

British Academy Review

UNDERSTANDING PEOPLES, CULTURES, SOCIETIES — PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE



Colin Mayer on making business fit for purpose

Nicholas Stern on understanding change ¶ Hermione Lee on bad behaviour in biography ¶ Stefan Collini on the vision of James Bryce ¶ The hype about 'neural plasticity' ¶ The different portrayals of India

British Academy Review

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The British Academy

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Editorial

Addressing the challenges of change

Welcome to this Summer 2017 issue of the *British Academy Review*.

We seem to be forever faced with our world changing rapidly around us. This issue has been sent to press the day before the General Election, so the affairs of the world will have moved on once more by the time you read this. How we understand change and manage it is a major theme in Lord Stern's article, as he reflects on the four years of his Presidency (page 3). Professor Colin Mayer FBA emphasises the importance of the business world meeting the needs of society, in the context of profound technological change (page 24). And Chief Executive Alun Evans offers an overview of a year of significant developments in higher education, and looks forward to the challenges of planning for Brexit (page 9).

Amidst these cycles of change, so much of the work of the British Academy is about continuing to nurture the best academics in the humanities and social sciences. This issue contains two articles arising from our schemes to support senior academics both on topics related to 'Peoples of South America' (pages 32, 36). And in the 'Emerging Perspectives' section, we celebrate our truly life-changing Postdoctoral Fellowships scheme. Two of the articles by these early career academics consider aspects of India's past, in this 70th anniversary of that nation's independence (pages 46 and 50).

There is always time for the timeless. Dame Hermione Lee FBA captures our unending fascination with the lives and works of the literary greats (page 16). And Professor Stefan Collini FBA reveals how, a hundred years ago, it was still just possible for one person to grasp some appreciation of what was being done across all the disciplines that we now call the humanities and social sciences (page 59).

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Understanding and changing: Care in enquiry and seriousness about values

Nicholas Stern reflects on his four years as President of the British Academy



Lord Stern of Brentford is IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government at the London School of Economics, and is President of the British Academy (2013–2017).

In your inaugural speech as incoming President at the British Academy's Annual General Meeting in 2013, you identified that there was a world-wide lack of confidence in institutions and in politics. As a response to that, you concluded your address with a clarion call to the Academy to 'show what our special and vital community of outstanding scholars can contribute to a nation and to a world which is hungry for ideas.' How has that ambition been carried forward during your Presidency?

That perspective has steered me through those four years. The lack of confidence in institutions and in politics that I pointed to four years ago has manifested itself quite strongly in events since

then. Remember, that was not so very long after the world financial crisis, which intensified such a decline in confidence – including in my own subject, economics. The world slowdown after the crisis, indeed recession in some countries, lasted a lot longer than some had hoped or expected. Of course, if they had understood their economics a bit better, they would have realised that it can take a long time to pull out of a financial crisis. It is not the same thing as a 'cyclical downturn'.

The events of 2016 – including the Brexit vote in the UK, and the election of Donald Trump in

the United States – appear, at least for some, to have embodied a severe and, in my view, worrying reaction to reason, to collaboration and to internationalism. And yet we had the extraordinary international agreements of 2015 – the UN Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July, the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals at the UN in New York in September, and the COP21 Climate Agreement in Paris in December 2015. (I was involved in all of them, but particularly closely in the third.) And that continued into 2016 with the very rapid ratification and coming into force of the Paris agreement in October and November 2016, ten and eleven months, respectively, after the agreement. So, as we look hard at the consequences of the decline in confidence in institutions, politics and ideas, perhaps decline in confidence in the values of the Enlightenment, at the same time we should see that, for many, that internationalism lives on. Perhaps some of it is embodied in the election of Emmanuel Macron as the President of France, who spoke explicitly of the Enlightenment in his speech to the nation on the night of his election.

Early in my Presidency, we put out a British Academy publication called *Prospering Wisely*.¹ It was very deliberately titled. We wanted to introduce the idea of prosperity in all its dimensions, with its more classical meaning, and not just a narrowly economic one. The reference to wisdom was intended as a reference to scholarship in the

1. *Prospering Wisely: How the humanities and social sciences enrich our lives* was launched in February 2014. The booklet, together with interviews with Fellows of the British Academy, can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prosperingwisely

humanities and social sciences as a key part of what we understand as wisdom. The collection of insights in that publication has stood the test of time. I reread it every now and again, and am struck by the really creative, thoughtful and sensible contributions from Mary Beard, Onora O'Neill, John Kay, Adam Roberts and many other distinguished Fellows of the British Academy.

I often come back to Adam Roberts' statement in *Prospering Wisely*: 'I do not know of a single major problem that we face ... that does not require attention both from the physical sciences and from social sciences and humanities.'² That perspective, which I share very strongly, has been a key motivation of the way in which I have tried to take the British Academy forward and steer it during these last four years. Our collaboration with the other national academies – the Royal Society, the Royal Academy of Engineering, and the Academy of Medical Sciences – has been extremely important, and has been reciprocated by them with enthusiasm

and understanding. The best scientists know the importance of the humanities and social sciences, and the best people in the humanities and social sciences know the importance of science. They know it is not a horse race. They know that the integration and the exchanging of insights, the insights that come from the interweaving of disciplines, are extraordinarily important.

Prospering Wisely provided a sense of direction around public engagement. I have always argued that, instead of being defensive,

we should make the case for our subjects by *doing* them. If we are good at showing what they can do, people will see how valuable the insights are from the humanities and social sciences. And that has been the purpose behind the British Academy Debates. We began with two series on 'Ageing' and 'Immigration' in 2014. We followed those with series on 'Well-Being' and 'Energy and the environment' in 2015, and 'Faith' and 'Inequalities' in 2016; and in spring 2017 we have had 'Robotics, AI and Society', which has looked, *inter alia*, at the future nature of work. These British Academy Debates, which we took to all parts of the United Kingdom, have been aimed at the general public, and have featured real intellectual interchange and the fostering and sharing of ideas.³ Through these events we have shown that, for example, you cannot, or perhaps

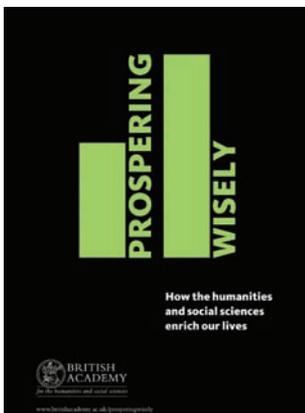
should not, talk about ageing without talking about psychology *and* the medical sciences *and* architecture *and* demography *and* Shakespeare if you want to understand the issues in their full depth and seriousness. And for energy and for robotics, the intersections between science and technology on the one hand, and the humanities and social sciences on the other, are intense. People have been able to see that we have to bring all these disciplines to the table in order to understand these issues of enormous public importance. We have to understand why things are changing so quickly on so many dimensions; why they will continue to change; and what is involved in taking the immense potential opportunities, whilst managing the dislocations and risks.

While the British Academy Debates have been a success, the way in which debate takes place has gone on changing during this period. Indeed, changes in the ways the public and academics interact with each other have accelerated, for example through social media and blogs. I suspect the British Academy may have initially been a little slow in adapting to this, but we are picking up, and that will be a big issue for my successor also.

In the light of events in the last 12 months, do you think those new modes of communication bring with them risks to reasoned discourse?

This has been a worrying period from the point of view of intellectual discourse. During the American Presidential race, we had so much reference to 'alternative facts', which of course is another way of saying things that are not true. We have also had intense focus on narrow self-interest, and the distrust – indeed, sometimes the hatred – of the 'other'. We should be troubled by those two things: the attack on evidence and reason, suggesting that they can be dismissed or shaped as you wish; and the attack on values, in the sense of the fostering of narrowness, of making a virtue of self-interest, and of hostility to other people. Both those things are attacks on the Enlightenment, and it is the Enlightenment spirit that guides bodies such as the British Academy, the Royal Society, the British Museum,⁴ and indeed academic life in general. We must intensify our efforts to bring care in enquiry and seriousness about values to centre stage.

But we also have to learn to put across ideas that are often deep and complex in a simple and succinct way, which at the same time does not do too much violence to their depth and complexity. We can learn something from the Pope. He has



2. *Prospering Wisely*, p. 2.

3. More information about these events can be found at www.britishacademy.ac.uk/british-academy-debates.

4. As well as being President of the British Academy, Lord Stern is also a Fellow of the Royal Society, and has served as Deputy Chair of the Trustees of the British Museum for most of his period as President of the Academy (his term at the British Museum came to an end in October 2016).



'The Allegory of Good Government', fresco painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Siena town hall, c. 1338-9.

spoken out for values that respect other people very strongly, and values that speak about responsibilities. On the environment and climate, he has said 'If we destroy Creation, Creation will destroy us'; and 'God always forgives, people sometimes forgive, but nature never forgives.' Those are memorable phrases which capture a key part of the argument in a very powerful way. Even if you might worry about some of how they are formulated – I have difficulty with the idea of Creation (and my father would have been very surprised to hear his son praising a Pope) – those are both examples of how deep, important ideas can be explained in ways that can be quite brief. We have to think hard about that, because it is a difficult thing to get right. But if we are to deal with bad arguments that can be expressed very quickly in snappy ways, we have, *inter alia*, to be able to express ourselves with good arguments in snappy, succinct ways. That is a talent which is scarce amongst academics. They can spend 10 or 15 minutes at the beginning of a lecture laying out the foundations – in an intellectual sense, clearing their throat. We have, at least for some purposes and interactions, to learn to do better than that.

So we keep having to demonstrate the contribution that the humanities and social sciences can bring to contemporary discussions?

I was a mathematics undergraduate at Cambridge when some of the argument between F.R. Leavis and C.P. Snow about the latter's *Two Cultures* was going on, and we were all very much intrigued by

what was being said. Professor Stefan Collini FBA has shown that, for all his vituperation and nastiness, Leavis comes out as the more subtle of the two.⁵ Snow's presentation of a narrow determinism in terms of technology and science was crude and misleading. It is counter to what I have been saying about the importance of seeing science, in the Latin sense, as covering all knowledge.

The essence of what has been achieved across the British Academy's disciplines over the years can be exemplified by the work of some of my predecessors as President. I have already quoted Adam Roberts. Witness the profound work of Onora O'Neill around trust and morality. Her TED talk is a masterpiece of communication. Keith Thomas wrote a beautiful book on *The Ends of Life*. It is about what economists and psychologists might now talk about as well-being, but historians see these things just as deeply and with the wisdom of experience. Tony Wrigley in historical demography and Garry Runciman in historical sociology brought a great breadth and depth across and within disciplines, and in doing so changed our understanding in profound ways.

I have kept in my room over the years what is now a fading reproduction of Lorenzetti's frescoes in Siena, painted in the 14th century, on good governance and bad governance. He has one side of the picture where governance is good, where people are prospering and agriculture is productive, and trade works well; on the other side, he has bad governance, where people are impoverished and all

5. See, for example, Stefan Collini, 'Leavis v Snow: the two-cultures bust-up 50 years on', *Guardian* (16 August 2013).

kinds of backhanders are taking place. If you look at Shakespeare's interpretations of history, so much of them are about leadership and governance, values, choices and dirty deeds, and how badly things go wrong if governance or leadership is weak or people behave in deeply immoral or reprehensible ways. His drama is partly about the human condition, partly morality tale, partly in some sense about political science. *The Merchant of Venice* has strong lessons on the workings of law, finance, uncertainty and misjudgement. For Balzac, too, intrigue and finance were centre-stage. So too, what happens under stress and when values get frayed.

If you look at artists like Lorenzetti, playwrights like Shakespeare, novelists like Balzac, you find insights that are very modern, because they are perennial. Each generation may find different aspects in them. And if we forget or ignore those understandings – as I think we have seen on a major scale in recent times – we take ourselves into dangerous territory. And by keeping such sources under study, the humanities and social sciences deepen and broaden the insights we can gain from them. There is no sense in which everything about them has already been said. There is always so much more, and it gets richer.

I should also emphasise language and internationalism. As English becomes increasingly dominant as the language of international science and business, and of much of the internet, there is a danger that our understanding of the world becomes more narrow or superficial. The British Academy has rightly been active on this issue, an important example being our 2013 publication *Lost for Words*.⁶

A major aspect of the first half of your Presidency was preparation for the Government's Spending Review, to argue the case for continued public funding for the humanities and social sciences.

Were you satisfied with the outcome?

You have to be careful with the word 'satisfied'. But it was so much better than it might have been.

Sometimes academics think that they have an entitlement, that society should give them plenty of resources and let them do whatever they like with them. That cannot be right. We argue that it is greatly in society's interest to offer us the privilege of study and research, but we should recognise that, whilst it is, in our view, a wise investment, it *is* a privilege for ourselves. And it also comes with obligations: a budget is not a licence to spend, it is an obligation to deliver. I tried to articulate some of that with my colleagues in the 2016 review of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which

I chaired. We, as academics, have to make the case that what we are doing is of great value, and that can often depend on being free and resourced to follow ideas where they take us. But our arguments must be sound, structured and evidence-based, although I have insisted on a very broad and deep sense of the meaning of 'great value'.

When we make that case for public funding, we have to recognise that economy in the use of resources is important; so too is an understanding how the UK political system works. I probably have some advantage in being an economist, and having spent three years inside the Treasury, as Second Permanent Secretary and Head of the Government Economic Service. We study institutions in the humanities and social sciences, and it is important that we understand the institutions with which we interact and exchange ideas and arguments.

We made our case together with the other three national academies. Our joint document – *Building a stronger future: Research, innovation and growth* – was of real quality in its argument and very effective. I should pay tribute to Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society at that time, with whom I worked extremely closely in the run up to the 2015 Spending Review, including in meetings at the Treasury. The case was founded on the contribution of research to productivity and growth. But it was also about the contribution to society more generally, showing the importance of research, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, to understanding what human life is about.

It was extraordinary that during George Osborne's Spending Review, when the hatchet was being wielded right across public expenditure, and we had been asked to prepare scenarios for up to 30 per cent cuts, we got 'flat real' in the jargon. And then, in Philip Hammond's first allocation, we got a major increase for the research budget. So we have established the research side of the budget in the UK in a much stronger way than many anticipated was possible. In these discussions, the Prime Minister's Council on Science and Technology played an important role. The ex officio membership of the Presidents of the national academies is vital.

But you cannot take anything for granted. There is always a risk that circumstances can change. So we constantly have to demonstrate what we do by engaging in the big issues of the day. I am happy to say that the cheerful and productive collaboration with the Royal Society and the other academies continues.

In 2013, you spoke of us being at 'a historic point of change'. And you have already acknowledged

6. *Lost for Words: The Need for Languages in UK Diplomacy and Security* (November 2013).

how eventful the last four years have been. Are you optimistic about the future?

Yes and no. The extraordinary agreements of 2015 that I referred to earlier give us a global agenda that stands. It is the first global agenda since the days after the Second World War, when we had the creation of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the beginning of the European Community; and we had the Bretton Woods Conference and the institutions founded there – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. That was before decolonisation, and involved just 44 countries. And after the experience of the preceding 30 years – two World Wars and a Great Depression – there were powerful emotions and reasons to believe that coming together and trying to do things in a more ordered and collaborative way would be an improvement.

