positioning men as the viewer and women as the viewed, men as active and women as passive, in this commodifying



women’s bodies for not only the men on screen, but also for the audience.

The male gaze also limits female characters, denying them of the nuance and backstory their male counterparts receive.

Fleabag’s very existence radically counteracts this concept. Fair or not, it is clear that the male characters in season one of ‘Fleabag’ act only as accessories to her life. This radical reversal of roles positions these men - Fleabag’s constant on-off boyfriend Harry in particular – as minor characters merely there to entertain Fleabag or fulfil her sexual desires. It is here that the female gaze differs - whilst the male gaze centres around the objectification of women, the female gaze renders men almost irrelevant. Whilst this narcissism is not necessarily what real women should strive for, it is refreshing to see such a deep-seated part of cinema rejected so wholeheartedly. It is however difficult to ignore that the female gaze somewhat involves the male gaze through its defiance of it. Art does not exist in a vacuum. Margaret Atwood writes that “*even pretending you are not catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy*”, which remains pertinent even through the snarky feminist lens of fleabag.

Whilst the framing of the series excludes men as an important factor, Fleabag herself appears to operate in a grey area between exploiting herself to men to get what she wants and radical ‘man-hating’ feminism. However, is this discord between the apparent intentions of the series and

the actions of the female protagonist what allows ‘Fleabag’ to rebel against the male gaze so unreservedly? ‘Fleabag’ portrays perfectly the deeply nuanced, oxymoronic space we inhabit as women: appearing to have power over our male counterparts in terms of romance and yet unable to use this power as currency in ‘the real world’.

Waller-Bridge utilises an ingenious breaking of the fourth wall (generally reserved for stage), perhaps to confront us with the abnormality of hearing pure unfiltered thought from a woman in front of the camera. It is perhaps ‘Fleabag’s’ roots, as a comedy show at the fringe, that has given rise to the series’ success. Central to Waller-Bridge’s genius is her ability transfer the show from one medium to another without compromising on intimacy and maintaining the painfully close relationship between Fleabag and the audience.

In the broader social scope, Fleabag appears a powerful woman: she’s fit, painfully middle class and men are, somewhat irritably, drawn to her - however, she has limited control in her inner sphere: she is motherless, grieving the death of her best friend, failing in her career and has an ironically intimate crush on a heartthrob of a priest. This notion that the patriarchy is an overwhelmingly internal issue highlights Fleabag’s privilege yet maintains a ring of truth. ‘Fleabag’ presents a controversial interpretation of women’s issues, now labelled as so-called ‘dissociative feminism.’ This trope generally

consists of white, waif-like, wealthy women performing nihilism and revelling in their patriarchally induced misery. It is an ideology not only displayed in 'Fleabag,' but also in works such as Sally Rooney's 'Normal People' and Ottessa Moshfegh's 'My Year of Rest and Relaxation.' Emmeline Clein suggests that dissociative feminism is a "curdling of the hyper optimistic, #girlboss" feminism of the aughts," encouraging us to question whether, after four glorious years in the spotlight, dissociative feminism has now received its death sentence.

Realistically, it seems counter-intuitive to encourage women to languish in their individual malaise rather than fight for progress as a general movement. There may, however, be a small part in every woman that yearns for the opportunity to wallow in their patriarchal pessimism and wish for their lives not to be representative of a worldwide movement. There is a fine line (whether or not it is crossed in 'Fleabag?') between freeing women of the expectation of being perfect, positive, perky feminists and encouraging a nihilism that is available exclusively to women already accessing a certain degree of privilege.

Whilst many are drawn to 'Fleabag' for its witty one-liner and refreshing reframing of female sexuality, some may argue it is nothing more than an exhibition of middle-class fragility. Viewing the show from a wider angle, Fleabag is perfectly ensconced in the bourgeois paradise of leafy London streets with a wealthy family to fall back on. Many argue that no true threat exists in Fleabag's life, that her only enemy is her own brain. However, perhaps to worry whether Fleabag's 'poshness' obscures the relatability of the show means we have misunderstood the tragi-comic as a whole. It feels as though Waller-Bridge invites us to dissect Fleabag, and ergo ourselves, rendering labels such as 'good' and bad, 'posh' and 'relatable' as irrelevant. This conversation in itself is the very

embodiment of privilege – whether or not 'Fleabag' displays 'good' feminism pertains little to the very real issues and dangers woman face daily around the world. We must not lose the true aims of the feminist movement in amongst the obsessive fog of navel-gazing.

