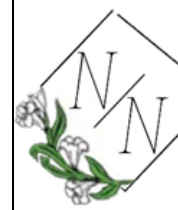


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Notre Dame Sixth Form Newspaper



CAMILLE VAS

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Welcome to the fourth edition of Notre News!

With the upcoming A Level exams, the newspaper club has been in the process of being handed over to the Y12 students to carry it on into the next academic year, and while this has meant the loss of a number of the Y13 writers, we've also welcomed a few new brilliant writers to the group.

These changes to the club have also meant a change in leadership as Hannah starts to step away from the newspaper that she started, and that has grown and evolved in the year since the first edition came out. As the new editor, I want to ensure the newspaper lives up to the standard Hannah has set, but I'm excited to see where we go from here!

The team have worked so hard to put together these articles, so thank you for reading and we hope you enjoy them.

Want to join?

The newspaper club is open to all sixth form students interested in writing articles, or helping others in doing so! Meetings are every Tuesday lunchtime in S30, starting at 1pm.

Lead Editor:

Camille Vas

Deputy Editors:

Eve Illien

Alecia Whitworth

Martha Jones

Editorial Team:

Hannah Green

Shreya Shaiju

Niamh Igoe

Giancarlo Mempouo

Mariella Boateng

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Lily Oxley

Eoghan Ross

Susie Walker

Olivia Davies

University - Subject Snobbery and the Issue of Applications

GIANCARLO MEMPOUO

In 2023, 757,000 applicants battled it out for about 550,000 undergraduate places. Amidst an increasingly competitive applicant pool, students must make their applications as impressive as possible, engaging in lectures, books, massive online open courses, outreach programmes and more. But how has the act of doing so unfavourably affected their education? What subjects and qualifications have been snubbed by students following the advice of universities, despite them perhaps suiting the student more?

A competitive application contains many things, but begins with the choice of subjects, A-Level or otherwise. Top universities such as the London School of Economics and Political Sciences (LSE), have a blacklist of subjects that they do not believe provide a strong basis for undertaking a degree at that university. On this list include subjects such as Media Studies, Physical Education or Sports Studies, Art and Design and Design and Technology. These subjects are also steadily on the decline in options that students pick, despite creative subjects offering benefits such as thinking about the box and problem-solving in a way that differs to science subjects. Subjects like Media Studies and Physical Education mix aspects of English Literature, Psychology, Biology and Physics – all subjects that would be respected offered on their own. From an economic standpoint, the creative industries bring in £108 billion annually and the sports industry brings in £39 billion a year, making both industries lucrative and beneficial to the economy. However, the disdain shown towards these subjects by universities has led to a 29% fall in art subject enrolment at

A-level. Choosing to not follow creative pursuits, can dishearten students, as well as contribute to a generation that lacks the creative thinking required to solve some of the world's most pressing problems.

The Russell Group fallacy, where students and parents alike believe that attending a Russell Group university will provide a decent job and salary, provides the universities within the group with a responsibility to ensure their advice provides a balanced overview. Their previous list of facilitating subjects has now been redacted, as although the idea of the list was to help students, it was, in some cases, seen as the only list from which to choose A Levels which often led to a narrowing of choice and pressure for students to take subjects which may not have truly reflected their interests. However, the damage is still done through the term 'facilitating subject', a popular term on student chatrooms such as The Student Room and sub-reddits, as well as in careers advice. This has been a major factor in subjects such as Media Studies and Physical Education not being respected and provides evidence of the influence that universities have over students' behaviour. Not only this but many of the most influential universities do not accept BTECs, CTECs and T-Levels for their standard courses, which has hindered their uptake by pupils.

Furthermore, universities which are less competitive may offer unconditional offers which have been shown to cause high dropout rates and make students more likely to miss their predicted grades by two or more grades. Or, as students apply to safeties, their offers are lower than what their predicted grades may be. One may argue that universities should offer personalised offers, to ensure that students who end up firming a CCC university with an A*AA do not choose to stop putting effort into getting the best grades possible. This will stop students

attempting to get an easy way out by choosing a university that they won't need to work as hard at to get into.

Universities also attempt to increase the numbers of those from underrepresented backgrounds, with multiple methods such as outreach programmes, mentoring, and contextual offers. These contextual offers are often a grade or two lower than the standard offer. However, while these contextual offers seem nice, they have a discriminatory undertone, suggesting that students from these backgrounds are unable to reach these grades. Students being given a contextual offer such as AAB and only managing to meet them doesn't provide them with the standard of knowledge that other students may have from achieving A*AA, essentially setting them up for failure, without adequate support later during the degree. After university, many graduate schemes do not subscribe to the idea of contextual offers and will be expecting high A-Level grades regardless of background. Other universities provide support for these students to ensure they are brought up to the standard offer. A great example of this is Lucy Cavendish College (part of the University of Cambridge) offering private tuition to offer-holders who match certain criteria. Universities should be looking to be like the latter example, enabling students who may be hindered by their socioeconomic background to achieve the best grades possible.

It's true that placing the blame solely on universities lacks nuances - parents, classmates and teachers often perpetuate and form rumours based on university advice. However, universities should accept that they have a certain degree of culpability. Ultimately, universities should ensure that the advice they give is clear and does not omit the benefits that subjects they do not accept can provide

Propaganda: Bad Politics and Good Art

SUSIE WALKER

In today's fast-paced world, political propaganda and media play a significant role in shaping our choices and beliefs. As defined by Merriam-Webster, it consists of "ideas or statements that are often false or exaggerated and that are spread in order to help a cause, a political leader, a government, and so on." From social media campaigns to biased news coverage, these influential tools have a powerful impact on how we perceive information and make decisions. Political propaganda often aims to manipulate public opinion by spreading biased or misleading information to serve a particular agenda. This can sway individuals' perspectives on important issues, leading them to make decisions based on incomplete or false premises.