This time around, in 2015, we had nearly 200 nations coming together. It was after decolonisation, and there was no one ‘bossy’ nation (remember how powerful the United States was, relative to everybody else, in the late 1940s). And those 200 nations were not just looking back, they were anticipating problems, looking many decades ahead in the case of climate change. And they were setting development goals around which we could all collaborate, around what kind of societies we want to build, how we would try to tackle poverty, build sustainable cities and ecosystems, and referring strongly to education, health and gender issues. This was a very powerful and encouraging coming together. And in case of the Paris Agreement on climate change, which is now a year and a half old, country after country has come out very strongly, particularly after the Trump election, to say that ‘we carry on’: the transition to the low-carbon and sustainable economy is the only serious growth story, it is the attractive way to grow, gives us cities where we can move and breathe, and ecosystems that can have a chance of survival, be robust and deliver so much. It is also the right thing to do in terms of our collective responsibilities. So that makes me optimistic.

But the signs of narrow nationalism and hostility towards other people, outsiders, are also there. So, too, is the attitude that sees self-interest as license to disregard the future and the rights and well-being of those who follow. One of the reasons these attitudes are present is that we did not think hard enough about the increasing precariousness in our society and about some aspects of inequality. As social scientists, we did know what was going on. There have been many writings about inequality and uncertainty of income, including from my dear

We did not think hard enough about how to manage change, and about how change would be seen.

and longstanding friend Tony Atkinson, who sadly died in January 2017. But as academics as a whole, we probably missed some of the message and did not think hard enough about what the consequences could be, and about what conclusions might be drawn by those who had become more precarious in their living. You cannot blame people who see or experience dislocation and alienation for thinking that something has gone wrong, and objecting.

We did not think hard enough about how to manage change, and about how change would be seen. For example, so much of it has been put down to globalisation, when in fact more of it is about changing technology and the casualisation of work associated with changing technology. That casualisation has brought benefits for people who need flexibility in their work. Uber uses the capital equipment – the car – in a more efficient way, it uses people’s time more flexibly, and brings down cost to

the consumers. And this has been made possible by digitisation and IT, and a bit of creativity in the service sector. But it has consequences: it dislocates taxis, and raises issues around rights of workers.

The changing nature of technology and work has been interwoven with globalisation. But a number of studies, whilst recognising the interactions, suggest that technology has been more important than globalisation in generating precariousness for some and very great riches for a few at the top. We are thinking more carefully about these things now. But if we had thought more deeply before, a better shared and more careful understanding could have led to better policies.

You have been involved in various of the positive global developments we have been talking about – you were at COP21 in Paris. What dimension has the fact that you have been President of the British Academy brought to that?

Usually I have been at the table as an economist – I am IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government at the London School of Economics (LSE). Or I have been there as somebody who has focused on the economics of climate change – I am Chairman of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the LSE. However, it has been important that I also badge myself as the President of the British Academy, because it signals the significance of all the humanities and social sciences in these issues. It is about speaking for the values of the Enlightenment, for reason and evidence, and for that broad view of what ‘science’ means.

It *has* made a difference. It has contributed to an identity and a presence that is more than just an economist with some experience in development and

public policy plying his trade. It has drawn attention to that key principle that you have to bring a full set of ideas to the table if you want to tackle the great problems of our times and the challenges of a rapidly-changing future. And I think it also shows a real commitment to quality as well. It is not just the breadth of our disciplines; it is the insistence on quality in their pursuit as well.

Being President of the British Academy has offered me constant enjoyment in the beauty and power of our subjects: talking to historians, psychologists, philosophers, linguists and other academics right across the whole spectrum, meeting people who are extraordinarily distinguished and listening to them. I would not have had anything like that depth of exposure, and it has been a great richness.

What will you focus on when you cease being President of the British Academy in July 2017?

I will continue to be deeply involved in public policy in the UK, but much more widely too. I will be joining a small international working party (a so-called 'Eminent Persons Group'), put together at the request of the G20, to look into the functioning and reform of the international economic and financial system and institutions. It will be chaired by Tharman Shanmugaratnam, the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, a very distinguished econo-

mist and public servant. That will be an important commitment for the next two years or so.

I will be able to intensify my own research. I hope, probably next year, to publish the third of our books on Palanpur, the village in India on which we have very detailed data on household circumstances going back to the 1950s. (My own work started in 1974 helped by a British Academy grant of £750.) It is through that very close personal observation of one village for more than four decades that a lot of my understanding of the processes of development has come.

At the same time, I will be deeply involved in the issues around climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals for the foreseeable future.

The next 20 years are absolutely critical to the future of this planet and its people over the coming century. We will roughly double the size of the world economy, and more than double infrastructure, in the next two decades. Get it right, and we will have a very different way of development. Get it wrong, and we are doomed to cities where you cannot breathe, you cannot move, and ecosystems that are deeply fragile. There is so much to do that is both fascinating and intensely important. And the humanities and social sciences must be at the core of analysis, understanding and action. ■

The next 20 years are absolutely critical to the future of this planet and its people over the coming century.

Nicholas Stern was interviewed by James Rivington.

A vibrant, cosmopolitan and competitive research community

The British Academy's Chief Executive, *Alun Evans*, picks out some highlights of the year 2016–17



Alun Evans has been Chief Executive of the British Academy since July 2015.

Writing this in the midst of the 2017 General Election campaign I am reminded of Harold Wilson's famous maxim that 'a week is a long time in politics'. If a week is a long time, then looking back over a year serves to remind us what a transformation has taken place internationally and domestically in our political landscape over that period. This time last year, Prime Minister May, President Trump and President Macron were all in the future. The Brexit referendum had not yet taken place. So now is perhaps also a good time to reflect on what the British

Academy has achieved over this tumultuous period of change.

The changing landscape in higher education

The past year has been a time of unprecedented change in the higher education landscape, offering numerous opportunities for the British Academy to promote the value of the humanities and social sciences.

We worked closely with our sister national academies – the Royal Society, Royal Academy of Engineering and the Academy of Medical Sciences – as well as through

parliamentarians, particularly in the House of Lords, to propose changes to the Higher Education and Research Bill as it passed through Parliament. The Bill received Royal Assent in the pre-Election 'wash-up' and will lead to the most significant changes to the education landscape in 25 years. It enables the creation of UK Research and Innovation, uniting the seven existing disciplinary research councils into a single strategic body. UKRI presents many opportunities to improve the way in which research funding is administered in the UK, and the British Academy will continue to press to ensure that the voice of humanities and social sciences is heard loud and clear in the new organisation.

The creation of UKRI presents particular potential for the support and funding of interdisciplinary research. Most of the major challenges which society faces – climate change, growing inequalities, computerisation of occupations – require interdisciplinary research and co-operation. The British Academy published a major policy report on this topic in July 2016. *Crossing Paths* looks at the opportunities and barriers at different career stages and institutional levels, and recommends changes to the way research is evaluated and to funding structures which would overcome the currently perceived risks of undertaking interdisciplinary research.¹

1. *Crossing Paths: Interdisciplinary Institutions, Careers, Education and Applications* (British Academy, July 2016).

We also consulted widely with our Fellows, award holders, and subject communities through the learned societies network to respond to the UK higher education funding councils' technical consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework due to take place in 2021. We welcomed the way in which the proposals sought to deliver the principles set out in Lord Stern's independent review and to reduce burden and game-playing, but suggested that some of the new components could introduce unintended and potentially negative consequences and should therefore be properly piloted and reviewed before they are introduced.

Outstanding individuals, innovative research

One of the most important roles of the British Academy is the provision of funding opportunities for outstanding individuals and innovative research across the humanities and social sciences. The range of Academy schemes for supporting research is shown in Figure 1, along with an indication of the sums that we disbursed in the past financial year.

The scheme that supports the largest number of research endeavours is the Small Research Grants programme. This popular scheme is resourced from public funding and a wide range of additional sources, principally the Leverhulme Trust, but also the Society for the Advancement of Management Studies, the Modern Humanities Research Association and others. Almost 400 awards were made in 2016-17, spread among applicants at 84 different institutions (and 16 independent scholars).

Another important strand of funding provides senior academics with a period of leave to undertake or complete a major piece of research, freed from the day-to-day stresses of teaching and administrative duties. In May 2017, the latest recipients of British Academy/Wolfson Research Professorships were announced.² The standard and calibre of applications were of the highest order and our awards committee were faced with some tough choices when they were whittling the shortlist down to the final four. The value of both these Research Professorships and the British Academy/Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowships is illustrated in the two articles later in this issue, by Professor Peter Wade and Dr Mark Harris.

But the jewel in the crown of our funding schemes – the British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships – continues to play a crucial role in bringing on the next generation of outstanding academics. It has been a particular pleasure in this past year to mark the 30th anniversary of the first of these early career fellowships to be held, with a celebratory reception held at the Academy in April 2017. The impact of the scheme in transforming the lives of individuals is well demonstrated in an article later in this issue (page 43).

Global Challenges Research Fund

The year has also seen the evolution of British Academy research funding programmes made possible by the government's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).

The GCRF is a £1.5 billion fund (running from 2016 to 2021) which aims to support cutting-edge UK research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries. The GCRF, which forms part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment, is managed by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), and is being delivered through a number of partners. As one of these partners, the British Academy is providing research funding through some specific schemes that we are developing.

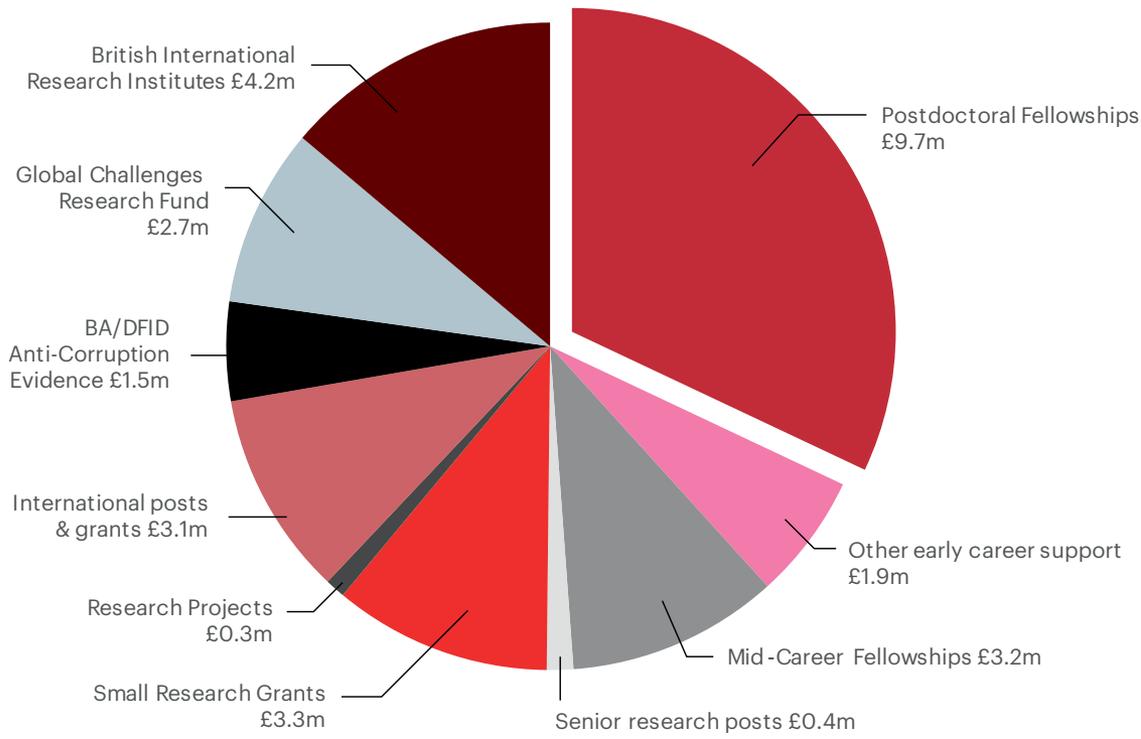
In December 2016, the British Academy announced that we would be funding 16 major research projects through the first GCRF scheme it has developed – the



The British Academy's premises in Carlton House Terrace are a popular venue for organisations seeking to hire space in central London. In February 2017, HRH The Prince of Wales (seen here being greeted by British Academy Chief Executive, Alun Evans) attended an event organised by his International Sustainability Unit. PHOTO: IAN JONES

2. See this issue, page 38.

Figure 1: British Academy expenditure on research posts and research grants in financial year 2016–17



Sustainable Development Programme. Professor Paul Jackson (University of Birmingham), appointed as Programme Leader, has explained the *raison d'être* of the scheme. 'The UK Government aims to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030, and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals offer a tremendous framework for making the world a better place for millions of people. However, we currently have only a partial understanding of what works and what doesn't, and the UK needs an approach that is based on evidence to evaluate the effectiveness and value for money of international aid efforts. Focusing on the core areas of governance, growth and human development, the British Academy's Sustainable Development Programme is an excellent opportunity to develop research that is not only academically excellent, but also has real impact on people's lives.'

We are currently assessing grant applications received for our second GCRF scheme – the Cities & Infrastructure Programme. The Programme seeks to enable UK-based researchers to lead interdisciplinary, problem-focused research projects that address the challenge of creating and maintaining sustainable and resilient cities. Projects should produce the evidence needed to inform policies and interventions for

improving people's lives in fragile or conflict-affected states or in developing countries.

And in May 2017, the British Academy announced the launch of its third GCRF scheme – the Early Childhood Development programme; this scheme is run in partnership with the Department for International Development.

Extending our resources

For the British Academy to be able to sustain and extend the research opportunities that it provides, it is crucial that we continue to explore new funding streams. Figure 2 shows the sources of Academy income in the financial year 2016–17. An important element is the revenue generated for the Academy by its wholly owned subsidiary, Clio Enterprises Ltd, through hiring out the many excellent meeting spaces within our home at 10–11 Carlton House Terrace.

During 2016–17 the British Academy received over £1.9 million in philanthropic support from private funders including trusts and foundations, learned societies, individuals and companies – some of whom I have already mentioned. We are enormously grateful to these supporters who enable the Academy to undertake events, award prizes, carry out policy work, and support a dazzling array of research in our disciplines. This

During 2016–17 the British Academy received over £1.9m in philanthropic support.

important support strengthens the Academy's independence from government, and enables us to act and respond quickly to external pressures and pursue strategically important initiatives.

In 2016 the British Academy began work on a new research and engagement programme that is being made possible through private funding sources, on the 'Future of the Corporation'. This programme seeks to explore the nature of business and its role in society and to drive positive change in the world through enabling and encouraging businesses to embed socially and environmentally responsible purposes at their core. The Academy has developed a Steering Group and Corporate Advisory Group to guide the project and ensure it remains relevant to business, and is working closely with government and other organisations active in the field. The 'Future of the Corporation' is discussed in much more detail in the interview given to the *British Academy Review* elsewhere in this issue by the project's academic

lead, Professor Colin Mayer FBA. And we are already developing plans for our second major programme on the 'Future of Democracy'.