Ultimately, no art can be truly separated from the world in which it was created. Perhaps no art born in the patriarchal sphere can be fully separated from our misogynistic reality, and this is merely a fact we must contend with. To hold 'Fleabag' to the highest standards of art purely due to the importance it places on the female perspective is unfair. To insist we hold up every woman's art as a paradigm of patriarchal defiance feels misogynistic in itself: art does not always have to be a symptom of a wider cultural disease. Whilst 'Fleabag' may have its limitations, it achieves one vital aim. **It makes women feel seen, and that is invaluable.**

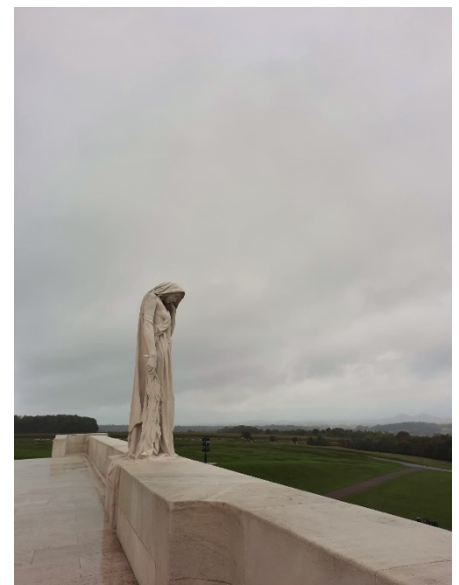
A Trip to the Battlefields of WW1

ALEXANDRA GARNETT

At the end of September this year, a group of y13 students, myself included, went on a trip to the battlefields of World War One in Belgium and France. We stayed at the Peace Village in Belgium which is a centre specifically built to host groups that want to learn more about the battlefields.

After travelling to the north of France by coach and ferry, we began at Vimy Ridge. The battle fought at Vimy Ridge was a part of the battle of Arras (1917) and the Canadian soldiers' goal was to capture the ridge. Though it does not seem to be a significant ridge, the surrounding land was flat,

so even a small amount of high ground provided advantage for whoever held it. Here, we were able to walk through the trenches that have been preserved and, in some areas, rebuilt. It was at this point that the axis and allied forces were the closest of the places we visited, close enough that they could talk to each other. We then visited the memorial at Vimy Ridge, which was designed by W.S Allward with some interesting symbolism - with two figures at the base of the memorial to represent France and Canada who were countries in mourning. Another statue adjacent to the monument represents Canada gazing sadly upon a sculpted tomb beneath the monument. An aspect which is equally moving is the forest of the site, with each tree representing a life which was lost in the battle.



Mother France and the Vimy Ridge Memorial

Moving into Belgium we visited the Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery, with its interactive educational visitor centre. We visited one specific grave in this cemetery, the grave of Nurse Nellie Spindler who died from injuries from an attack on the casualty clearing centre that she worked at. She is one of only two British women from the war buried on the western front.

On the next day, we experienced Sanctuary Wood, where trenches

have been preserved by the family who owned the farmland containing them. There were many relics and artefacts in the museum to be considered before entering the trenches. To give an indication of the conditions soldiers experienced the bottom of the trenches had only planks and it was visibly muddy. Whilst the shell holes in the ground made the experience very real, there were many trees which made the area feel sheltered - a luxury that the soldiers would not have had. Leaving the trenches, we went to Langemark German war cemetery which is one of the few German cemeteries on the western front. Here, none of the soldiers had individual resting places or messages from loved ones only their name and their rank in the army. There was a mass burial plot in the centre with 24,917 known and 7,977 unknown soldiers buried in it. The known soldiers had their names on basalt blocks surrounding their grave.