Similarly, the media, including news outlets and social platforms, have the power to influence our choices by selectively presenting information and framing narratives in a certain light. The constant bombardment of news and opinions can shape our views on various topics, affecting how we vote, what products we buy, and even how we interact with others. As a result, it's crucial for individuals to be vigilant consumers of information, critically analysing sources and seeking diverse perspectives to make informed decisions. By understanding the potential impact of political propaganda and media on our choices, we can strive to think independently and resist manipulation.

Political art in general, is more of an umbrella term, describing any piece of 'art' that could be remotely considered a political statement, or

connected to some sort of political belief. Because the genre is multifaceted, there are numerous different types of political art. As much as there is political propaganda in art, there is also satiric, participatory, and activist political art, but all fall under the three main categories of Portrayal, Promotion, and Projection.

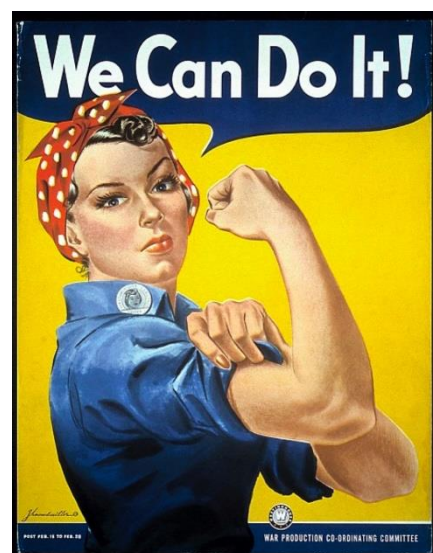
Portrayal is the more neutral of the three categories as it describes art where sometimes the mere topic of an artwork is enough to make it political. By documenting a specific event, artists can make political claims by observing and representing the event through art. Political artwork that falls into the category of Portrayal usually depicts real-life occurrences that have happened in the past or are occurring presently.



Political art as Promotion is less neutral and involves more of the artist's own political views. Promotional political art is all about finding resolutions to social events. However, to provide a resolution is also to involve one's own opinion in the artwork, and so subjectivity is more deeply ingrained in this type of political art. We often see political propaganda creep into this category. The artist will create the piece with the intent of inspiring the audience to feel something, and it will most definitely be biased.

Projection is the most destabilising of all types of political art, as it imagines worlds that are yet to come. It is the political art of what could be, involving the use of varied artistic elements. Artworks of this type rarely portray events or make direct political arguments, they instead become political solely because of how they challenge and break boundaries of the existing status quo in both art and politics.

So, it has been established that Propaganda and political art does have an impact, but is it all necessarily bad? At its core, propaganda is the dissemination of information—be it true, misleading, or outright false—with the aim of shaping public perception and behaviour. Its techniques can range from subtle persuasion to blatant manipulation, often employing emotional appeals, selective presentation of facts, and repetition to sway audiences. It can be argued that the principle of propaganda undermines critical thinking, and creates a false sense of what's real, coercing viewers into beliefs that are often twisted.



However, it is essential to recognize that not all forms of persuasion can be equated with malicious propaganda. Advocacy campaigns for social justice, public health initiatives, and educational outreach efforts also utilise persuasive

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techniques to promote positive change. In these cases, the ethical evaluation of propaganda becomes more nuanced, as its morality is intrinsically tied to the intentions behind its dissemination and the values it seeks to uphold. Moreover, propaganda is not inherently negative; its morality depends on its content, context, and impact. For instance, propaganda can be a tool for resistance against oppressive regimes, empowering marginalised groups to challenge dominant narratives and advocate for their rights. It can also serve as a means of raising awareness about pressing issues, mobilising communities, and fostering social cohesion.

Furthermore, the advent of digital media and social networking platforms has revolutionised the

landscape of propaganda, amplifying its reach and blurring the lines between information and misinformation. In an era of "fake news" and echo chambers, distinguishing between authentic communication and propaganda has become increasingly challenging, underscoring the importance of media literacy and critical thinking skills.

While propaganda is often vilified for its manipulative tactics and potential for harm, its ethical evaluation necessitates a nuanced understanding of its complexities. While it can indeed be used as a tool of manipulation and control, propaganda can also serve noble purposes, such as raising awareness, promoting social change, and amplifying marginalised voices.

Ultimately, the morality of propaganda hinges on its intent, content, and impact, highlighting the need for vigilance, scepticism, and ethical discernment in the face of persuasive messaging. By shaping public opinion, manipulating consumer behaviour, fostering polarisation, undermining trust, and influencing policy decisions, propaganda can significantly impact individual choices, societal dynamics, and international relations. Recognizing the prevalence and effects of propaganda is crucial for promoting critical thinking, media literacy, and ethical discernment in navigating today's information landscape.

Seven Decades of Change: Sophia Jex-Blake

CHARLOTTE BALL

A woman who was described as a 'most dangerous opponent' by her critics and 'fun, wilful but naughty' by her friends: Dr Jex-Blake was unarguably an important figure in history. So why is it that much of the population has never heard of her?

Jex-Blake was born in Hastings, England in 1840. She would pass two weeks before her 72nd birthday in 1912. During these seventy-one years, Jex-Blake revolutionized the experiences of female doctors both in education and in practice. These advancements mostly came due to the work of the Edinburgh Seven, a group of women who fought to become medics – led by Jex-Blake herself. The group was named after the Greek myth 'seven against Thebes' and consisted of Sophia Jex-Blake, Matilda Chaplin, Isabel Thorn, Helen Evans, Mary

Anderson, Edith Peachey, and Emily Bovell. These women campaigned for decades for women's rights to practice medicine and attend university; their cause was revolutionary even garnering the support of heavily influential men such as Charles Darwin.

To fully explain the impact of Dr Jex-Blake's life, we must first look at her childhood. She was born to evangelical parents, retired lawyer Thomas Blake and Mother Maria Cubit. Although the couple by all accounts were good parents to Sophia, they were also incredibly conservative and restrictive of what they would allow their daughter to do professionally. The only typical job for a woman at this time was a governess at a school. This is why, when Jex-Blake turned 18 and aimed to tutor mathematics at King's College London, her father only gave her permission on the grounds that she would not take a salary. She agreed and tutored students in math from 1858-1861.