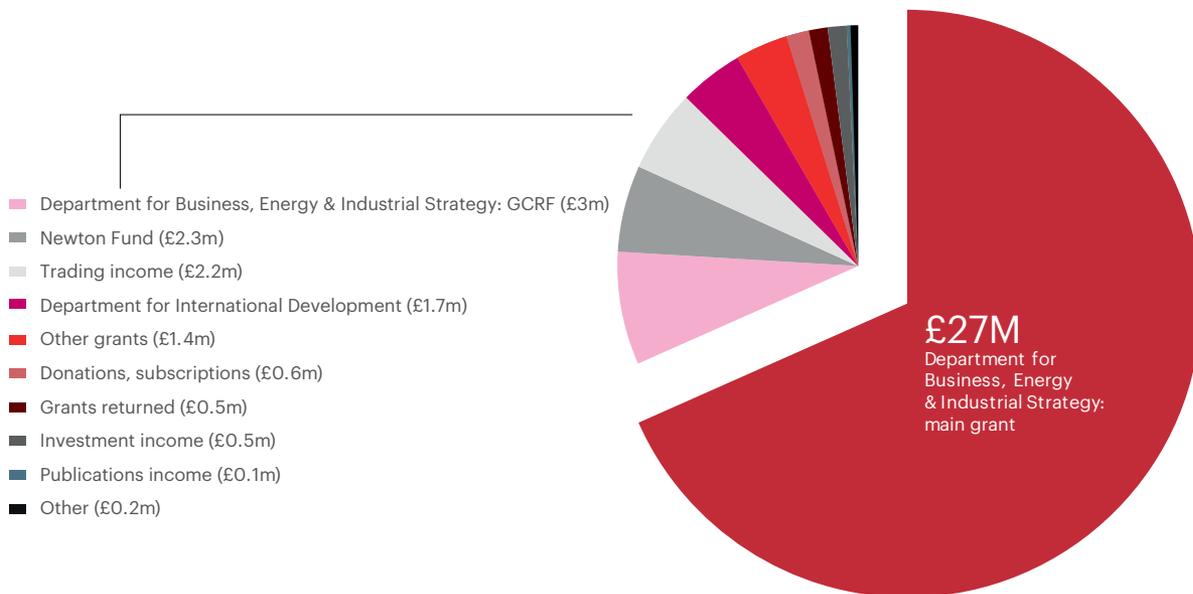
Diversity

On becoming Chief Executive, one of the things I said that I wanted to stress was that the British Academy should be seen to be more representative of the community we seek to serve. And whilst we will always seek to elect Fellows and fund research on the key criterion of excellence, it is also essential that we ensure all of the community have the opportunities to be part of our work. During the past year a working group chaired by one of our Fellows, Professor Sarah Birch, looked at what more the Academy might do to promote greater diversity. We already have a good track record. For example, looking at all our grants awarded, some 54 per cent go to women, and some 15 per cent go to members of the Black and minority ethnic community, compared to shares in the



In May 2017, the British Academy held a week of public events on the theme of 'Adaptations and Transformations'. Stories are regularly re-told, adapted to another medium, or completely transformed, and this programme of events explored such evolutions of literature across time, culture, language and form. ILLUSTRATION: PATRICK BOYER

Figure 2: British Academy income in financial year 2016–17



population of 53 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively.³ But the working group also came up with some very sensible proposals on promoting greater diversity in our Fellowship, including in terms of recruiting our Fellows from as broad a range of institutions as possible, and ensuring that emerging and minority disciplines are represented. I shall continue to follow how well we perform across all these diversity dimensions over the coming year.

By word of mouth

In the interview that I gave to the *British Academy Review* when I took up post two years ago, I said ‘I think we have a fantastic story to tell. Perhaps we have not told it quite as loudly and vigorously as we could have done in the past. That is one of the things I want to do.’⁴

I have had great personal pleasure in leading a series of British Academy ‘roadshows’ to UK higher education institutions to explain what we do and the opportunities for funding young researchers in the humanities and social science. I have been to Belfast, Bristol, Manchester, Sheffield and Durham, and will keep travelling this year to take our message out widely. Wherever we go the Academy is welcomed and there is real enthusiasm for what we are seeking to achieve. But we can never take for granted the assumption that academics working in the humanities and

social sciences are fully aware of all the ways in which the Academy can support their endeavours.

As an Academy we also have a duty to engage more widely with non-academic audiences. And so this past year we have had another very full programme of events aimed at a wider public audience at our Carlton House Terrace premises, and we have also sought to take our public events ‘on the road’. The series of British Academy Debates on ‘Inequalities’ (autumn 2016) and on ‘Robotics’ (spring 2017) included events in Bristol, Leicester, Edinburgh, Belfast, and even one in Brussels.⁵ And in the last 12 months we have reached large audiences through our partnership events at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Cambridge Literary Festival, the Oxford Literary Festival, and the Hay Festival.

June 2016 saw the initiation of our first British Academy Soirée, as a showcase for the work of the British Academy. The best exemplars of humanities and social sciences scholarship are our own Fellows of the British Academy, and a particularly effective feature of the Soirée was a series of short ‘pop-up’ talks by Fellows of the British Academy about their work and interests.⁶ We have since extended this idea by starting a regular podcast *From Our Fellows*, in which Fellows offer brief reflections on what is currently interesting them.⁷ The

We have also sought to take our public events ‘on the road’.

3. The percentage figures are for grants awarded in 2015–16.

4. Alun Evans, ‘Interview’, *British Academy Review*, 26 (Summer 2015), 11.

5. Further Information on the British Academy Debates can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/british-academy-debates

6. Recordings can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/british-academy-soiree-2016-speakers

7. Listings of *From Our Fellows* editions and individual contributions can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/from-our-fellows



In April 2017, the British Academy published a volume of essays on *Gertrude Bell and Iraq: A Life and Legacy*, edited by Paul Collins and Charles Tripp FBA. Arising from a conference organised by the British Institute for the Study of Iraq and the British Academy, in collaboration with the Gertrude Bell Archive at Newcastle University, the volume examines Gertrude Bell's role in shaping British policy in the Middle East in the first part of the 20th century, her views of the cultures and people of the region, and her unusual position as a woman occupying a senior position in the British imperial administration. She is pictured here at a picnic party at Ctesiphon, Iraq, in 1921; King Faisal sits second right. GERTRUDE BELL ARCHIVE, NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

range and depth in subject matter, perspective and tone have quickly established this as essential listening for anyone wanting to understand what academics working in our disciplines really do.

Where we live now

In the previous article in this issue, Lord Stern drew attention to the continuing lack of confidence that people have in institutions and in politics. A key consideration in understanding people's concerns is to appreciate what their place means to them.

In March 2017, the British Academy announced the findings of *Where We Live Now*, a major project seeking to understand how people feel about the places in which they live, and what this means for creating policies that will improve people's lives.

As part of this landmark project, the British Academy examined what makes a place special; how where we live impacts our health and well-being; and how we can use local knowledge to increase local productivity. At a time when many decisions are being devolved to cities and regions, the British Academy aimed to understand these questions and how they relate to people's attachment to places – be it a street, village, town, city, county or country.

Where We Live Now took the British Academy around England and Wales to gather opinions on how we can use the way people feel about the places where

they live and work, to create and manage new policies. We have discussed a number of aspects of, and barriers to, place-based productivity strategies in England and Wales: place quality, health, housing, employment, skills, infrastructure, planning, post-industrial decline, culture and the environment. As a result we have produced four key briefing papers, a collection of perspectives including eight essays, four case studies and a variety of poetry and imagery, and two policy papers.⁸

And looking ahead, in the coming year we will be bringing to conclusion another major piece of research work which the Academy has been leading on 'Governing England'. The *Governing England* project brings together place-based perspectives with questions of governance, representation and the constitution. Ahead of the Metro Mayor elections in May 2017, we held events across the country to explore devolution in England. A report on the conclusions to be drawn from these roundtables will be launched at a conference on 'Governing England: Devolution and Identity in England' on 5 July 2017. Through *Governing England*, the British Academy seeks to provide valuable insights into what these and other changes mean for our local democracy in a changing world.

Brexit

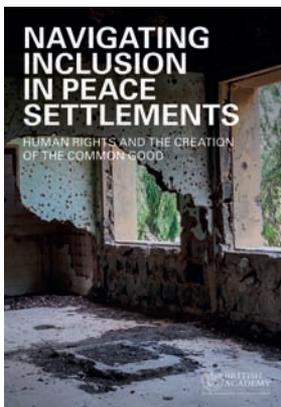
But the most significant constitutional change of the past 12 months has, of course, been the aftermath of the

8. The *Where We Live Now* reports and other resources can be found via <https://wherewelivenow.com>

European Union Referendum in June 2016 and the vote to Leave the EU. As we wrestle individually and collectively to understand the implications of this profound geopolitical shift, the British Academy is seeking to provide balance, insights and perspectives to help us find our way – all based on the best evidence and expertise available.

The British Academy publication – *European Union and Disunion: Reflections on European Identity* – aims to illustrate the feelings, attitudes and sentiments we hold towards Europe today and have done in the past, and to demonstrate how these can be and have been used, mobilised and at times distorted in politics and public discourse.⁹ Critically, however, the contributions in the publication also re-imagine these narratives of Europe – both positive and negative – and aim to look forward to a new looking glass of how both nation and Europe can be harnessed to the same societal project.

And in June 2017 the British Academy has hosted a conference to examine the idea – propounded as part of the Brexit-inspired narrative of a ‘truly Global Britain’



As part of its international policy work, on 6 June 2017 the British Academy launched a report entitled *Navigating Inclusion in Peace Settlements: Human Rights and the Creation of the Common Good*. Many recent peace processes appear to have produced an uncertain, and sometimes transitory, peace. This report points to ways in which peace agreements based on compromise and without a clear pre-commitment to the common good tend to institutionalise ‘formalised political unsettlement’, i.e. a situation where the root causes of a conflict are carried into the new political and legal institutions, rather than being resolved. This report argues that human rights commitments can facilitate entry points for the creation of an inclusive political order, and suggests a novel approach to the implementation of human rights measures. In so doing, it responds to calls from development and peacebuilding actors for more politically smart tactics with regard to intervention in fragile and conflict-affected states.

– of reaffirming and strengthening ties with ‘old friends’ across the English-speaking world – the so-called ‘Anglosphere’ – particularly Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.¹⁰

Brexit will continue to be a major focus of our attention in the coming year. The humanities and social sciences are the essential disciplines for shedding light on the complex issues – legal, political, economic, cultural – surrounding the UK’s disengagement from the European Union. As one example of our engagement in this area, the British Academy has been working very closely with the Royal Irish Academy on the set of issues that the island of Ireland now faces and how the border will operate when the UK leaves the union.

But Brexit also brings with it concerns for the future health of research in our disciplines. On this matter, we have provided written evidence in recent months to three parliamentary select committees, as well as oral evidence by our President; and we have convened two joint statements from the seven national academies in these islands.¹¹ In these submissions, we have stressed the importance for the future of UK-based research of addressing the mutually entwined issues relating to resources, people, collaboration and regulation.¹² We have, for example, called for all non-UK EU academics and their dependants currently in the UK (or accepting employment here before the time the UK leaves the EU) to be provided with permanent residency. We have also highlighted how successful UK-based humanities and social sciences researchers have been in EU competitive funding programmes – in particular grants awarded by the European Research Council, a world-leading frontier research programme, which simply cannot be replicated here in the UK alone.

Delivering global leadership in research is a strategic priority of the British Academy. We will continue to stress the value to UK research of international collaboration and mobility – beyond just the European dimension. We will continue to make the case for a vibrant, cosmopolitan and competitive UK research environment.

Finally, and on a personal note, I should like to thank Nick Stern for the leadership he has provided to the Academy over these past four years as President. He has played a leading role in raising the profile of the British Academy, and emphasising at all times the centrality of the humanities and the social sciences to all of the key challenges of our time which we as a nation are facing. I shall miss his friendship and wise counsel. I am equally looking forward to welcoming and working with his successor Professor Sir David Cannadine. ■

9. *European Union and Disunion: Reflections on European Identity*, edited by Ash Amin and Philip Lewis (British Academy, May 2017). It arises from a November 2016 British Academy conference on ‘European Union and Disunion: What has held Europeans together and what is dividing them?’ That initiative has been adopted by All European Academies (ALLEA) as a programme of activities, including further conferences and publications.

10. See Andrew Mycock, ‘Brexit, the Anglosphere and the emergence of “Global Britain”’ (British Academy Blog, 5 May 2017).

11. The British Academy, the Royal Society, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Academy of Medical Sciences, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Royal Irish Academy, the Learned Society of Wales.

12. Further details of these submissions are available via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/eu-statements

HERMIONE LEE

... talks about enthusing readers, and bad behaviour in biography



Dame Hermione Lee is the outgoing President of Wolfson College, and Professor of English Literature, University of Oxford. She was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2001.

Tell me a bit about your background. Did the home you grew up in foster an early interest in literature?

Yes, it did. My sister and I had a privileged London childhood. My father, who was a GP, loves music and was a good cellist, so it was a very musical home and we went to a lot of opera and concerts. My mother, who came from a working-class background and had left school at 15, was a self-educated woman of high intelligence and was a wide and avid reader. She had worked briefly for Jonathan Cape during the War, and she gave me the run of her astonishing library of books. I was reading very early – Thomas Hardy from the age of eight. I think I did a great deal of my life's reading between the ages of eight and seventeen, when I went to Oxford University.

It was a very bookish childhood. Every week my mother and I went to the Buckingham Palace Road Public Library in Victoria and got my books out, and I can vividly remember the point at which I was allowed to graduate from the children's library to the adult library.

Did you feel that you were better read than your school contemporaries?

When I was very young, I think I was aware that I was reading different kinds of books, which

slightly took my teachers aback. I can remember boastfully telling my teacher, when I was about 10, that I was reading *Jude the Obscure*. She clearly thought this was a bad idea. But I was a slightly odd, inward child. At home – we didn't have television – I was reading, reading all the time.

Do you think that gave you a more mature outlook?

No, not at all. I think I lived in a fantasy world. I was completely unable to come to terms with reality.

You were to take this interest in literature further by going on to study at university. Was that inevitable?

I suppose it felt inevitable. I went to a series of schools: the Lycée in London when I was very young; and then the City of London School for Girls, which was then a direct-grant grammar school. Then, for the sixth form, I went to an excellent private school, called Queen's College in Harley Street, which had been founded by Frederick Denison Maurice for middle-class girls to become governesses, and which had been Katherine Mansfield's school. It had a very enlightened headteacher who pushed the A-level course into one year and gave us a wide-reading cultural course in the first year. So I took the Oxford entrance early.

I had a fantasy about wanting to act, but I was clearly not cut out for it. It did always seem pretty

obvious that I was more of an academic and an English literature person.

At the time, I loved going to university early, and being in fully-paid employment by the time I was 22. But looking back, I think I might have done better to have taken a year out and grown up a bit more.

You studied as an undergraduate and graduate at Oxford.

Yes, I did the BPhil. I was in the last generation of academics that did not have a DPhil.

Your first academic post was at the College of William & Mary, in Williamsburg, Virginia.

How did that come about?

There was a scheme that the Woodrow Wilson Foundation set up in liaison with the English Speaking Union, to plant young teachers in American universities for a year. I suppose it was a brain exchange. I went for an interview straight out of the BPhil. I remember being asked what I would do if a gunman came into the class (this was 1969): I said I would hide under the desk. But they still took me on.

I got an instructorship at William & Mary, which meant teaching a sophomore survey course, 'From Beowulf to Beckett', and a freshman course. I was plunged in at the deep end, because these were students very unlike the Oxford undergraduates I had taught when I did the BPhil. It was good training for me to teach big classes.

Is there any causal relationship here with your undoubted interest in American literature?