Sanctuary Wood preserved trenches

From Langemark, we moved to Tyne Cot which has 35,000 names on the memorial of the missing and around 12,000 graves with many of them unnamed. Unnamed graves have the phrase 'known unto God' on the gravestones and sometimes their country or rank on them if it could be worked out from their uniform. As with many of the other cemeteries that we visited, we were taken to one notable grave by the teachers then

were given time to look around the graves and memorial by ourselves. We headed into France on the third day, stopping off first at Arras Cemetery where we held our act of remembrance. We wrote a message on a cross and placed it on a grave, spending a minute in silence to respect the soldier who sacrificed their life for their country. Arras Cemetery also remembers soldiers whose bodies were never recovered; their names engraved into the walls of the memorial.

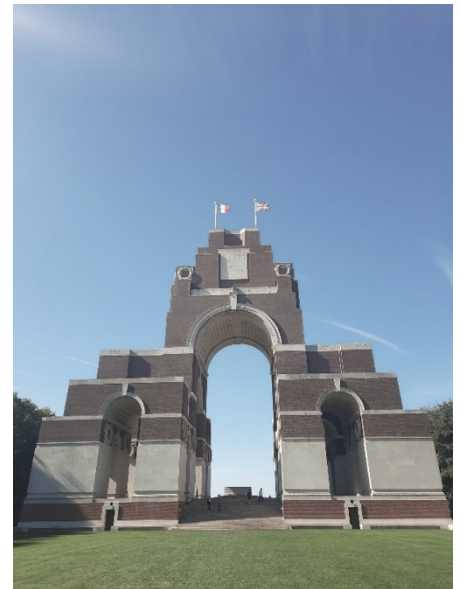
Then we went to Deville Wood where South African soldiers fought; it was named 'devil' wood due to the brutal fighting conditions they faced in the wood. We were told that the wood never rested, and fighting would occur throughout all hours of the day, meaning that soldiers could not rest. When we were there, there was many trees in the wood but all but one of those trees have grown after the war. The final remaining tree from the war was now caged in, perhaps after surviving a war a protective cage may not be entirely necessary.



Tyne Cot Cemetery

Whilst in France, we went to multiple other memorials, including Thiepval, the Newfoundland Memorial and the Sheffield Pals Memorial. Thiepval is a memorial dedicated to the missing of the Battle of the Somme with 72,246 names on the memorial. In the same way with most of the other memorial we visited there were

memorial registers containing names of those on the memorial, included the date of their death, their rank of the army and their home address. At the Sheffield Pals memorial, there was a trench which we stood in to re-enact going over the top of the trench in the same way that the Sheffield Pals Battalion did in the Battle of the Somme.



Thiepval Memorial in France

To reflect, I feel like this trip was very educational even for someone who does not study history A-level and it is a type of trip that I would never have undertaken independently - I am glad that school runs the trip.

Has the Government gone barking mad?!

CONNIE ARMSTRONG
CHARLOTTE BALL

In recent times, only one breed has been bullied by the government. With every passing week another headline shows: 'man mauled', 'woman attacked', 'child savaged', and which breed is always accountable for these tragedies? The XL Bully of course.

This scrutiny can be seen as unjustifiable; that a minority of violent beasts are representing a docile majority. On Tuesday 31st October, the government announced that the breed has been added to the Dangerous Dogs list in England and Wales. Breeds on the dangerous dog list have often been intentionally bred to have undesirable characteristics such as stronger aggressive instincts and a drive to fight and hunt more often; this is seen in the case of the XL Bully backed by the surplus amount of tragic tales piling up against them. Being placed on the Dangerous Dog list means that people will no longer be able to buy, sell, gift or breed the XL Bully. It is now also illegal to own one from December 31st, 2023, without exemption and has been announced that the dogs will have to be neutered by June 30th, 2024, as well as a need for them to be muzzled in public areas including the owner's own car. This may be seen as essential to providing safety, however, leaves many asking if these drastic measures are a necessity.