When she turned 21 in 1858, Jex-Blake went to America to research

how girls' education differed worldwide in preparation for the girls' school she planned to open in Manchester. She studied for three years in Boston but was rejected from Harvard Medical School in 1867. This experience convinced her to switch from teaching to medicines, and when she returned to England because of her father's declining health, she started campaigning to be allowed to obtain a medical degree in the United Kingdom. It was around this time that the Edinburgh Seven was formed. Jex-Blake showed her commitment to advocating for woman's rights when she contributed to a volume published by the suffragette Josephine Butler, in which she noted that females in medicine were often only given child rearing and midwifery positions, highlighting the array of competent female medical professionals in Renaissance Italy, The Odyssey and others.

The university Jex-Blake chose was the University of Edinburgh – due to her belief that it was more enlightened than its English

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counterparts. She and the rest of the Edinburgh Seven were accepted into the university in 1869. However, they faced challenges from the get-go, with the women being charged higher fees than their male contemporaries, facing harassment from other students and the professors refusing to teach them the content needed for exams. This prompted Dr Jex-Blake to sue the university – however, her attempt at reform failed when the courts voted in the institution's favour.

The tensions around the women's university experiences erupted in violence on November 17th, 1890, the Surgeons' Hall riot. This dramatic event was an encapsulation of the growing fear that tradition was being destroyed by the appearance of women in university life. Dr Jex-Blake and her peers were attacked by a mob of 200 male students outside a hall where they were supposed to take a crucial exam on anatomy. They pelted the Edinburgh seven with mud and rubbish before the women finally managed to get into the exam hall, with the help of a sympathetic male student. The rioters then pushed a sheep into the exam hall, causing chaos. However, surprising everyone, the invigilator of the exam replied to the chaos saying 'the sheep can stay. It is clearly more intelligent than those out there.' Although this event was an outrageous show of misogyny against the female students, it did have an unseen benefit. Newspapers very quickly picked up the story and reports spread of the injustice the Edinburgh seven faced and public support heavily swayed in favour of them – resulting in increased public support for their cause. This support included the women being escorted to and from classes and exams with

male students who acted as bodyguards and police fining three instigators of the riot £1 each (approximately £63 in today's money) for breach of the peace. As well as this, 3 instigators of the riot were fined the equivalent of £63. The results of said exam also proved many critics wrong, with all of them passing the exam and 4 placing in the top 10 out of 152 students.

Disaster struck however, in 1873, when the women lost their right to graduate. The growing publicity attracted the attention of the supreme courts who not only ruled that the women could not obtain their degrees, but they should never have been allowed into the university in the first place. Outraged, Dr Jex-Blake moved to Bern Switzerland where she earned a degree in medicine in 1877, at the age of 37.

After earning her degree, Dr Jex-Blake did much good in the world. In June 1878, just a year after obtaining her degree, she went on to open a medical practice and established a dispensary for impoverished women soon afterwards. In 1887 she combined two of her passions, teaching, and medicine, and opened the Edinburgh school for women, with it being the first of its kind in the UK. She later went on to open another of its kind in London. In 1889, largely due to the struggle of Jex-Blake and her peers, parliament sanctioned degrees for women. She was the first practicing female doctor in Scotland and one of the first in the wider UK, a resounding victory of what she worked so hard to accomplish throughout her life.

At the age of 59, Dr Sophia Jex-Blake retired. She and her

companion and potential lover, Margaret Todd, who was 19 years her junior, moved to the peaceful town of Windydene where she could retire, and Todd could write. When Sophia Louisa Jex-Blake passed away, Todd, an established author, started to work on a book titled 'the life of Sophia Louisa Jex-Blake'. Despite Todd calling her dear friend "impulsive" and admitting that she had "made many mistakes" because of her "naturally hasty temper", the book was full of adoration and respect for a woman who helped shape the world we live in today.

She is remembered in many ways, though the most notable are the Jex-Blake medal, the copious amounts of literature written in awe of her tenacity and intelligence, and the acknowledgement she receives today, such as the BBC crediting her for helping during Covid.

It is important, however, that we as individuals remember the inspirational and brave woman that was Dr Sophia Louisa Jex-Blake. After all, it is due to her effort that many of us have the option to pursue further education.



Are We The Mean Girls?

MARTHA JONES

The whirlwind of the musical movie that is Mean Girls was released in the UK on the 19th of January this year and has already been the victim of much criticism. The fact that the producers decided to not tell anyone it was a musical made the movie heavily criticised almost instantaneously, not to mention the questionable wardrobe choices they made. It took little time before the critique of the film began to shift to the actors themselves - in recent weeks, Angourie Rice has faced an onslaught of online hate for her portrayal of the main character, Cady - but just why is it so extreme? Is this necessary at all?



The Mean Girls movie had massive shoes to fill, following the much-loved 2004 cult classic original and the extremely popular stage musical version that soon followed. Therefore, the 2024 Mean Girls reinvention was bound to be vulnerable from the start given the wide, wide fanbase it was to be greeted with. The film was declared

mediocre from the offset – with the Observer referring to it as ‘the worst

film of 2024’ - and if this wasn't bad enough, it now pales in comparison to two beloved classics and is getting shot at from all angles. Most of the critiquing of the film is valid – how Regina George looks like she bought her wardrobe from Shein, the awkward music, etcetera. However, it seems that many have forgotten about the film's bad qualities and have started personally attacking Angourie Rice for her performance. Surely the weird choreography in ‘Stupid with Love’ is much more interesting to discuss than Angourie Rice herself, wouldn't you agree?

Unfortunately, this ‘trend’ of hating on women in media has been prevalent for a long time.