Yes, there is. I had not read much American literature when I had done my massive reading as a child and teenager. But when I came back to England in summer 1971, there was a job in the University of Liverpool – these were the days when there were lots of academic jobs going – and I was asked to teach American literature. I did a rapid crash course in Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Dickinson, Whitman and Poe, and it went on from there. That was lucky for me.

What is the particular interest for you in this American pioneer literature?

The people I have written about have been women novelists of the late 19th and early 20th century, Willa Cather and Edith Wharton. I am also very drawn to writers like Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor.

I am interested in the unpredictability of the forms they use. And I am interested in the transatlantic cultural relationship these writers have with other countries. I am interested in the relationship between the 'brave new world' and the old world, in the old ideas of American innocence and of being looked to as an exemplary nation – and how chronically distorted and destroyed that idea has become. I am interested in those pioneering adventure stories, which can be women's stories. There are things in common between *Moby-Dick* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, if you like – not stylistically, but in the idea of fronting the world. And I am fascinated by that theme in Cather, with her stories of the first-generation immigrants pouring into America (stories that we need to be reminded of now), and how they face that new world, how they deal with it and make a shape out of it.

I have a passion for the big 19th-century American writers. I am in love with Emily Dickinson, I have come, late, to admiring Whitman, and I am interested in Melville. I'm addicted to contemporary North American writing, from Roth and Updike to Tyler and Ford. But I would really like to spend the rest of my life writing about Henry James.

I feel rather shocked that British readers do not know writers like Willa Cather as much as I would want them to.

Do you think you bring a perspective to your studies of those American authors that an American critic would not have?

I think the impulse has been the other way, which is to feel rather shocked that British readers do not know writers like Willa Cather, Flannery O'Connor or Eudora Welty as much as I would want them to. It's even the case with Edith Wharton, who is a big name, but people tend to know only about five books out of a huge opus. So it's more 'Read this, and this is why I love it.' I want to bring them more readers.

On the other hand, I don't think that the scholars who work on Willa Cather in Nebraska all their lives, putting out definitive editions of her work, are particularly interested in what an English academic has to say about her.

While you have certainly written about male authors, the authors you seem to have focused on are women: Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, Penelope Fitzgerald. Do you have a particular interest in women writers like these?

Yes, I do. But I am not single minded about that. I wrote a short book about Philip Roth,¹ for instance, and did quite a lot of work on his books

1 Hermione Lee, *Philip Roth* (Methuen, 1982; reissued in Routledge Revivals, 2010).



Willa Cather, Elizabeth Bowen and Penelope Fitzgerald have all been subjects of books by Hermione Lee.
PHOTOS: EDWARD STEICHEN, CONDE NAST COLLECTION (CATHER); JANE BOWN © GUARDIAN NEWS & MEDIA LTD 2017
(BOWEN, FITZGERALD)

at one time, informally reading for him and interviewing him for the *Paris Review*.²

So is it entirely coincidental?

No, it is not coincidental. I am, of course, deeply interested in women writers. However, I think that Elizabeth Bowen (who is a great novelist and essayist), Fitzgerald, Cather and Wharton were reluctant to identify themselves with particular groups or causes. Woolf, who obviously was an enormously influential 20th-century feminist, did not want actually to describe herself as a feminist, because she was worried how that would define her. I think I am interested in them primarily as great writers and extraordinary individuals, rather than going to them because they are women.

I am currently writing a biography of Tom Stoppard, so that is a change.

You published your first book on the novels of Virginia Woolf 40 years ago this year.³ Has the study of women writers changed since then?

Yes, hugely. I look back on that book with slight embarrassment because I had a very male-dominated training at Oxford. I tried to make myself sound very formal and grown-up and Latinate when I was writing that book, and I was still a bit defensive about writing about her. I had a stuffy male tutor at Oxford who said, 'Of course, Woolf and Forster are minor novelists, nothing to be compared to Conrad and Eliot, if you are talking about modernism.' That was in the early 1970s. I think I chose to write about her because of that, but I still felt that I had to be slightly defensive about it.

The study of women writers has been completely transformed in every way since then – whether in biography, literary criticism or cultural theory. That 40 years has seen a huge change. Now I can happily and confidently spend four or five years writing a book about Penelope Fitzgerald.⁴ If I had tried to do that earlier on, in the 1980s when she was still writing, it would have been thought of as very much a minority interest. Things have changed.

The immense work that has been done by many feminist critics, political movers-and-shakers, and cultural critics has completely altered the way we can write about women in the last 40 years. And the fights that other women have fought on behalf of women like me have obviously helped me in my career. For instance, I was the first female Goldsmiths' Professor of English Literature at Oxford, and I am the first woman President of Wolfson College, Oxford. There are many trail-blazers before me who I owe that to.

For Woolf, Bowen, Cather, Wharton and Fitzgerald, you have published both biographies and editions – sometimes the edition first, sometimes the biography. What is the interplay between the two?

Very frequently, if you are thinking about a person's work and life, you are looking at unpublished material and at uncollected work. With Bowen, for instance, there had been no editions of her essays after her lifetime. I did a collection of her essays and letters called *The Mulberry Tree*, which was published just after my book on her, and which came out of my work on her.⁵ She is a brilliant essayist, and it was pleasing to put some of those pieces together. Virago published that in 1986. Probably no other publisher would have done so then. Virago was very important for me, as for so many other women readers and writers.

With Cather, again, I wanted people to read her short stories, and there was no current edition of the short stories in the UK at that time, and Virago published my edition of them.⁶

I also did two volumes of short stories by women in the 1980s, called *The Secret Self*, which was published by Everyman.⁷ That was fabulous to do, because it enabled me to introduce all kinds of writers, such as Jean Stafford and Grace Paley.

My husband John Barnard, who is the editor of Keats, is the real thing, a scholarly literary editor. When we talk about our respective work, I am tremendously aware of what a close relationship there is between editing and biography. You cannot write biography if people have not edited the materials.

2. Philip Roth, interviewed by Hermione Lee (The Art of Fiction, No. 84), *Paris Review*, 93 (Fall 1984).

3. Hermione Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (1977; reissued in Routledge Revivals, 2010).

4. Hermione Lee, *Penelope Fitzgerald: A Life* (Chatto & Windus, 2013).

5. Hermione Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation* (1981); revised edition as *Elizabeth Bowen* (Vintage, 1999). *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, edited by Hermione Lee (1986; reissued by Vintage, 1999).

6. Hermione Lee, *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up* (Virago, 1989; reissued 1996). *The Short Stories of Willa Cather*, selected and introduced by Hermione Lee (Virago, 1989).

7. *The Secret Self 1: Short Stories by Women*, selected and introduced by Hermione Lee (J.M. Dent, 1987; revised edition, 1991). *The Secret Self 2: Short Stories by Women*, selected and introduced by Hermione Lee (J.M. Dent, 1987; revised edition, 1991).

You start your biography of Virginia Woolf⁸ with her quote ‘My God, how does one write a Biography?’ You have written on this subject, including in *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*.⁹ In there, as one of the many characterisations of how biography can be written, you draw the distinction between ‘autopsy’ and ‘portrait’.

I am glad you have quoted that line by Woolf. One of the reasons for writing the Woolf biography was that I was fascinated by her own deep scepticism about biographical processes. She wrote an enormous amount about that, including within her fiction. In *Jacob’s Room* and *Orlando* she is saying ‘How do you know another person?’ Therefore I couldn’t set out to write a standard cradle-to-grave biography: it would have been a bit of an affront to her. I wanted to build in the questions she was asking about how a life is written. And from that I got very interested in those questions of life-writing. I run a life-writing centre at Wolfson College,¹⁰ and I have taught life-writing courses. (By life-writing, I mean biography, autobiography, letters, diaries – these genres overlap with each other.)

Autopsy, yes. There is a kind of biographical process that is, necessarily, cutting into the dead corpse, however ghoulish that can seem. You are as ruthlessly as possible trying to dissect and analyse the nature of the life.

The other approach is more akin to portraiture: to see how the person looked from the outside, how they affected and influenced people, what their friendships were like, how they were one thing to one person and another thing to another person. I think you have get at both inside and outside if you can.

For me, the approach to the interior life is also via the subject’s writing. Because I am a literary biographer, and I come out of literary criticism, I deal with the relation of the life to the work. I would not write a biography of someone who was not a writer.

You have quoted the line that ‘We all live out narratives in our lives’.¹¹ Do you think that our narratives are already there to be revealed, or are they constructed by biographers?

There is another quote to add to that, from Roy Foster, the great Irish historian and biographer of Yeats, who taught with me on my life-writing

course. At the start of his biography of Yeats he says, ‘We do not, alas, live our lives in themes, but day by day.’¹² This was in contrast to the way I constructed my Virginia Woolf biography through themes; in fact I think it was part of a friendly argument with that approach.

This idea of themes and narratives in a life, that somehow a life’s shape can always be discerned, is something that I have mixed feelings about. Yes, we all have a story, and we are unravelling our own story from ourselves like a spider making its own web, as we go along. But nobody’s life is necessarily a predictable story. And people’s lives are not consistent. We all have more than one self, as Woolf says in *Orlando*. You have other selves than the person who is sitting here interviewing me.

I think that biography has to be watchful of making life seem too predictable, or determinist, or shaped, or ordered. Biographies go through fashions. There used to be a fashion for making the study run smoothly and look definitive – ‘this leads to this leads to this.’ I think life-stories are more bitty and piecemeal.

And life is also very repetitive, so biography often has to make a story out of repetition. We all do the same things when we go to work, day in day out, but that is often not very interesting to write about. On the other hand, you have to give a sense of the chunks of people’s lives where they are doing much the same thing.

So there is a tension between the muddle and repetition and fragmentariness of a life, and the desire of the biographer to turn it into story narrative.

When, as in the case of Virginia Woolf, you have a very important, much-read woman writer who kills herself, there is a powerful desire to make the story move towards that point. You see that also in the life of Sylvia Plath – perhaps even more, because she was so much younger. It becomes all about the suicide. I sometimes ask people who haven’t read Woolf how old they think she was when she killed herself. Very often they will guess that she was in her 40s; and when I tell them that she was 59, they are often surprised. The film *The Hours* did a lot of damage in that respect. It was not a *very* long life, but it was a long-*ish* life, and not all of that life was taken up in thinking about whether she was going to kill herself the

8. Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (Chatto & Windus, 1996). This biography won the British Academy’s Rose Mary Crawshay Prize in 1997.

9. Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

10. Oxford Centre for Life-Writing (www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/oclw).

11. Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 104.

12. R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, Volume 1, *The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xxvii. Professor Roy Foster was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1989.

next day or not – far from it. So one of my motives in writing about Virginia Woolf was to get away from the determinist sense of a story that had to end that way.

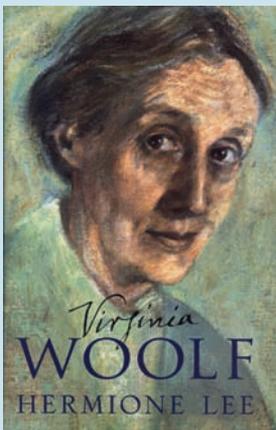
Creative people want to be judged by their work rather than by their lives. You have quoted Janet Malcolm’s views on ‘the voyeurism and busybodyism’ of biographers in this respect.¹³ How do you find an appropriate balance?

The biography of Penelope Fitzgerald was a very interesting case. I knew her a little bit, and I had interviewed her more than once. Her family executor asked me to do her biography, and I was delighted, because I think she is a genius. But she was also very private, very secretive, a bit of a liar. There is a haunting novel she wrote about Moscow just before the Revolution, called *The Beginning of Spring*. People would say to her, ‘Surely you know Russia well. You must have spent many years there.’ Sometimes she would say, ‘Yes, yes, I have been there very often,’ and other times she would say, ‘No, I have never been there in my life,’ depending on what mood she was in. The truth was she had been there for one week on a package tour, with one of her daughters. I love all of that: she didn’t want people to know, she wanted to keep her secrets. There were lots of things about Fitzgerald that I never found out.

But you have to push against that privacy, even if it’s a privacy that you yourself would want to keep. In a sense, you have to be like the Janet Malcolm image of the burglar ransacking the drawers or the publishing scoundrel in *The Aspern Papers*. You have got to be ruthless. But I also think one should be ethical, and treat one’s subject truthfully, but with respect.

That sounds weak, as if you are going to be kowtowing to your subject, but I think there should be some dignity in biography.

Where you have a subject about whom biographies have already been written, how do you decide, ‘You know what, I think there is a gap there?’



I wanted to insist on Virginia Woolf as a hardworking professional, not some doolally, cardigan-wearing elitist.

The books on Bowen, Cather and Wharton I chose to do for that reason. But the biographies of Woolf and Fitzgerald came at me; I was asked to do them. With Woolf I thought at first, ‘This is completely ridiculous. Why on earth would I? How could I?’ Then I was asked again, and so I thought, ‘Well, perhaps it *is* the right time, and perhaps I could try.’

I started work on it in 1990. It was a time when there had been a concentration on her madness, on childhood sexual abuse – Woolf as a victim. She is one of those figures who keeps pace with the psychoanalytical movements of the time. I wanted to insist on her as a hardworking professional, as a political realist, as someone who was in touch with her time, and not some doolally, cardigan-wearing, eccentric elitist, talking to herself on the downs. So I was writing against some previous versions.

Also, Quentin Bell (who was very generous to me) had written the family version, the story of his brilliant, mad aunt. It was a very funny and beautiful book, but it was a deeply unpolitical version of her. So I was writing a bit against that too.

In the case of Edith Wharton, the big Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of her by R.W.B. Lewis was tremendously American-focused. This is a person who left her country and lived abroad for a large part of her life – though the subject of her writing was still America. I wanted to place her more in Europe, in Paris, and I began my book there.¹⁴

With Penelope Fitzgerald, I was the first to write her biography. So almost all the personal sources of material that I was using I was seeing before anyone else (except perhaps the family): her student marked-up essays, or her annotated books, some of which had been rescued from the river when the barge that she lived on sank in the Thames. It’s moving to hold these crinkled copies with her writing on them. That is a different kind of responsibility from writing on a much-biographised figure.

And you have also been able to talk to people who knew your subjects.

All of my subjects have been recent enough for that to be possible. There were just a few very old people left to talk to about Edith Wharton – Sybille Bedford, wonderfully gossipy – but obviously I had the least contact of that kind with her.

13. Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 95.

14. Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton* (Chatto & Windus, 2007).

With Woolf, when I started, a lot of the people in that last generation – Stephen Spender, Frances Partridge, Quentin Bell, Angelica Garnett, Noel Annan, Dadie Rylands – were all alive. They had been telling their stories for 50 years, and you knew that the minute you left the house they were ringing each other up to say ‘She doesn’t seem too bad.’ However, the point was to get the tone, rather than any new information.

With Fitzgerald, people were talking for the first time, and a lot of them were quite old. I find that the older people they are – in their 80s and 90s – the easier it is to talk to them. If they want to talk, they will just talk – often on the phone, where they don’t have to do the whole business of making you a cup of tea – and they will say quite frank things. Obviously, everybody misremembers. But you are going for *how* they talk about a person, not so much facts.

By contrast, I am talking to a lot of people at the moment who are not in their old age, they are busy, in their prime, in the middle of their lives. Quite often they can’t remember dates when things happened, but that doesn’t matter. I just want to know what they think about my subject.

Witnesses are fascinating, and always unreliable. They misremember like mad. And sometimes they will want to edge themselves into the foreground of the picture.