If the government had not banned the XL Bully, would the public be willingly letting a brute live among people who are defenceless against its bite? This dog may not be meant for a life alongside humans – the facts agree with this sentiment. Fourteen deaths in the past two years (estimated 70% of dog attacks in the

UK) - despite the fact they only make up a mere one percent of dogs. Cases such as the tragic death of Jack Lis indicate the truth behind these statistics; Jack (aged 10) tragically died after an attack in Caerphilly on 8th November 2021 as a result of a savage XL Bully attack. His heartbroken mother stated that the dog was "a clear and lethal danger"; this fear was echoed by many when hearing about the case of an innocent boy taken from the world too soon.

The XL Bully is therefore a danger to civilians. Experts believe the dangers of this breed trace back to their ancestry. Killer Kimbo, an inbred fighting dog renowned for his fearsome stature, has been found to be related to 50% of XL Bullies in the UK and 32/50 of the breeding animals used. With an XL Bully putting a buyer £2000 out of pocket, you would think they want the best quality, and not a defected puppy evolved through lines of inbreeding. However, many buy XL Bullies for the status, and the need for an inbred guard dog with strong violent instinct will keep Killer Kimbo genes in the pool.

So, is it the owners at fault? It is widely believed that dog training does not change the animal's personality but does work to make the animal more approachable and have acceptable characteristics, help the XL Bully clearly needs. With the breed commonly being used as a show of strength rather than treated like a loved pet it is easy to believe that negligent owners are more at fault than the scrutinised XL Bully and that the dog is simply a reflection of its teacher.

Such an idea causes outcry from the owners who genuinely do care for their puppies, so much so there are many easily found petitions online, some with upwards of 600,000 signatures. Although good owners are rarely first-time dog parents and are often those who can provide consistent training and exercise for the dog, they still swear that their dog

is just like any other. One such person is Samantha Wood from Aberdeen who said that her 3-year-old XL Bully is good natured, caring, and protective of her nine-month-old daughter. Surely if the dog was truly a monster it would not be allowed within a mile of Ms Wood's daughter, never mind protecting and playing with her.

Not only would this ban affect the breed in question, but it may also cause waves from other breeds. The XL Bully is a breed combined of many others including the American Pit Bull Terrier, Staffordshire Terriers, Bullmastiffs and Boxers. With the actual breed of 'XL Bully' being so hard to define, paranoid owners of associated breeds are worrying about their dogs being banned as well. This would be significant as the sub breeds of the bully are significantly more popular with the public and to ban them would cause national outcry.

This ban has had mixed reactions: from victims to XL Bully enthusiasts, everyone has an opinion on the law. Throughout the debate one thing is clear: our society needs reform and regulations to prevent deaths such as Jack Lis and a dog being used as a trophy piece. However, does it need to be to the extent of excluding an entire breed from society? That's the question we are asking. The government is punishing a helpless animal for its owner's incompetence. It's the owners we need to blame, not a dog, we need to hold the slothful owners accountable: punish them with guidelines and restrictions on mandatory training and in-depth background checks. A trained dog is not only better for society's wellbeing but also the wellbeing of these bullied dogs. **We need to make the government realise - villainising the XL Bully only stands to villainise themselves.**

Dark Academia: The Aesthetic of Elitism

CAMILLE VAS

Dark Academia is an internet aesthetic consisting of misty, autumn evenings and gloomy afternoons, favouring motifs such as typewriters, handwritten letters, ancient statues, and renaissance paintings. Pinterest boards are full of record players and towering stacks of books (and often the same photo of three friends running through the Louvre, taken from *The Dreamers*, 2003). Taking its inspiration from the classical era, sourcing clothing from the 30s and 40s, with roots in 80s and 90s media, this aesthetic took full force in the 2010s. It is a subculture that has become increasingly well-known in recent years, with the term becoming one that many people would recognise and would perhaps even use to describe themselves and their lifestyle. Through this aesthetics historic influences however, its antiquity may indicate that it needs to evolve to meet the Modern Era and the standards of contemporary society.

'Does such a thing as 'the fatal flaw,' that showy dark crack running down the middle of a life, exist outside literature? I used to think it didn't. Now I think it does. And I think that mine is this: a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs.'