Last year, we bore witness to the blitz against Rachel Zegler, who was labelled a ‘pick-me’ during the press campaign for the Snow White remake for saying that “the original cartoon came out in 1937, and very evidently so. There's a big focus on her love story with a guy who literally stalks her. Weird!” She also faced backlash when, in the same interview discussing the recreation of the film (which will grace our screens in 2025), Zegler stated, “We absolutely wrote a Snow White that's... not going to be saved by the prince, and she's not going to be dreaming about true love.” As a result, there was an almost unanimous hatred that conspired against her, leading to YouTube videos titled ‘Rachel Zegler is a Horrible Person Who Needs To Be Fired From Snow White’ and ‘Rachel Zegler's Most Annoying Moments’. 1 Many of these comments are clearly examples of deep-rooted sexism, basing themselves on the opinion that “Disney has made plenty of movies with strong female characters... why

the hell are they changing Snow White? Woke and broke.”

Women have been weaponised as villains and capitalised in this way since the very creation of cinema, before films even had sound. An example of this would be the actress Theda Bara, most recognisable from her portrayal of Cleopatra in 1917. She was controlled by Fox studios and was presented as an Egyptian-born character of a femme-fatale nature, told to cover her face with a veil and villainised to such an extent that she was nicknamed ‘vamp’, short for ‘vampire’. Bara is therefore a stark example of how women in media have faced the brunt of society's hatred for decades.



The exponential rise in media misogyny has unfortunately and inevitably caused women to be driven out of the public eye. From celebrities such as Millie Bobby Brown deleting social media, to politicians such as Nicola Sturgeon resigning, this affects women everywhere.

The abuse women face online viciously dehumanises them, and many continue to question if this reflects our ancient patriarchal society or if technology is acting as a catalyst. The organisation #ShePersisted released ‘Monetizing Misogyny’, a

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study into the patterns and motives of gendered disinformation (sexually charged slandering and defamation of women in the public eye) 2 last year. It found that the problem is less one of misogyny per se, but one of the monetization of misogyny by digital platforms and media and political giants, therefore answering our question. The report, which studied female leaders and experts in a range of countries, discovered that ‘gender trolling’ had been strategically deployed by political opponents (this is particularly characteristic of right-wing parties, the study found).

Furthermore, Karla Mantilla, the author of ‘Gender Trolling: How Misogyny Went Viral’ wrote that “these attacks aim to weaken not only the credibility of women but what they stand for: reproductive rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, liberal values and inclusive, diverse democracies.” An example of such attacks are those against Manuela D’Ávila who ran for Presidency of Brazil in 2018, only to have multiple falsified accounts of her and a photo of her five-year-old daughter alongside a rape threat that was posted publicly. D’Ávila

announced that she would not run for the 2022 elections because of the hate she and her family received, alongside other reasons.

It is clear how online, gender-based bullying leads to hatred forming globally, defining the fate of young girls who are discouraged from certain professions; albeit out of concerns for her safety or simply the pure misogynistic stereotypes which continue to pervade society. The hatred directed at women in film and television only reflects the harsh reality experienced by women in every sector. As hateful sexist content has increasing engagement, harmful narratives are amplified. Platforms have failed to tackle this. It will take comprehensive efforts and legislation for this issue to even begin to be dismantled. In 2022, the EU passed the Digital Services Act, which obligates social media companies to mitigate the risk they pose on society. Whilst this is a step in the right direction, democratic countries need to be open to such change and follow suit, as their failure to do so will ultimately lead to the rampancy of gendered disinformation and the destruction of democratic principles.

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An Interview with 'Wednesday' Creator Al Gough

HANNAH GREEN

Best known as a co-creator of Hannah Montana, Smallville, Into the Badlands, The Shannara Chronicles and most recently the Netflix hit based on the Addams Family, Wednesday, Al is a notable writer, producer and director in Hollywood. As series two of Wednesday is out soon and his new project with Tim Burton (Beetlejuice 2) hits UK cinemas in September, I took the opportunity to chat with Al about his career, his creative influences, and his love of Taylor Swift.



How did it all start, how did you first get into writing?

'I always loved movies and television - I was obsessed with Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. I told everybody I wanted to be in the movie business, they looked at me like I said I was going to Mars. I decided to apply to film school and landed in Los Angeles on my 25th birthday. Studying the Peter Stark Producing Program I teamed up with my writing partner (Miles Millar); we wrote a script and sold it while we were still in school (1994). So, I fell into writing. I don't think I knew it

was something that would be my path.'



What would you say are the benefits and challenges of co-writing?

'We've been partners for 30 years. It's great because show business is so crazy - when you can say your ideas out loud it allows you to see if they work. It's nice to have somebody to bounce things off. A lot of times people have writer's block, I call it a 'story block' because you get hung up on things off topic - writing together makes it easier.'

Smallville was inspired by Superman and ran for 10 series - would you say you are strongly influenced by the DC comics when you write?

'Comic book writers are great. We loved the first Superman movie and loved the idea of doing the years of Clark Kent that nobody had really covered. It's interesting, it was a blank canvas, we weren't hemmed in by all the mythology in the comics. We stuck to the spirit of Superman and Clark Kent, but we weren't driven by all the comic lore in our heads.'

Do you have broader influences - do family and friends creep in?

'I grew up in a small town (Maryland), so I understood that world - I thought there was a weird kind of creepiness to small towns.

When we pitched Smallville, we said it was Norman Rockwell (an American artist) on the surface with a kind of idyllic, small-town image. 70s and 80s movies (like Star Wars) were my biggest influence.'

Are there consequences to building on characters who are already iconic and have a diehard fan base?

'One generation's heresy is the next generation's gospel. When Smallville started, the internet and social media didn't exist, but there were fan sites. After a while you of ignore it. You will always have some people that would just go after it because they didn't like it, because it wasn't 'true' or a version they thought it should be. You make the show for yourself, and hope other people want to come along for the ride - what you don't do is react to people's opinions on the internet as a it's often a small but loud group. For Wednesday we didn't really have this - people really loved the show.'



Is there one character that you have developed you feel a particular connection to?