You have a nice sentence in your Woolf biography, where you talk about interviewing people who knew her: ‘I often found how impertinent it was to reduce other people’s long histories to their moments of knowledge of this one famous person, as though the rest of their lives counted for nothing.’ Have there been people whom you almost wished you could pursue in their own right, to bring them more centre-stage?

All the time. I am having to do it at the moment when I talk to friends and colleagues of Stoppard. These are mostly astonishing, very talented, brilliant people in their own lives, and I am just asking them to tell this little bit of it. You have to try not to deviate, but it’s hard.

Being used as a witness is just beginning to happen to me. People have started to ask me about the generation I have known, for example for biographies of Brian Moore and Angela Carter. Now it’s my turn to have that moment of, ‘Hang on, what about *my* life?’

In your acknowledgement note for your *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up*, you start with: ‘I am grateful to the British Academy for a personal research grant in 1987

which enabled me to visit Nebraska.’ How important is it to visit places that feature in the biographies?

A key book for me has been Richard Holmes’ *Footsteps*, that romantic account of his following Robert Louis Stevenson – with a hat instead of a donkey. I am full of admiration for biographers’ quests. Edmund Gordon’s recent biography of Angela Carter is very impressive in that way: he has been everywhere.

When a writer is so deeply imbued with a sense of place – as Cather is – you have to go and spend some time there. I didn’t know the mid-west beforehand. John and I went to the Mesa Verde, which is at the heart of *The Professor’s House*. I spent some time in her home town, Red Cloud, Nebraska.

For Elizabeth Bowen, I needed to be in County Cork, to look at that field where Bowen’s Court once stood.

It’s about colour and landscape and environment. Of course, everything will have changed. You go to New York to look for Edith Wharton’s Gilded Age

buildings: but pretty much every building directly associated with her is either gone or very changed. Still, I had a year in New York writing that biography, at the Cullman Center in the New York Public Library, which was invaluable to me.

So I am a great believer in seeing the places. I have just been to Zlín in the Czech Republic, where Tom Stoppard was born.

Do you have to like the subject of the biography?

You have to like their work, and then you hope you will like the person.

But quite often you run into objectionable things about them, and I am interested in the way biographers deal with their own emotions about their subjects’ bad behaviour. When you are working on Virginia Woolf or Edith Wharton, what do you do when they say or do awful things? We all know about Woolf’s snobbery, her occasional bouts of hatefulness, and her treachery to her friends. All one can say about it is that she was as acutely aware of it as any biographer could ever be.

Willa Cather was a hard nut to crack, because she was a very reticent, rather stony person in public, and while I was writing about her it felt like climbing up a rock face. So while I hugely admire her work, I didn’t find myself warming to her.

Penelope Fitzgerald was a very complex, elusive person, and again I didn’t always warm to what I learnt about her behaviour. There are stories about her cheating at cards with her five-year-old grandson, or cheating at cards with her husband while she was sitting by his deathbed in the

There are stories about Penelope Fitzgerald cheating at cards with her five-year-old grandson – because she absolutely had to win.

hospital because she absolutely had to win. It is funny, but also hair-raising. You have to tell everything, including the bad things.

Lucy Hughes-Hallett's life of Gabriele d'Annunzio, *The Pike*, is a very good case-in-point, on a different historical scale, about awful behaviour. She is very good on objectivity and not making judgements.

Who do you think of as the readers of your biographies?

It's an essential question, but a complicated one. In teaching, reviewing and book writing, I have always tried to write the same language that I would speak. I think I am a refugee from critical theory, in that I felt uneasy about a technical, professional language of critical studies that was not accessible, and so I have never been adept at employing it. I have always wanted these to be very accessible books that could be read by people who wanted to find out about these writers, who perhaps did not have any previous knowledge of them.

There were many times, especially writing about Woolf, where I would think: do I really have to tell this story again? For instance about her friendship with Vita – everybody knows this! Then you have to think: no, there is more than one audience for this. There are the people who are going to the biography because they already know the story, and they want to see how it is going to be retold and whether they will find out anything new. There are the people who come to it because they love the books and want to find out more about the person. Then there are people who might just have a general interest, and who don't know the story at all. So you have to imagine all of those audiences.

One of the benefits of being a Fellow of the British Academy is that in due course the Academy will publish a Biographical Memoir – an extended obituary – of you. Are you more conscious of the traces you are leaving of how your own life, career and work might be construed?

I try never to think about it. The *Paris Review* has started to 'do' biographers, and in an edition a couple of years ago they profiled Michael Holroyd, and me.¹⁵ It was the first prolonged interview I had done (with a very good interviewer), and I thought, 'Oh my God, I am writing my own obituary.'

I don't think that I have earned immortality in the way that I feel real, first-order creative writers – like the people I have written about – deserve immortality. I think biography is a

second-order activity, as far as the immortality stakes are concerned.

If people do ever think about me, I would like to be judged by the different but connected aspects of my work. I have taught since I was 22, and I have supervised a lot of graduate students who are now out there as professional academics, and I would love my reputation to be in their hands, as it were. I have done a lot of journalism and reviewing. And I did a book programme in the 1980s for Channel 4, when it used to be an educational channel, and I interviewed most of the writers who were producing books over about six years. That was important for me, and I would like to be remembered in its cultural context – when Britain used to have serious arts programmes.

All of that work over 45 years or so connects, I hope, through a desire to enthuse other readers with my own discoveries and literary passions.

Tell us more about the biography of Tom Stoppard you are working on.

I am having an exciting time thinking about his plays and working through his big archive in Texas. And I am talking to a lot of people. There is an astonishing range of work, and it is fascinating for me to be working on a dramatist – not a novelist – partly because it is not so linear – one book at a time. In any given year of his life, there have been an amazing number of things going on at once. Also, his texts are not finalised. I sat in on some of the rehearsals for the brilliant new 50th-anniversary production by David Leveaux of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* at the Old Vic. I was struck by the fact that most of the actors weren't born when the first production took place, and yet there is the writer still sitting in the room, responding to questions about the text, and indeed changing it. Stoppard often says that theatre is an event, not a text. People have their precious copies of *Arcadia* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* which they have studied at school, and which are classics of the 20th century. And yet the author is completely open about saying to the actors and the director in rehearsal: 'Do you want to shorten that line a bit?' or, 'Shall we put a bit more Shakespeare in there?'

I like to think of biography as something that is open-ended. That's inevitable in the case of writing about someone who is alive. This is the first time I have ever done that. In 50 years' time, someone may write a completely different book about him. So mine will be a provisional biography, but I hope it will have immediacy. ■

Hermione Lee was interviewed by James Rivington.

COLIN MAYER

... on teaching business, and trying to influence
the future of the corporation



Colin Mayer is Peter Moores Professor of Management Studies, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2013.

Tell me about your background. Did your home life as a child foster an early interest in business?

My father was a businessman. He ran a company called Griffin & George, which was one of the largest suppliers of scientific instruments to schools across the country. So he generated an interest in my mind in business and the issues that it raised. I went to Oxford intending to read engineering; but people said ‘You need to have business knowledge if you really want to succeed’, so I went on to do the joint degree in engineering and economics.

After doing a postgraduate BPhil in economics (supervised by John Kay),¹ I became a professional economist. I got a job in the forecasting department of the Treasury. I spent two and a half years there, during the very interesting period

when the IMF came over to Britain to bail out what looked increasingly like a bankrupt country.

I then went to Harvard to study at both the business school and the economics department for

an Oxford doctorate. I learned about two subjects that were, at that stage, still little known in Britain: finance, and regulation.

I came back from Harvard in 1980 just before the period when Thatcher began to introduce notions of privatisation, and so regulation suddenly became a very hot topic. I was fortunate to be in a position where I could draw on some of the knowledge that I had learned in the US.

You have spent quite an amount of time in positions abroad – Brussels, Columbia, MIT, Stanford. Was this because business studies was more developed as a discipline outside the UK?

The origins of what we now term ‘industrial economics’ were British: during the 1930s and the 1940s, many of the most prominent ideas emanated from UK universities. What happened in the US was the development of business education and business schools. Subjects such as finance developed far more rapidly in the United States than in the UK. So travelling internationally was an important component in gaining an understanding and appreciation of the subject.

1. Professor John Kay was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1997.

Your career seems to involve various firsts: the first holder of posts, including the first Professor at the Saïd Business School, and founding journals. Does this reflect the evolution of the discipline?

It partly reflects an evolution of the discipline, in that there were a number of areas that I felt could usefully be developed, but it also reflects my particular interest in starting things. I very much like creating new activities, new ideas, new organisations and helping to get them off the ground. That is what I found particularly interesting about the idea of setting up a business school in Oxford. The actual process of running a large organisation is not something that I find quite as stimulating, and so the best contribution I can make is to pass on that function at the appropriate moment.

How has business studies developed as a discipline over this period? Has it been through the evolution of thought within the academic context, or is it in response to real-world issues?

It is a mixture of the two. There is little doubt that business studies has changed the nature of business and the way in which business operates. Just as John Maynard Keynes said that politicians are slaves of defunct economists, so business leaders are the product of yesterday's business theories. There is a strong element of business schools changing the way in which business operates. But at the same time, business schools have to be very engaged and cognisant of current thinking in companies. Otherwise, they can be overtaken by what happens in the business world, and businesses actually then become more innovative than business schools.

It is a very interesting interplay and that is what makes running business schools and business education so interesting and difficult. On the one hand, it is a seed of ideas, which is fairly familiar to universities; on the other hand, it is an activity that has to be very responsive to the outside world. Academics are very good at the former, but not terribly good at the latter, for the most part. Getting that balance right is key to building a successful business school.

Have there been particular episodes in the business world that academics have had to react to in order to develop their discipline?

The Thatcher era of privatisation was one where the private sector suddenly found itself with new opportunities in terms of contributing to the delivery of public services. But it was also faced with external government intervention, in the form of regulation. Businesses had to learn how to develop and flourish in an environment in which there were lots of opportunities, but there were increasingly intense restrictions imposed on the way in which they could operate. Quite reluctantly,

business leaders had to turn to economists to give them advice on how to think about the cost of capital, for example. That has actually made the influence of economics and business schools — in terms of business practice — far greater over the last 30 or 40 years than it ever was in the past.

Your own career reveals a mix of academic and real-world consultancy work. How do you balance the two, and how do you judge the relative importance of the two?

Both are valuable activities, and balancing them is exactly the right issue for academics to address. There is a great deal that academics can learn from doing consultancy, but there is also a great risk in terms of their independence and integrity. When economics, business or politics academics get involved in outside work, it is important that they understand the basis on which they should be doing it. When I helped set up the consultancy Oxera (Oxford Economic Research Associates), we established the principle that it was not there to tell businesses what they wanted to hear; it was there to tell people what we thought was the correct description of the situation. In many cases we would tell them things that they decidedly did not want to hear. But I felt that was an important principle, and it is an important element in terms of striking a balance.

The other balancing element relates to time commitment. One of the risks of business schools is that they become shells — the academics are never there. Although there are benefits that academics derive from doing outside work, it is important that they appreciate that their primary responsibility is to research and teach. In Oxford, there is a limitation that academics should do no more than 30 days of consultancy a year.

Your own studies have focused over many years on the corporation. What do we mean by 'corporation' in this sense?

A corporation is an organisation that combines two functions, reflecting its origins. The first function is the promotion of enterprise and entrepreneurship, pursuing activities that have a commercial benefit associated with them. That is very much how business developed, particularly in the Middle East and later in many continental European countries, in terms of activities associated with trading.

The second element, which particularly emanated out of the guilds in Britain, is associated more with administration and how one can ensure high standards of conduct in organisations.

The remarkable feature of the corporation is the merging of those two functions. A corporation can muster large amounts of capital and use that for promoting successful commercial activities

for the benefit of those involved in funding the organisation. At the same time, it can bring together people with a variety of different roles and skills to provide a high level of administration and professional conduct. It is those two components that make it such a potentially powerful agent for promoting well-being. It is why it has a very long history, dating back to Roman times, but a relevance today in modern society that is probably greater than it has ever been in the past.

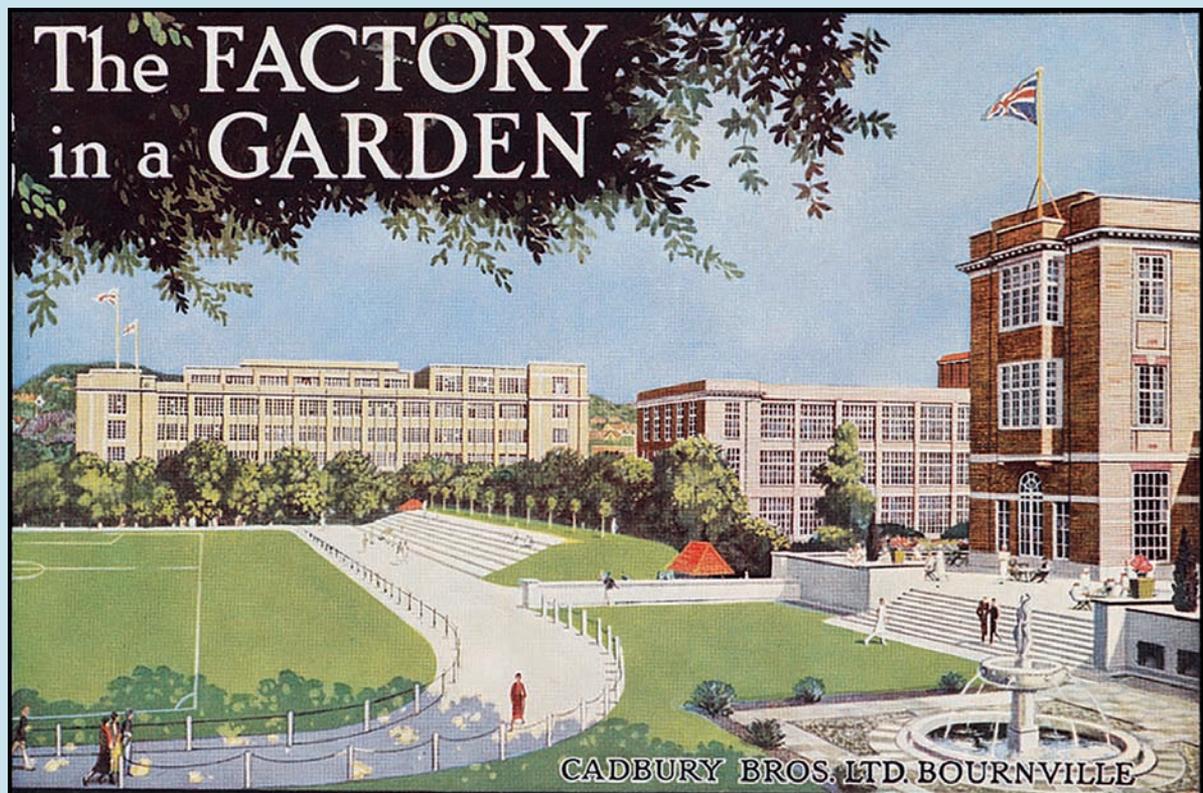
But you don't think the corporation is actually working as well as it should?