Donna Tartt, *The Secret History*

'The Secret History' details the killing of a student by his classmates, the leadup to it, and the aftermath (in that order). Containing all central staples in 'Dark Academia' story, from morally grey characters and themes of murder to works of Ancient Greek and Latin, the novel is admittedly the inspiration for Dark Academia as a literary genre. Despite its interesting examination of privilege and wealth, its 'Dark Academia' aspects have been misused to perpetuate elitism and exclusivity rather than provide a meaningful analysis of them. Illustrating the irony of this book being a staple in Dark Academia particularly well, Richard Papen – narrator of the story and the latest addition to the college class it centres around – confides his readers that his 'fatal flaw' is 'a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs'. This reads as a critique of the intense need to romanticise not only academia, but the darker aspects of life, for example death, obsession,

jealousy, to an unhealthy extent – one that sacrifices a true understanding of the world in exchange for a shallower, if more aesthetically pleasing, view.

At the end of the day, Dark Academia is an aesthetic, a lifestyle built on carefully cultivated Pinterest boards and heavily edited Instagram posts – it is a picturesque depiction of academia that fails to account for its flaws. Hiding behind a facade of enlightenment, it pretends to face the 'ugly truth' of what it means to be human while simultaneously ignoring the reality of these issues and their consequences. It is one thing to find beauty in the pursuit of knowledge and the gothic architecture of old colleges, and another thing entirely to romanticise to the point of a complete loss of meaning.

Unfortunately, an unhealthy need for the picturesque is not the only issue with ignoring the inherent problems of an aesthetic built on archaic institutions and classical history. The label of 'Dark Academia' seems to be reserved for certain people and places and is guarded carefully by the community who dictate what is or is not worthy of belonging to the aesthetic. The range of people that 'fit' the look and lifestyle is narrow, referring primarily to rich, white men who have access to higher education, which is not surprising when you consider the aesthetics' reliance on the overwhelmingly white literary canon.

Take, for example, another Dark Academia classic, 'Dead Poets Society', a film about a class of boys and their English teacher. Although it is a brilliant film that I would recommend, it is also important to acknowledge that it is not exactly a paragon of diversity. While it is unfair to critique Dark Academia as whole based off of one film (especially a film made roughly 34 years ago, and set about 20 years prior to that), the trope of 'rich white men discovering what it means to be human through their access to prestigious institutions while possibly committing illegal acts and getting away with it' has become all too common across the media adopted by this community, despite how niche it seems. The idea that academia is open only to people who are male and white is harmful, creating a space where women or people of ethnic minorities are unwelcome.

Furthermore, the obsession with higher education, particularly universities such

as Oxford and Cambridge, places great emphasis on academia as an elite environment, exclusive to only those who are rich enough to attend these places. Enamoured by a sense of superiority, in both a visual and academic sense, they read only 'intellectual' books, aim to go to the 'best' schools and talk about 'sophisticated' topics in the hopes of inflating their own egos. If Dark Academia wants to move past its position as an archaic notion of the academic sphere and into representing a true appreciation of knowledge and the human experience, it must better reflect opinions that do not match the typical 'face of intelligence'.

However, it is not all bad. Much of the media it bases its identity off condemns the aesthetics' themes of wealth, elitism, and exclusivity, often featuring a main character that is comparatively less privileged than the supporting cast, whether it be due to class, race, or education. Trouble comes mainly through misinterpretations, with people choosing to imitate the very characters that are meant to be warnings or overlooking the message of the story in favour of its aesthetic.

In addition, our 'morbid longing for the picturesque' is not just a shortcoming of the Dark Academia aesthetic, but a symptom of the larger problem surrounding our generation's obsession with labelling every minuscule aspect of our lives, attempting to fit the incomprehensibility of our individual existence into neat boxes.

Dark Academia is one of many new 'aesthetics', one that just so happens to be attached to academia which has always been a subject widely debated and criticised. It is important to remember that the aesthetic does have an impact on how we view academia, but perhaps we can use it to deconstruct elitism instead of perpetuating it, and work towards creating a more inclusive environment for all.