'At different points; I identified with Clark Kent and then I identified with Wednesday as she's someone who just speaks her mind and isn't beholden to social media. There's something about Wednesday that's quite connected - we all wish we could be more like her as she doesn't care what other people think. It's a very freeing

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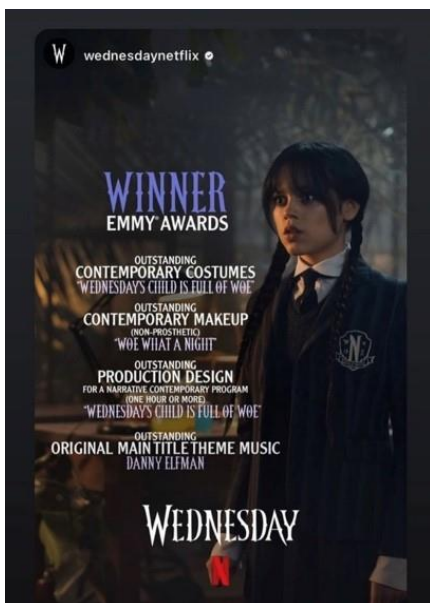
way to live your life. I have two daughters - what I think's great about Wednesday is she's a role model for teenage girls, she's unapologetically smart. She doesn't care what other people think. It's also not a story of the wallflower who finds her voice and stands up ... and it's not about boys. She doesn't care about romance ... at this point.'

Wednesday's style was great ... was that what you hoped for?

'Yeah, that's amazing – the costume designer decided what young women want, and Tim's messages on the ideas helped develop it. We're taking the iconic Wednesday and bringing it into the present day but keeping the black and white motifs. It's fair to say I exactly I agree the wardrobe was fantastic.'

Any advice to someone my age who is interested in screenwriting as a career?

'The good thing about screenwriting is you don't need permission to do it. It's about your time ... if you want to be a writer, you must write. You get better at it is to do it. There are lots of scripts on the internet - pick your favourite movies, find and read the scripts, see how they're put together. Then just sit down and start to do it - that's the only way to go.'



You went to see Taylor Swift recently ... have you got a favourite song?

'Good question. I think my favourite era is the Red era; I Think 'All Too Well' is probably my favourite song. I got to know her when we produced the Hannah Montana movie - I specifically wanted her in the movie at a point when people didn't really know who she was outside of country music. She both performed a song and then wrote the last song, 'Always Find Your Way Back Home' for us, that Miley Cyrus sang. So, I've been a Swiftie for a very long time.'

Any last thoughts?

'If people want to explore show business or get into film/television there's no kind of mystery to it. It feels kind of mysterious, but it's not. If you want to do it, you should try. Every business is hard, you might as well do something that you're passionate about. You should pursue the things you want to pursue and see if they lead to a career.'

I'm a Politician, Get Me Out of Here!

CONNIE ARMSTRONG

Are those running our country blurring the lines between politician and celebrity?

The recent appearance of former UKIP leader Nigel Farage and former secretary of state for health and social care Matt Hancock on the reality tv show 'I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out of Here' sparked controversy. It raised the question: 'are politicians now celebrities?'. A celebrity is often defined as someone who is unique, well-known, and someone who gains a lot of public attention - their life is consumed for public entertainment. Whereas, a politician is classed as someone who uses their expertise to represent their party members and to assist in policy formation to better the country. However, within the last

decade the number of politicians exchanging Westminster for the Jungle has dramatically increased.

The spike in politicians appearing on reality tv can be directly dated back to 2010 with the first televised political debate between the three leaders of the three main parties: David Cameron (leader of the Conservatives); Gordon Brown (leader of the Labour party) and Nick Clegg (leader of the Liberal Democrats. This debate was the first time that television had been used to promote political parties, thus resulting in 'Cleggmania' and an overall increase in support for the 'Lib Dems' - in fact, their share of the vote had increased by 33% in the 2010 General Election. This is a clear indicator that television-oriented media can shape public opinion significantly. Could it be that our parties are now utilising the impact of television to gain support?

The Conservative party now uses television to target an audience who may not be politically active. In fact, they have had the highest number of MPs switching from politics to reality TV with 6 MPs in total. However, this may be more of a political statement than one originally perceives it to be. 18–24-year-olds have, on average, a turnout of just 47%. Yet they have a high engagement with social platforms such as reality TV being 69% of the total viewers, thus featuring these MPs, allow them to gain more publicity (and potentially more support). Matt Hancock in 2022 entered the jungle and appeared to be the most controversial character ever to enter, seemingly due to his 2021 resignation after being caught breaching Covid-19 social distancing regulation during an affair with his colleague. Is this what is being promoted on these programmes? The bigger the scandal the bigger the publicity and pay check? Hancock was paid £400,000 to appear on the show - a £400,000 reward after causing so much despair. His reasoning for appearing on the show is yet unclear, but could it be that he

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went into the jungle to attempt to make politicians seem more human? This ideology is emphasised by the Conservative Party after receiving backlash for 'Party Gate', another simple, human 'mistake'. Hancock's appearance on the show can therefore be perceived as possibly redemption for the Conservatives, yet for most, his participation in the show is disgusting and despicable.

Similarly, Nigel Farage entered the jungle in 2023. He was third in 'I'm A Celeb', and far right on the political spectrum, which resulted in calls from the presenters of the show for no more politicians, given the ratings saw a decline of 4 million viewers. Evidently, politicians are not welcomed by the public to be mixed in with their soaps and series'.

Additionally, another member of the Conservative party that appeared on 'I'm A Celeb' is Stanley Johnson (Boris Johnson's father). However, his appearance on the show was not as controversial as Hancock or Farage - in actuality, he was a fan favourite! However, I think it is worthy to mention the political context that was slowly emerging at the time of his jungle fame in 2017. Boris Johnson was a favourite in the opinion polls (despite stepping down in the 2016 leadership election). Could Stanley's appearance have been part of a master plan? Or is it merely a coincidence that Boris won the 2019 leadership election? As a result, it is speculated that Stanley's appearance could have been a measure to ensure that Boris would gain leadership of the party in 2019.