It is something that I have been aware of for a long period of time, having looked at the very different philosophies underlying the notion of the corporation that exist across the world. The notions of companies in the Far East and in many parts of Europe are very different from those in the UK and the US. For a long time, I had been very troubled by the preoccupation in the UK and the US with the role of shareholders in the running of companies. In other parts of the world, longstanding influential families play a much more important role, and banks are more important for the financing of companies. I was particularly interested in the longevity of companies, and concerned about the short-termism that can result from the engagement of shareholders in companies.

When I visited Stanford at the end of the 1990s, nearly all the classes that I was teaching contained students who were starting up their own companies: if you did not have your own start-up company, there was something wrong with you. About two years after I left, the dotcom bubble burst and nearly all of those businesses went bankrupt. From that major crisis there was a re-evaluation of the governance of companies in the United States.

People thought this had been fixed through the 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act, which sort to reform corporate governance in the US, only to discover with the financial crisis that it had actually not been fixed at all. The prevailing view then became that we had learned the lessons of the 1930s about how to run monetary policy, and all we needed to do was to cut interest rates, stimulate monetary development and we would get out of the problem.

I think that policy reaction has failed. The fact that, 10 years later, we are still in a world that has to have zero interest rates is indicative of the fact that macro policy has not been able to solve the problem, and there is something more fundamentally wrong. The problem to my mind is much more significant: the rationale and motivation for the existence of business have gone awry. And this is creating immense problems globally and in society in general.



Cadbury was a family run company with strong ethical principles.

What about specific instances of corporate misbehaviour? We have had a little run of them recently.

It is not as if the problem has not been present in the past. The problem is that we think that these are aberrations, scandals. The difficulty is not those cases that really come into the limelight – Sports Direct, BHS, or in the past Robert Maxwell. It is the presumption that, for the most part, businesses are okay, and we just have to deal with examples of bad behaviour when they arise. If people misbehave, we will punish them, and that will deal with the problem. But that is not the solution. The problem is that the corporation is not being run today in the way in which it should be.

So how have we got to where we are now?

I have worked on the history of corporations, including looking at how companies have evolved over a 100-year period. With the introduction of freedom of incorporation and limited companies in the 19th century, the corporation took off. For the most part, it took the form of being a family activity, passed on through generations – much as is still the case in many parts of the world. In many instances (not all, by any means), those families had clear principles and a notion of responsibility. This is best reflected in the Quaker companies such as Cadbury, Rowntree, Boots, Beecham, Colman, Reckitt, which had owners with very strong ethical principles by which they felt that companies should be run.

In the 20th century a lot of those companies began to sell their shares on the stock market to fund their growth, but for the most part control of the enterprise was still dominated by the families. As the century progressed, in Britain – and also in the United States, though not quite to the same extent – those families lost control, as they were forced to sell off a substantial proportion of their shares to be able to fund their businesses. So in the interwar period, in Britain in particular, a lot of capital was held by many individual shareholders, the so-called ‘widows and orphans’. But they didn’t do much more than just collect their dividends; they weren’t actively engaging with their companies very much.

Then there was a realisation that this was pretty inefficient: surely it would be better for specialists to look after people’s investments for them. And so we had the emergence of a substantial pension fund business – or mutual funds in the United States. That was the moment of substantial change. Instead of long-term inter-generational family control, we moved to a world of ownership by institutions that were merely intermediaries between the companies and the ultimate investors. And those intermediaries felt obligated to ensure that the companies were doing whatever they could to further the interests of their pensioners and other investors.

At this point, business schools and university economics departments began to take the lead in developing thinking about the role of the corporation – that it is not just to reflect the interest of shareholders, but to *maximise the value* of shareholder interest. All economics and business models became focused on this notion, which then fed into business education for managers and business leaders. And that is when the notion of the role of business loses its direction and is hijacked by this sole preoccupation.

So we now have insurgent investors; senior staff are remunerated through shares rather than pay, in a way that aligns their interests with the shareholders rather than the basic purposes of the company; we have shares traded in milliseconds. How do you make the short-term needs of the stock market serve the long-term aspirations of the corporation?

That is the fundamental trick of running a successful organisation. How do you balance those interests? How do you convert the short-term interests of investors and savers, in terms of having liquid, relatively safe short-term investments, into what companies do, which is to invest in high-risk, illiquid, long-term assets? That is what the modern financial system and institutional investment are not very good at doing, particularly in the UK.

Some of the most successful companies in the world like being listed on the stock market, in order to be able to tap into the capital that stock markets can provide; but they do not like the idea of that same stock market controlling what they are doing. If you look at most companies elsewhere around the world, family members continue to hold the majority or a large proportion of the shares, so they retain control even though the companies are listed on the stock market.

Why is it different in the UK?

In many other countries around the world, families have made use of ‘control devices’. Just as in the UK, families have had to sell shares to raise capital. But, although they may sell off a lot of the shares, they keep control by retaining voting rights. They use ‘dual-class shares’, retaining voting control, and selling off shares that have low voting rights associated with them.

In many countries they create ‘pyramids’. One company owns the majority of shares in another company that owns the majority of shares in another company, etc. You go through a whole series of layers of ownership, where you have control at every level, so that you are controlling the companies at the bottom of the pyramid. The Agnelli family in Italy has used this as a way of controlling many of the companies that they own around the world.



Investor behaviour should not just be the unrelenting seeking of financial gains above anything else.

Why has this not happened in the UK? As I described earlier, in the period after the Second World War, pension funds and life insurance companies became holders of very substantial amounts of capital in the UK. As a consequence, they began to exert a considerable amount of political influence. In the 1950s, a series of hostile takeovers caused business to regard the external influence of financial markets as really damaging, and it tried to respond by issuing dual-class shares to avoid this external control.

The pension funds and life insurance companies objected vehemently to this, because the takeovers were ways of creating huge amounts of value for shareholders. They lobbied the British government over this, and eventually the Stock Exchange passed various rules that said that, if you were a listed company, you could not have this type of share structure. So British companies are prevented by regulation from protecting themselves.

In the US it is very different because companies are not prevented from protecting themselves in this way. Google, Facebook and LinkedIn make use of dual-class shares. The most recent example was when the company Snap came to the US stock market. Snap actually gave the outside shareholders *zero* votes. That caused a furor. But everyone still bought up its shares, and they started trading at a huge premium.

Without that sort of protection, we have a system that encourages unhelpful investor ☒ and indeed ‘rent-seeking’ ☒ behaviour.

Yes. Professor Rosemary Batt put it very well in the Sir John Cass’s Foundation Lecture which she gave at the British Academy in March 2017.² It is a financialisation problem. It is the unrelenting

seeking of financial gains above anything else that causes the most serious disruption.

In your 2015 Sir John Cass’s Foundation Lecture, you said, ‘We need to ... put humanity ... back into business. There is ... no institution in the world better placed to do that than the British Academy ... and I would urge it adopt this as a programme of debate and research.’³ It now has. What is all that about?

I am very grateful that the British Academy has picked this up in such an enthusiastic way. The ‘Future of the Corporation’ is a programme of academic research⁴ looking at what the corporation will look like in 20 or 30 years ☒ and what it *should* look like. That is the right way of posing the issue: it is about how the corporation meets the needs of society.

There are other elements too. Virtually every element of business, from energy to transport, is being affected by technological change, so the type of corporation that we are going to need in 20 years is going to be very different from what it is today. For example, in the ‘sharing economy’ ☒ with companies like Uber and Airbnb ☒ the idea is that it is more effective for people to share in the ownership of the business assets, and information technology can help to do that. The frontier between what is *in* a taxi company and what is *outside* of it is shifting and becoming much more blurred. So the whole notion of what is a corporation is dramatically changing.

Other aspects of technology are having a profound influence on the way in which corporations can conduct their activity. The impact of technology in terms of destroying jobs is a very important issue for the future of work, in particular for future generations. For instance, there is a huge proportion of the population employed in driving vehicles of some form or another, which may become entirely redundant. This is an incredibly interesting and important area which we will be looking at as part of the Future of the Corporation programme.

Further, artificial intelligence is now replacing not just men with machines, but minds with mechanisms for outperforming what human minds can do. That shifts the order of significance to a much higher level, raising fundamental questions. If forms of medicine are essentially developed through mechanisms not controlled by men, how are we to determine what is acceptable, or who should be determining what is acceptable? That whole set of issues about who or what is in control is going to pervade everything, not least the way

2. Rosemary Batt, ‘Wall Street and Main Street: Dilemmas for management strategy’, Sir John Cass’s Foundation Lecture, 2 March 2017.

3. Colin Mayer, ‘Reinventing the corporation’, *Journal of the British Academy*, 4 (2016), 53–72, at 70.

4. www.britishacademy.ac.uk/future-corporation

in which the corporation is going to have to be managed and controlled in future.

So we don't want to end up with inanimate corporations trading with each other, with people being entirely surplus either as workforce or customers?

Absolutely. You mentioned high-frequency trading earlier. Algorithms are doing all of the trading that people had previously been doing. That is fine insofar as all that they are doing is trading bits of paper or setting prices in markets. If it comes to the point that they are running companies, it raises interesting issues.

You have just given a very long-term vision of the project's ambitions. But it also has more immediate considerations. You have written about the importance of identifying and foregrounding the *purpose* of the corporation. Can you explain that some more?

There is a highly influential movement that talks about the importance of developing the notion of purpose in companies. This can simply mean the purpose of a business in terms of, for example, making reliable cars or cheap washing machines. But it can also have a more normative notion to it, in terms of the role of business in society and the obligations of business to future generations as well. Purpose has really become the flavour of the month; companies need to get a purpose.

The purpose movement is in reaction to the Friedman doctrine (named after Milton Friedman) which said that the sole purpose of business was to maximise profits for its shareholders. The idea that companies need to define and act on their purpose, in relation to what they are doing and their role in society, is something that is getting the attention of a lot of business leaders, and quite rightly so. It is slowly becoming embedded in business thinking and education.

But, however well-intentioned a company, there are factors that may ultimately make it difficult for it to be able to pursue that broader agenda and a more responsible purpose. You only have to think about a case like Antony Jenkins at Barclays Bank, who took over the reins with a very clear notion as to the type of purpose that he wanted to embed in the business, only to find himself essentially stalled by the way in which the investment community responded to him. More recently, we have seen what has happened to one example of a really purposeful company, Unilever, and its very purposeful leader, Paul Polman, after the company was subject to what turned out to be an unsuccessful bid from Kraft. Even though the bid only lasted for about a day in the public domain, it appears nevertheless to be having quite a significant impact on the policy of the company, which is being pressed in the direction of putting greater emphasis

on shareholder interest. So the determination and implementation of a company's purpose cannot be separated from the issues we have been discussing about the ownership and the control of companies.

In the Future of the Corporation project we are interested in engaging not just with business, but also with policy-makers. In relation to the corporate governance Green Paper we organised a business breakfast meeting, at which some very interesting ideas emerged, not least of which was the notion that, as a basic starting point, one should ensure that companies uphold the existing company law. Section 172 of the Companies Act of 2006 sets out that directors owe a duty to their 'members' (i.e. shareholders), but must 'have regard to' the interests of other stakeholders, such as employees, suppliers and customers, for the long-term benefit of the company. So, at the very least, we should be ensuring that directors recognise their responsibility in relation to this 'have regard' element, and expecting them to report on how they are taking due account of those other parties as well.

This illustrates that the Future of the Corporation programme is relevant to immediate, as well as long-term, policy formulation.

Will institutional investors, with their clever lawyers and with their political influence, ultimately always manage to thwart reform which, however necessary or however obvious, they regard as being against their immediate interests?

In the debates about reform that are going on at present – for example, the whole issue about dual-class shares is the source of a lot of discussion in this country – one can still see the institutional lobby being very influential in terms of the way in which policy is thought about. And you can see why: if trillions of dollars or pounds of investment hinge on the behaviour of the institutions, they exert a lot of power.

On the one hand, we just have to stand up to this. We have to recognise that this has been damaging to the performance of the British corporate sector, and damaging to the rest of society.

On the other hand, institutions are beginning to understand the way in which they have been failing. There is a whole movement around promoting more long-term thinking by institutional investors, which is gaining a lot of traction and support in a number of institutions – particularly the sovereign wealth funds, which is where a great deal of capital is now going. The British Academy's Future of the Corporation programme can play a very important role in providing a framework in which policy formulation should take place over the longer term. ■

Colin Mayer was interviewed by James Rivington.

Paul Langford's polite and commercial Englishmen

This extract from *Paul Slack's* extended obituary of Paul Langford (1945–2015) discusses his two books that redefined 18th-century England



Professor Paul Slack FBA is Professor of Early Modern Social History in the University of Oxford.

Anyone who saw him in these years hard at work in the Upper Reading Room of the Bodleian in term-time, or in the two dozen and more provincial record offices he visited in the vacations, knew that he must be engaged on some large enterprise. But there was no prior indication of how substantial an advance on his earlier work it would turn out to be, both in the breadth of its historical vision and in the depth of its scholarship, until the appearance in rapid succession of the two books which made his name and by which he will always be remembered. The new breadth of vision was prompted by an invitation from John Roberts, the General Editor, to write a volume in the recently

planned 'New Oxford History of England', and it produced *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989). The fresh focus for his scholarship became evident when he received a later invitation to give the prestigious Ford Lectures in 1990, and this resulted in *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689–1798* (Oxford, 1991). It was predictable of Paul that his New Oxford History volume was the first of the series to be published, and that *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman* was sent to the press as soon as the last of his lectures had been delivered.

The two books, on which he must have been working simultaneously, were very different in style and content, the first a novel interpretation of a whole society, with particular focus on the two themes in its title (taken from William Blackstone), the second a massive work of dense scholarship on a particular and particularly important topic. (He had hoped to publish



a shorter synopsis alongside the latter, in the shape of the Ford lectures more or less as delivered, but the Press demurred.) *A Polite and Commercial People* deliberately set out 'to emphasize the changes which occurred in an age not invariably associated with change'; and to underline the role as agents of change, not of a small aristocracy, but of 'a broad middle class whose concerns became ever more central to Georgian society and whose priorities determined so much both of debate and action'. Britain was no longer a traditional society in any sense. It was a 'plutocracy' in which 'power was widely diffused, constantly contested, and ever adjusting to new incursions of wealth, often modest wealth'; and it was held together by the commerce and politeness which were essential elements in what Paul called 'the peculiar modernity of the Hanoverian age'. There was nothing very unusual in pointing to new kinds of commerce and consumption when explaining rapid social change in the 18th century; but the stress on the importance of polite

modes of behaviour in regulating and conferring status across a broad social range was novel. It made politeness central to historical understanding of the 18th century for the first time.

The overall effect of the book was therefore to turn attention away from a landed elite and established church towards the middling and commercial classes who had left as indelible a mark on manners and attitudes as on the economy and politics. Paul confessed that the result was ‘a bias perhaps’ (p. xi), and there were reviewers who thought that sections of society above or below his very large middle class got short shrift, but all of them welcomed the book as giving new life to a much neglected period of English history. It contained some nicely quotable phrases in the author’s most assured style, to the effect, for example, that ‘a history of luxury and attitudes to luxury would come very close to being a history of the eighteenth century’ (p. 3). It was also very witty. Until we read Langford’s treatment of them, few of us ever supposed that the intricacies of English politics in the 1750s could be so entertaining. One review concluded that he had set a standard ‘in terms of scholarship, liveliness and sheer historical craftsmanship’ which later New Oxford Histories would find it difficult to match.