While the conservatives have utilised reality TV more than opposing parties, Labour has also been caught in controversy. Former Scottish Labour leader, Kezia Dugdale, also entered the jungle in 2017. However, it sparked a mishap within the party itself as she had not been granted permission to appear on the show, which is required for all MSP and MPS. She stated that she wanted "to take on the myth that every politician looks like Stanley [Johnson] - old,

white, male, pale and stale". Is this the purpose of reality TV now, instead of escaping everyday life into those of celebrities, we are now required to form opinions on those who run our country? Kezia Dugdale entered 'I'm A Celeb' with a clear political motive, which the channel viewers did not agree to. Despite Kezia losing her role as Scottish labour leader, she continued to sit in the Scottish parliament until 2019. Is it acceptable that she was allowed to keep her role despite breaking labours rules about TV? There is a lot to question.

However, it is argued that politicians aren't human enough and that they need to humanise themselves to really connect with the public. One way of doing this is through appearing on reality TV shows, which shows us the human side of politicians, as many of them are not acting in front of a camera for a speech to try and persuade the public to vote for them. Rather, it is the purest form of politicians, given they are stripped of their dignity and subjected to a pitiful ration of rice and beans. This facilitates the viewer to feel, perhaps, more sympathy for the politician - providing evidence for the Rational Choice model, (a form of voting behaviour that suggests that voters decide based on the personality of candidates). Their appearance on the shows may actually help modernise British politics, as the politicians who are leading our country will constantly be in the public eye and not behind the doors of Westminster. This could be crucial for the survival of British politics, given it has the possibility of helping solve the political participation crisis; with the younger generation more likely to be exposed to political ideology and politics, making them more likely to vote.

Politicians need to connect themselves to the public more and equally display their humanity, however they should not be exploiting reality tv for their own political benefit. There's already TV shows for this, like the 3 leaders' debate during

campaigns. Reality TV needs to stay away from politics. Its sole purpose is to distract the viewers from the real world and placing controversial politicians into reality TV takes away from that.

It's Creating Yourself, Not Finding Yourself

OLIVIA DAVIES

'You need to find yourself' - this mantra is thrown around so easily that it's almost embedded in the mind as a truth. What's worse is the fact that people, young and old, are under a constant pressure due to the belief that once they find themselves all will become clear. In particular, young people often strive to 'find themselves', but this will only lead to a dead end, or worse, misconceptions of what the world around you has tried to tell you about who you are. But it's all a lie. The truth is, it's not about finding yourself, but rather creating yourself. As Sydney J Harris stated, 'Young people searching for their 'real self' must learn that the real self is something one makes; and it is one's daily actions that shape the inner personality far more permanently than any amount of introspection or intellection'. This right here is an eternal verity, and the most exciting thing about it is that we have the ability to create ourselves! We can be anything we want to be, we can infiltrate the characteristics we want to have, to create ourselves to be the person we want to be.

If I was to ask you what makes you *you*, I assume you would say your personality, but what is our personality constructed of? Personality traits. By, denotation, personality traits are characteristic patterns in how you think, feel, and act. All things you have control of! As humans with freewill, we owe it to ourselves to take control back in our own lives and realise that we have the

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power to be exactly what we want to be. And I'm not saying it's easy - it's a hard pill to swallow realising that you can be exactly what you want to be. But take it from me, it is absolutely worth it. A year ago, I was getting in trouble constantly and always saying, 'it's not my fault it's just me' but now, in the present, I've realised that I (and God as well) dictate and cultivate my very essence of who I am in the moment. My point is, that if I can do it, I know you can too.

It is time we all take responsibility for the control we have in our own lives. Still don't believe me? Here's the science. Our brain has an ability to change and adapt in response to new experiences, learning, and environmental factors, and this is called 'Neuroplasticity'. When we repeatedly engage in a certain behaviour, the neural pathways associated with that behaviour become stronger, and more efficient overtime, making it feel automatic. This is a habit. The brain is not predetermined to certain habits, and therefore you cannot find yourself. Through this conscious effort, and practice, we can create new neural pathways that support different behaviours and thought patterns. I found many tools to help me reconstruct my neural pathways, and create healthy habits for myself, to create a new, better self, and I want to help you too, so here's a few of my tips.

Meditation: During meditation the brain shifts its states, and these changes in brain waves have been associated with improved attention, cognitive function, emotional regulation, and stress reduction. By practicing meditation regularly, we can learn to shift our brain activity in a way that supports the creation of new neural pathways and the breaking of old habits.

Visualization and Positive Emotions: Visualization is another technique that can be used to create new neural pathways in the brain. By

visualizing positive outcomes and experiences, we can activate the same neural pathways that would be activated if we were actually experiencing those outcomes and experiences. This can help to create new neural pathways that support positive change and personal growth.

The Role of Repetition and Persistence: Creating new neural pathways takes time and repetition. Keep specific goals in mind to track your growth and remember how far you've come in being the best version of you! It's also important to be patient and kind to ourselves. Creating ourselves is challenging, and setbacks are to be expected. But with persistence and commitment, it is possible to create positive change and live a more fulfilling life in being exactly who you want to be.

The Role of Mindfulness: Research has shown that mindfulness (a state of awareness that involves being present) can promote neuroplasticity and support the creation of new neural pathways in the brain. Mindfulness can also be used to increase self-awareness and identify the triggers and patterns associated with old habits. By becoming more aware of our thoughts and behaviours, we can begin to make conscious choices that support the creation of new habits and behaviours.

The Power of Affirmations: Research has shown that affirmations can be an effective tool for promoting positive change and personal growth. One study found that affirmations can increase activity in the reward centre of the brain, which is associated with positive emotions and motivation. Affirmations can also be used to support the development of new habits and behaviours. By repeating affirmations that support the desired behaviour or habit, we can create new neural pathways that support that behaviour.

Incorporating Movement and Exercise: By incorporating movement and exercise into our daily

routine, we can support the brain's ability to create new neural pathways and support the breaking of old habits.

And remember, you really can be anything you want to be!

On Corvidae Birds: Mythos

EOGHAN ROSS

For thousands of years the group of birds known as corvids, including magpies, crows, and ravens, have held a prominent place in human culture across the globe. This significance is perpetuated through to the modern day as their symbolism continues to be used in media ranging from 19th century literature through to modern day film and TV. It is arguable that their cultural significance is on par with that of lions, dragons, and wolves; beasts that similarly make their way onto flags, heraldry, and into legend – but why are they viewed in the way they are? In some ways the answer is simple, however recent studies reveal to us that humans and corvids may be more alike than previously thought. The unsettling and cunning nature of corvids as presented by folklore and mythology may be the result of one of the most striking examples of convergent evolution in cognitive ability available to us, especially in a class of creatures so inherently distant from humans and the human experience.

This article will focus itself first on the presence of corvids in Norse, Pagan, Brythonic, and Irish mythology and then reason a link between this and the behaviors and intelligence of these species. It should be known that corvids are present in both North American and parts of Asian mythology too, albeit in a slightly different form given the different species that live there. Starting then, in more popular culture, many who have visited the Tower of

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London will be aware of the legend stating that "If the Tower of London Ravens are lost or fly away, the Crown will fall and Britain with it." Hence the care of these birds on the ground of this superstition is taken up by the well-known "Beefeaters" and the aptly named "Ravenmaster". The origin of this peculiar but significant myth is found in Welsh mythology through the euhemerised tale of war against Ireland's Mathlowch who had married and mistreated Princess Branwen. Branwen's brother: Bran 'the Blessed' (King of the Britons), was killed during this war but ordered, before his death, to have his head removed and buried under the white hill (where the tower now stands) to act as a talisman warding off invasions from across the channel. With Bran being the modern Welsh word for raven and the magically protective properties being attested to across much of Celtic folklore, it is generally accepted that this tale was the source for this myth. It should also be noted that it is possible some of these superstitions were carried to Britain by the Romans during their invasion in 43AD as magpies and ravens already held huge cultural significance in their mythology – being omens, messengers for Gods, and symbols of high birth and prosperity.

Corvids are often seen as both good and bad omens within the same mythos and culture, though this may just be a case of confirmation bias throughout history, an example of this exists in the "Magpie Rhyme" which goes as follows:

*"One for sorrow, two for joy,
Three for a girl, four for a boy,
Five for silver, six for gold,
Seven for a secret never to be told."*

Versions exist which count all the way up to thirteen magpies, however the purpose is to show how magpies, like ravens and crows, have a supernatural and deterministic power

granted to them. I would argue that this is a result of their behaviour, their tendency to watch and observe, as well as their ability to remember individuals and hold grudges. Often overlooked is their ability as navigators, the birds are incredible and were historically rumoured to be used as guides for lost sailors, this ability may have also contributed to their position as spiritual guides. Abilities that may have led to the spawning of this rhyme which was first printed in eighteen-twenty by James Orchard Halliwell. From the same period came one of the most influential Raven-related pieces of literature of the 19th century: Edgar Allen Poe's the Raven which explores themes including death, deceit, mourning, madness, and wisdom. A poem which took the Pagan and Latin superstitions around the birds and rebranded them for a more modern audience linking the birds to a Gothic aesthetic and horror literature – which would later evolve into much of the gothic media of the present.

Linked closely to the phenomena of corvids recognizing human faces and appearing to hold grudges is their apparent wisdom and regality; In places across the British Isles where Brythonic culture is still living such as Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and areas in the north and west of England it would not be bizarre to see someone to bow or greet a single perched magpie, raven, or crow. A greeting such as:

"Good morning, Mr Magpie, how are Miss Magpie and all the little Magpies?"

would be seen as sufficient for both warding off bad omens or even earn yourself a boon of good luck. Some also link this fear of their power to a suggestion that the magpie was the only bird not to fall silent when Jesus dies on the cross. In many places in Scotland, however, they are seen as much more fearsome superstitions around their ability to mimic sounds. Some propound that resting on the tongue of each crow, magpie, or

raven, sits a droplet of the Devil's blood; And that if you let the birds drink a drop of human blood then they will be granted human speech.

Of course, thus the names of these foreboding corvids such as a "Murder" or a "Conspiracy" are the result of its foreboding mythic presence. They got their name in the mid medieval period where the English language exploded in complexity and size due to the converging languages around Britain all contributing words (this is the same period of time where most bizarre collective nouns names were coined). These names are also derived from their behaviours and diet. For example, a murder of carrion crows (Corvus Corone) will feast primarily on small forms of carrion; insects, earthworms, other invertebrates, grain, fruits, seeds, nuts, small mammals, amphibians, fish, scraps and will also steal eggs. Crows are scavengers by nature, which is why they tend to frequent sites inhabited by humans in order to feed on their waste. Hence during the medieval period, they would be often found near battlefields, hospitals, or graveyards where they would gather around and pick at corpses.

In Celtic lore ravens belong to Morrigan, the Irish war Goddess, who could transform into one herself. Corvids for a long time associated with fairy revels, strength, wisdom, and foresight; However, with the spread of Christianity this changed to a connection with witches and devilry – likely in an attempt by invaders and evangelists to vilify the indigenous beliefs. In Scandinavia magpies were said to be sorcerers that would fly in the direction of dark magic rituals and yet it was once seen as a sign of good luck in those countries. In Norse myth, Skadi, was a member of the magpie clan. Their black and white markings of the bird were believed by them to represent sexual union, and the perfect balance of masculine and feminine energies. Also, in Norse mythology, but somewhat more well

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known, are the two ravens of Odin called Huginn (meaning 'thought') and Muninn (meaning 'memory') which were said to fly across the world and bring information back to Odin, they were spies and messengers. Additionally, the raven banner was carried by such figures as the Jarls of Orkney, King Cnut the Great of England, Norway and Denmark, and Harald Hardrada which speaks to their significance and meaning.