Public Life and the Propertied Englishman presented more of a challenge to its audience, a book, one reviewer said, that was ‘wonderful to own but dreadful to read’, because it was chock full of the results of original research undertaken in every corner of England. John Brewer agreed that it deployed ‘a learning that is as formidably deep as it is breathtakingly broad’, and while it might not be an easy read, it was ‘an astonishing achievement, a new anatomy of eighteenth-century England’. Langford’s anatomy was based once again on the broad middle ranks of society, and he concentrated here on the importance of their property, the many forms which it took and its role in giving them political identity and agency, in what was increasingly a propertied rather than a status-based society. In his Preface he was careful to make clear where he differed from the views taken by other historians of the 18th century:

I hope in some measure to have provided a corrective to the view that Georgian politics was overwhelmingly controlled by its aristocracy, as conventionally defined ... and to argue that our perception of eighteenth-century life has been dictated rather too much by the patronage preoccupations of the gentry, by the retrospective appeal of plebeian revolt, and by the long-standing English obsession with party politics.

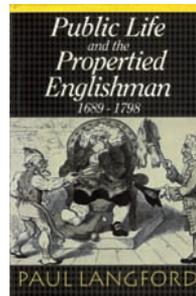
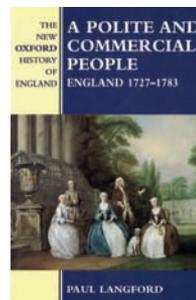
Here he was not only distinguishing his interpretation from the old Namierite paradigm of an 18th century dominated by the power and patronage of its landed aristocracy, which had never had any appeal for him. He was also separating his approach from more recent interpretations in terms of political parties and popular radicalism which were equally far removed from Namier’s model. As he explored how property was defined, contested and defended at every level of the political structure, he had come to realise the special character of the politics created by the growth and diversification of a large and propertied governing class. As he said in his

Preface, his research in the archives, local as well as central, had led him away from ‘high politics’ to an appreciation of ‘politics in its fullest and authentically “highest” sense, as the means by which communities organise themselves for what they perceive to be the public good’.

He was also at pains to explain that he was, as he had always been, ‘a political historian concerned primarily with relationships of power and influence, with the ways in which individuals and groups obtained and exercised authority’. He acknowledged a great debt to social historians (and he might have added economic historians) who had illuminated some of the relationships between property, social class and power which contributed to the peculiar character of Georgian society. But he was never very sympathetically disposed towards their kinds of history, despite his own interest

in property and its social distribution. He did not need to be. He was a political historian through and through, and *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman* had a major impact across the whole field because it was demonstrably authoritative in its own terms. It spoke to different historical constituencies and offered all of them new arguments and a vast amount of new material to ponder. Critics might find fault with its neglect of one or another kind of property, or of the centre as opposed to the localities on which it lavished so much attention, and question whether property was quite so overwhelming a political preoccupation as its author seemed to suppose. It was sometimes underappreciated also because its arguments were too buried in its text. But it was, and remains, undeniably a great book. There was no disputing the fact that it made all those working on the 18th century ‘think differently and think better’, and together with the recent Oxford History it marked ‘a historiographical breakthrough in our understanding of eighteenth-century England’. ■

The full text of the obituary can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/memoirs



The birth of Brazilian Amazonian cultures

Mark Harris looks back to the 17th century to find the origins of societies along the Amazon



Dr Mark Harris is Reader in Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews. He held a British Academy/Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowship in 2015–16.

Amazonia presents the contemporary scholar with challenges. For example, what does it consist of and what are its limits? Seen as a place apart from the rest of the continent of South America, its historical connections with the Andes or the Guianas, to name two neighbouring regions, are hardly examined. Studies on the environment emphasise the positive or the negative: the destructive power of development projects, or the way humans have made the natural world more productive. Anthropologists and geographers provide analyses of one group or another, such as indigenous people fighting mining companies or poor fishermen on the edges of large cities. Rarely are these diverse approaches and different people

brought into the same frame of reference. Perhaps for good reason: new migrants searching for gold do not have the same histories, cultural values or political status as the Kayapó or Munduruku Indians defending their lands from hydroelectric dams. Yet the contemporary Brazilian Amazon is all these people, struggles and more. Indians frequently encounter miners and illegal loggers invading their lands. Few analyses try to explain how these threads come together to make the region a historical place like any other.

My proposal for a British Academy/Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowship sought to meet some of these challenges by going back to the beginning. To return to a time when Indians and Europeans first had to deal with each other, which for the Amazon was the early 17th century. The objective was to address the origins of modern Amazonia, and how this beginning gave rise to resilient social and cultural forms, such as peasantries. At the heart of this project were the survivors of traumatic episodes in the colonial and early national periods (c. 1650–1850), for these individuals had created enduring riverbank societies as the Portuguese established an insecure domination over most of the region. The rivers enabled this colonial control, but they also shaped cultural and material life in a manner that privileged those with regional knowledge and skills. By analogy with Braudel on the Mediterranean, we may think of the region's history and anthropology as those of 'the deep Amazon'. This development unifies the different historical societies, and allows us to understand the re-emergence of indigenous identities and status in the contemporary period. The aim of the fellowship was to conduct research and write a book that would be of interest to an anthropological and historical audience.

Approach and archival sources

In previous work I have used my training as an ethnographer¹ to understand the historical documents I

1. Dr Mark Harris was a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, 1996–99. His monograph *Life on the Amazon: The Anthropology of a Brazilian Peasant Village* was published by the British Academy in 2000. See Mark Harris, 'Life on the Amazon', *British Academy Review* (July–December 2000), 32–5.

was reading. This helped me appreciate imaginatively the participant's point of view, even when I could not access it directly. My research has identified bundles of cultural practices that were transferred from one generation to the next in conditions of turbulence and upheaval. This continuity of knowledge and skills, gifts from the past to the present, was central to survival.

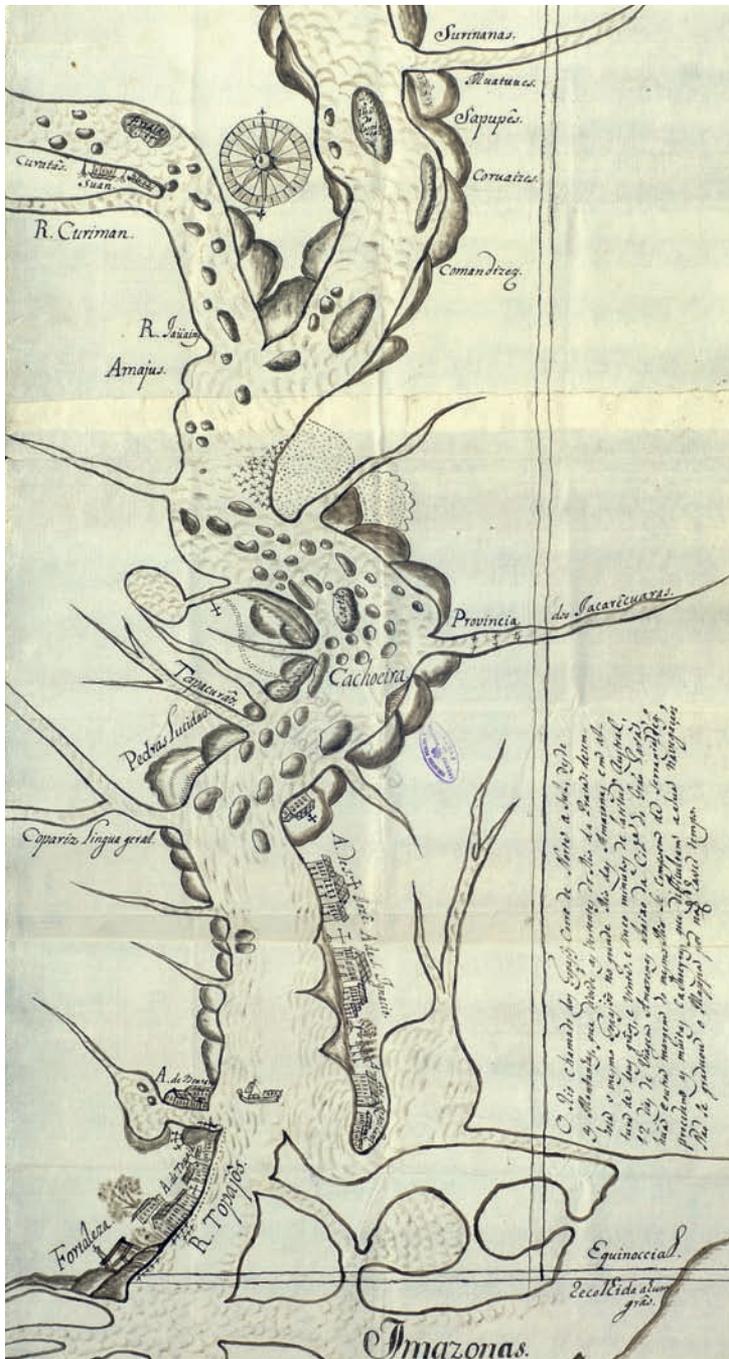
The sources consulted were left by missionaries, Portuguese officials, European traders, church officers, and by visiting scientists and artists. Many of these documents were written in Portuguese, though some are in Latin, Dutch, French, and English. They are spread out

in archives in Brazil, the United States and Europe, and cover various levels of correspondence, administrative, religious, military and commercial. Of most interest to me were letters or reports from writers who worked with Indians face to face. These documents, which occasionally relay Indian phrases or their reasoning for acting in a certain way, provide an invaluable record of the voices from the past, as Carlo Ginzburg says with regards to the value of the inquisition testimonies. Unfortunately, and unlike Spanish America, there are very few documents written by the Indians themselves. The book will cite a number of these sources for the first time, indicating how poorly the history of the Amazon has been investigated.

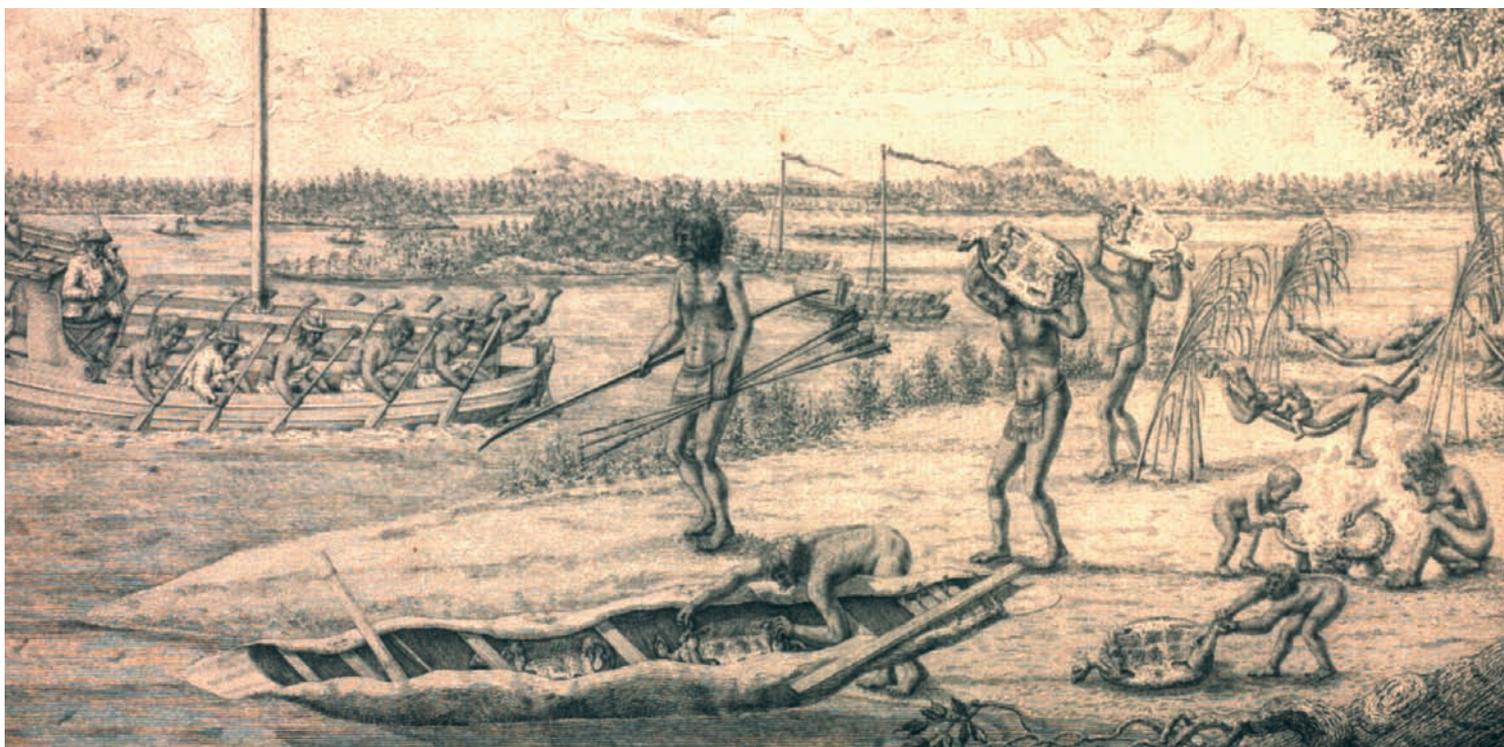
As I worked with these sources, and read about the fears of slavery on behalf of Amerindians, their anger at having their communities broken up and their impoverishment at the hands of the Portuguese, I was made aware of the limitations of applying an anachronistic understanding. Unwittingly, I was interpreting these experiences from the perspective of the present. Somehow I had to undo my view that the individuals identified in the documents knew the future of Portuguese colonial rule. While they felt its immediate force, they were only vaguely aware of the world beyond and what they were up against. Nevertheless, Indians came to participate in the colonial sphere and sought to influence the course of events, which they occasionally did by persuading officials to pursue different policies, or leave them in peace and obtain their Indian slaves elsewhere. For these reasons I focused on parts of their world where they could have a degree of control over such as river-based activities (boat building, navigation and piloting) and livelihood making. These were areas of regional life where Europeans depended on the superior acquaintance of Indians with the environment.

The genesis of new Amazonian riverine societies

Community formation proved to be just as important to building the new world in the Amazon. To explain why, I need to go back to the period just before Europeans came to South America. Archaeological evidence from the Amazon indicates there were many different kinds of societies, some large, living in villages of a few thousand, differentiated into classes of warriors, ritual specialists, secular leaders, farmers, fisher people and so on. These



A 1740s map of the Tapajós, a major tributary of the Amazon.
PHOTO: EVORA.



The importance of the Amazon River and its produce are illustrated in this print showing turtle collecting.

societies received tribute from nearby ones. In return they were offered protection by the ancestors and from enemy attack. These arrangements were likely to have spread out along the main Amazon, up its tributaries, into the forest, over watersheds, and on to the Caribbean islands, and probably to North America, creating a series of regional networks linked by the exchange of precious goods, marriage and war.

What happened to these societies in the Amazon following European arrival, which was minimal at first? Some helped the whites get food, look for riches, drawing each side into new alliances and divisions. Others moved away from further contact, impacting those places in turn. My research found that those Indian societies who made close friends of the whites lost out the quickest, because the pact was with a certain leader and was always precarious. Those who resisted the whites had a longer colonial life. By the late 17th century, there remained few powerful societies along the main Amazon River. Colonial policy was focused on making settlements and obtaining labour, enslaved and free, for domestic service and agriculture. Amazonian plantation farmers did not make enough money to import African labour until the mid 18th century when the state provided subsidies.