As we can see the group of birds knows as corvids and their most common and populace members: the raven, crow, and magpie have held significant import through a range of periods and across a range of people and cultures – each developing at different times. This, as I see it would suggest that humans share a special relationship with the group of birds which is the result of our interactions with the birds and our observations of their complex behaviour. It seems to

have resulted in a recognition of their intelligence articulated through legend and veneration while also interlacing their unique intelligence with a sinister undertone. Be it as guardians of knowledge, spies, omens of good and evil, or even signs of strength and regality the prevalence of these birds in human culture marks an intricate relationship between mankind and other species we perceive as intelligent – and therefore dangerous.

Linguistic Lens: Will Artificial Intelligence Make Language Learning Obsolete?

ALECIA WHITWORTH

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has made remarkable strides in recent years, transforming various aspects of our lives, including communication and language processing by revolutionising how we analyse language structures, semantics and pragmatic aspects of communication. From virtual assistants and chatbots to machine translation and text generation, AI technologies are increasingly integrated into everyday interactions. But this makes us question: Is AI taking over language?

For the over 7,000 languages spoken worldwide, the AI revolution brings both promise and peril. On one hand, natural language processing could help digitally preserve endangered languages or make language learning more accessible. The emergence of language was the most important intellectual development in our species' history. The intersection of AI and linguistics has a rich history, dating back to early attempts to develop computational models of language processing, with building machines that can understand language being a central goal of the field of artificial intelligence dating back to its earliest days. It is through language that we formulate thoughts and communicate them to one another. Language enables us to

reason abstractly, to develop complex ideas about what the world is and could be, and to build on these ideas across generations and geographies. Almost nothing about modern civilization would be possible without language.

Technology sceptics imagine a dystopian world where human discourse is dominated by automated machines. But a more uplifting narrative is possible – one where global citizens use technology wisely to celebrate the breadth of human linguistic diversity. Today, AI-powered language technologies play a central role in various domains, from healthcare and education to business and entertainment. One of the most visible manifestations of AI's influence on language is its integration into communication platforms and devices. Virtual assistants like Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant have become extremely common, providing users with voice-activated interfaces for information retrieval, task automation, and entertainment. Similarly, chatbots and conversational agents are used in customer service, social media, and e-commerce to facilitate natural language interactions and enhance user experience. While this hasn't replaced human communication, it has influenced content creation processes by providing insights, generating ideas, or even assisting in writing drafts. AI algorithms analyse social media posts and other online content to gauge public sentiment, trends, and opinions. Synonymously, the AI bot on Snapchat represents a

significant advancement in social media technology, offering users interactive experiences, personalised services, and enhanced engagement. As AI continues to evolve, the role of AI bots on Snapchat is poised to expand, shaping the future of social media interaction, communication and language.

Undoubtedly, AI technologies raise ethical and societal implications regarding language use and manipulation. Concerns have been raised about the potential for AI-generated content, including fake news, misinformation, and manipulated media, to influence public discourse and perceptions. Additionally, the rise of AI-powered language models has sparked debates about data privacy, bias in AI algorithms, and the responsible use of technology in linguistic research and application. Some people think that soon AI will be so good at translating languages that humans won't need to learn other languages anymore, for example you can talk to your AI on snapchat in any language - but is this really true? Will AI make learning languages pointless? As AI translation becomes more ubiquitous, the question arises: are we approaching a technological ceiling to human linguistic skills? Some believe AI translation could make learning languages pointless if technology can instantly bridge communication gaps. But is transliterating words between languages the pinnacle of what it means to understand global cultures?

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The short answer is: No, AI will not completely replace the need for humans to learn languages. Powerful new AI translation tools represent an impressive technological feat. Services like Google Translate can translate full documents between over 100 languages with decent accuracy. The technology improves constantly through advances in machine learning, but AI lacks the relationships and empathy needed for meaningful intercultural exchange and so is no threat to our language. . Drawing parallels to today's world, as generative AI becomes increasingly sophisticated, one may rightly be concerned about its potential to decrease the quality of human writing. The question persists: Will relying on AI render us less capable or even lazy writers? Who knows? But if we recall the apprehension surrounding the introduction of digital calculators, Detractors believed that these devices would erode essential mathematical abilities, and now they are used as a complementary tool and pose no threat, thus suggesting that generative AI can be seen as a tool for enhancement, not detracting. It can amplify human capabilities if used with discernment and understanding, rather than act.

AI will most definitely shape the future of language learning. But its growing role presents opportunities. Used carefully, AI could make language education more accessible and engaging. If employed strategically, AI could allow educators to focus on higher-level linguistic and cultural pursuits. Students should use the tools available to them, while retaining the ethos of language as an expression of human culture. AI can catalyse growth in language programs if deployed judiciously, expanding access without compromising quality discourse between people. The goal should not be human versus machine, but rather optimised symbiosis. Chatbots practice vocabulary so instructors can lead creative discussions on linguistics and ethics. AI translation aids reading fluency so students can study philosophy and history. With care, AI could democratise language education – an opportunity, not a threat. This alignment could lead to more structured, data-driven thinking patterns, as AI is usually designed to process vast amounts of information efficiently.

In truth, the way AI is framed sets up a false dichotomy between human abilities and AI. Mastering languages is not just about fluency in vocabulary

or grammar. The only risk is that we may lose cultural nuance, which would be our fault through developing an over reliance on technology and heavy algorithms. People risk becoming passive consumers of information rather than active participants in cultural exchange. But language learning represents a perspective shift – an opening of one's mind to alternate worldviews expressed through culture, poetry, values, and tradition. AI may someday allow near-instantaneous translation between any language; however, no algorithm can replicate the insight gained from studying centuries of literature or debating philosophies across cultures. AI should assist global discourse, not dominate it.

So in summary – no, AI will not make human language learning obsolete anytime soon. Mastering languages remains culturally and socially important even with technological advances in translation. In summary, the language of artificial intelligence is not just about understanding words—it's about unlocking the potential of human language to create intelligent systems that can communicate, learn, and adapt in an ever-changing world. Human language is the cornerstone of human intelligence.