Jesuit, Franciscan, Mercedarian and Carmelite missionaries had primary responsibility for contacting Indians and bringing them into new places. The correspondence here is particularly helpful in portraying an alternative view to the one most historians and anthropologists have of this process. Many missions of late 17th century were established on old Indian towns, rather

than new locations. After all, familiar hunting grounds were nearby and fields of anthropogenic soils well established. Did this make them more Indian or colonial? If new ones were set up, the Indians invariably dictated the location, finding the best land for planting, avoiding burial grounds, and so on. In cases where Indians were prepared to leave their up-river homes and move to main river missions, similar demands were made: to have no more attacks from white soldiers looking for slaves, to choose their own leaders, and to have ample provision of tools and cloth. If these were promised, then families of 50 or so people would relocate to a mission and make their livelihoods there, while remaining in contact with former homes. These are the moments I identify as the birth of Amazonian cultures in the modern period.

The main part of the book examines the formation of the villages along the main rivers of the Amazon from the 1650s onwards. Each one had its history of settlement, composed of the forced or voluntary relocation of indigenous groups, and their subsequent relations, which varied between antagonism and support. The durability of these villages depended on the quality of relations, including those to whites, soldiers, missionaries and officials, and to indigenous societies in the neighbouring spaces. Investigating the precise character of these situations has been a major accomplishment of the research. It has meant piecing together documentation from dispersed archives. The chronology of each place has to be understood in the context of Portuguese and missionary policy on contacting Indians. But the practical realities could not be predicted from these policies, and even the best of intentions. For indigenous reactions to contact

with whites depended on specific cultural and historical factors, not to mention recovery from outbreaks of disease. Some fought amongst themselves to gain access to whites, and their goods. Others sought more limited access. These positions often reversed as Indians struggled amongst themselves and with outsiders. A critical element in the fate of family assemblies was the degree of unity a leader could generate. If there was dissent about a course of action, people moved away, which led to division at first, but then reconstitution, if they joined another group. The destruction of riverbank indigenous societies was less a fragmentation than spatial reorganisation. Charting the making of these relations and their values is the core preoccupation of the book. For in the transformation of indigenous societies in the colonial period we have the birth of riverine peasantries, Brazilian Amazonian cultures. Overall, I have sought to reconstruct some of the main regional networks to show that the large-scale and long-term connections provide a framework for the sharing of fates in the future of the Amazon. At the time of writing this piece, a draft of the book is almost complete and will be submitted, with the same title as this project, for consideration to Cambridge University Press in the summer.

Amazonia in a world historical context

The Amazonian Indian historical experience of displacement, disease and slavery shares some of the characteristics of African-American cultures. The title to this project alludes to Sidney Mintz and Richard Price's book on African-American societies, first published in 1976, which argues that the roots of African-American culture lie in the shared efforts of the enslaved to create a new society. Moreover, there was no single culture that enslaved Africans took with them across the Atlantic. The new societies they made in the Americas were 'forged in the fires of enslavement', their shared understandings and collective experiences of facing a white oppressor. To do so they drew on their past memories, skills and adapted them to the new challenges. This action produced a generally open character to their cultures, able to absorb new influences quickly. There were continuities that stretched across the Atlantic, Mintz and Price argue, especially around ritual observances; these need to be understood at a deeper cultural grammar level, or what they call cognitive orientations.

Another feature that bridges these diverse historical experiences across the Americas is their peasant character. This broad concept provides a common analytical framework to compare South Americans and to reflect on the world-historical position of the Amazon. It refers to semi-independent, marginal communities connected to a state and market, which can be composed of ethnically mixed people, some with an indigenous past. They keep a measure of autonomy by maintaining their hold

on land and waterways. This resilient character can be found in many South American countries and beyond. The settlements that were built along the Amazon River in the late 17th century were peasant in the sense their inhabitants became tied to the state through labour obligations and taxes on the sale of goods. They were also ethnically indigenous, kept contact with those from similar ethnicities, worked their own parcels of land and lived in villages with their own kinpeople. Over time this peasant nature remained strong. But apparently their ethnic distinctions as indigenous grew weaker, as much to do with social prejudice against being Indian as losing contact with fellows elsewhere. This story of assimilation

and acculturation is familiar to 20th-century scholars of Brazilian indigenous people, who assumed that the transition of becoming peasant was at the expense of being Indian: a person could not be both at the same time. But in other areas, such as the Andes or western Mexico, being peasant and being Indian were not differentiated.

What I think makes this research compelling is the re-emergence of Indian identities in the present in the Brazil,

though they are not challenging their peasant status. Some of the descendants of the first modern Amazonians are now reviving their indigenous status and seeking alliances with existing indigenous people. That means the numbers of indigenous people are growing. They want to demarcate their own lands and defend them from large development projects, road building, logging, mining, and protect the environment on which their livelihoods depend. This is by far from a uniform process in the Amazon, but it is one that is gaining ground. This phenomenon cannot be understood without an historical perspective and reconstruction of the subterranean networks of ethnic identities. This research contributes to analysing contemporary revitalisation movements not as recent inventions, but as part of a longer history of seeking new prospects and remaking communities in adverse conditions. ■

British Academy/Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowships

British Academy/Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowships offer an opportunity to established scholars to have the time to concentrate on bringing a significant piece of research to completion while freed from their normal academic duties. Time to focus on research is one of the main research funding needs that many academics identify. Award-holders have one year to pursue their own research agenda and prepare work for publication and dissemination. The British Academy is very grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for its continued generous support for seven new Senior Research Fellowships annually.

In the transformation of indigenous societies in the colonial period we have the birth of Brazilian Amazonian cultures.

Genetic research in mestizo nations

Peter Wade reveals the temptation to read too much into genetic data in Latin American countries



Peter Wade is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester. He held a British Academy Wolfson Research Professorship from 2013 to 2016.

Genetic scientists in Latin American countries have long been interested in measuring the amount of biological mixture in their national populations. The basic techniques for calculating how much genetic ancestry a mixed population had inherited from each of two previously separated parental populations were laid out by the German mathematician Felix Bernstein in the 1930s, and were used in Brazil in the early 1940s to work out how much African and European 'blood' had contributed to sample mestizo (mixed) populations. The method was later refined to allow calculations for 'trihybrid' populations, formed from mixtures of European, African and Amerindian ancestries.

Why were these scientists concerned to measure mixture? In the 1940s, Colombian anthropologists considered their work a contribution to 'racial studies', that is a description of human biological diversity based on the idea that this could be conceived in terms of a division into a small number of original or underlying 'races'. Already at that time, the viability of this conceptual apparatus was under fire from scientists who contended that human physical diversity could not be divided up in this simple way — not to mention the opprobrium that was increasingly being heaped on the idea that human races were naturally ordered into a biological, moral and intellectual hierarchy, with white Europeans at the top. Still, while the idea of hierarchy was becoming politically toxic and scientifically unlikely, the basic idea of 'race' as a concept to classify human biological variation remained in play for some decades.

The Colombian anthropologists had a further aim, which was linked to a concept of the nation that had emerged from the mid-19th century, not only in Colombia, but in many other Latin American countries. This concept depicted the nation as a progressive mixture

of three original populations — European, African and indigenous, with the balance varying according to the country in question. The mixture — *mestizaje* in Spanish, *mestiçagem* in Portuguese — was biological and cultural, and was depicted as having been driven from the outset by whiter, dominant males having sexual relations with subordinate indigenous and African women: these were the founding 'fathers' and 'mothers' of the nation. *Mestizaje* was often seen as progressive in nature: by transcending racial difference, it produced a democratic and modern society; some commentators also thought *mestizaje* had a natural tendency towards whiteness, because of the supposed superiority of white 'blood'. This view was counter-intuitive in the context of the European racial science and eugenics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which held that 'miscegenation' was a degenerative process. Some Latin American thinkers agreed and despaired of the prospects for their nations; many

others, wary of condemning their populations to inferiority, qualified theories of degeneration by seeing mixture as potentially constructive. Nevertheless, all elites agreed on the desirability of encouraging European immigration, to introduce valued aptitudes and habits, but also 'superior' breeding stock; elites also

saw nothing contradictory about discriminating against black, indigenous and mestizo individuals, while simultaneously lauding *mestizaje* in abstract terms.

In this frame, the Colombian anthropologists were using studies of blood types among indigenous groups to assess how biologically mixed or 'pure' they were, and how biological mixture squared with cultural assimilation. The nation was moving towards ever greater mixture and modernity, and unassimilated indigenous groups were a problem. On the other hand, indigenous groups were also seen as vulnerable and under threat from *mestizaje*, which would destroy them; in that sense, these studies were 'salvage anthropology', collecting data which were disappearing. These contradictory tendencies obeyed the common co-existence in many Latin American coun-

Mestizaje was seen as progressive: it produced a modern society

tries of ideologies of *mestizaje* with those of *indigenismo*, which lauded the nation's indigenous heritage as a source of authenticity and distinctiveness – although mostly in the past tense, valuing ancient civilisations, while contemporary indigenous populations should be shepherded protectively towards incorporation.

Genomic studies of diversity in Latin America

Fast forward some five or six decades. Genetic science has progressed in leaps and bounds and, in the wake of the Human Genome Project, has become genomic science, characterised by the ability to sequence whole genomes with increasing speed and economy, to produce calculations of ancestral mixture for individuals not just populations, based on the analysis of not just a handful of blood markers, but hundreds and even millions of genetic variants. The rationale for this science is predominantly medical – human health and well-being has always been a central concern of genetics, even in the days of eugenics, and many genetic studies in post-war Latin America had medical aims at their core – and the search is on to locate genetic variants associated with 'complex disorders', such as diabetes, obesity, cardio-vascular disorders, which have mixed genetic and environmental causes. The measurement of degrees of mixture in 'admixed' populations (ones formed by the relatively recent encounter of populations with little previous gene exchange) now has a medical purpose – for example, to facilitate 'admixture mapping' and control for the confounding effects of different degrees of admixture in samples of people with a disorder who are compared with healthy controls.¹

As before, however, genetic data about degrees of mixture can circulate through diverse networks of knowledge and discourse, becoming entangled in ideas about the nation and its past, present and future. Geneticists in Latin America form part of international collaborations and scientific consortia; they publish in English-language scientific journals as active participants in a global scientific endeavour. But some of them also publish in popular science outlets and have things to say about the national character of their countries. Even their purely scientific work often focuses on samples and datasets drawn from their national populations and thus perhaps tacitly but necessarily contains a representation of the nation. And of course their work is often re-worked by science writers in the mainstream media.

In this context, it is relevant that many Latin American countries have, in the last two to three decades, been

undergoing a thorough re-assessment of their national identities, spurred by the so-called 'multicultural turn'. From about 1990, constitutional and other political and legal reforms have, across the region, given unprecedented recognition to indigenous and Afro-descendant minorities, with measures that include varied forms of land rights, special political representation, ethno-educational initiatives and some kinds of affirmative actions. The question of what the nation is, what its history means and where it is heading has been given a lot of air time.

In this context, what do genetic scientists and genetic data have to say about mestizo nations? One early example is the Human Expedition (1988–1993), led by the Institute of Human Genetics of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá.² The research was primarily genetic, medical and also populational, although, in an innovative move, the researchers explored cultural diversity too. Its stated aim was to 'respond to the needs of the indigenous, black and isolated communities of Colombia', but it also proposed going 'on the trail of the hidden America', understood as the country's 'hidden' black and indigenous communities, located in peripheral and isolated regions.

The HE's website recounted how 'the expeditionaries return from their travels with a new vision of the Colombia that is slowly being revealed to us', a vision that it was hoped would 'help to construct a future in which we can live together in reasonable harmony'.³ Like the studies of the 1940s, the HE was partly driven by salvage anthropology, aiming to conserve a biological patrimony that was being 'diluted amid the progressive *mestizaje* of these cultures'. The nation was represented as a mainly mestizo one, with relatively 'undiluted' blackness and indigeneity 'hidden' in isolated peripheries: the substantial indigenous and majority Afro-Colombian populations living in urban areas were indeed hidden or apparently deemed uninteresting from a genetic and cultural point of view.



1. Admixture mapping is based on the idea that some disorders are more common in some of the world's populations than in others. When the genomes of patients and healthy people are compared, if patients show a high level of, say, European ancestry, at a particular place on the genome, this may indicate the location of a genetic variant underlying the disorder under study. The result narrows down the search for relevant genetic variants among the millions present. In controlling for confounding effects of ancestry, researchers match samples of people with the disorder and control samples in terms of ancestry, which allows them to discriminate between genetic variants that are associated with disease and those that are a product of demographic and evolutionary processes.
2. See Eduardo Restrepo, Ernesto Schwartz-Marín, and Roosbelinda Cárdenas, 'Nation and difference in the genetic imagination of Colombia', in *Genomics, Race Mixture and Nation in Latin America*, edited by Peter Wade, Carlos López Beltrán, Eduardo Restrepo and Ricardo Ventura Santos (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), pp. 55–84. See also Peter Wade, *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom: Genomics, multiculturalism, and race in Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).
3. See www.javeriana.edu.co/ins-genetica/investigacion/expedicion-humana

A second more recent example comes from Brazil, where teams of geneticists carried out extensive work measuring degrees of admixture.⁴ Some of this work aimed to show that social categories of colour or race which were used to classify individuals in Brazil – such as white, black, and brown – had little correlation with the amount of African genetic ancestry in individuals' genomes. There was also not much correlation to objective measures of skin tone. These data were used to argue that these social categories were useless – even as rough proxies – for medical research and treatment that needed to know about genetic ancestry: the only sensible approach



was to measure the actual genetic ancestry of each individual. But the data were also used in other ways. In a popular science article titled 'Molecular Portrait of Brazil', a group of geneticists speculated that 'if the many white

Brazilians that have Amerindian and African mitochondrial DNA became aware of this, they would better value the exuberant genetic diversity of our population, and, who knows, they might construct a more just and harmonious society in the twenty-first century'. The genetic data, which uncovered facts about the past and present of the Brazilian nation, were used to make optimistic statements about its future. These statements fitted with ideals of the country as a 'racial democracy' that had, in the mid-1900s, been the official face of the country, but had taken a severe beating after about 1970, without disappearing entirely, at least as an aspiration.

In 2007, some of the geneticists in this team were also asked by BBC Brazil to undertake DNA ancestry tests on nine Afro-Brazilian celebrities: the results indicated that some of them had a lot of European ancestry in their profiles. At the time in Brazil, there were heated debates about the pros and cons of race-based affirmative action policies specifying admissions quotas for black people in some public universities. Those in favour of the policies argued that they would help correct past racial injustice; those against said the quotas would simply reinforce racial divisions, arguing that social injustice should be tackled with colour-blind policies. Critics of the scheme used the BBC results and other genetic research showing that black people in Brazil have substantial amounts of European heritage to argue that there is no 'real' black population in Brazil that could be the beneficiary of

race-based affirmative action policies: all Brazilians are mixed, they said. Even a leading geneticist said that policy-makers should pay heed to genetic realities to guide social policy. The courts and the government, however, backed the quotas, saying that genetics was irrelevant: being black is a social fact not a genetic one. The point is that data about degrees of genetic mixture were being deployed to make statements about and evaluations of the nation, its present state and its future direction.

In the 2000s, as in the 1940s, genetics continues to be entangled with the wider social networks in which it sits: the biological facts of *mestizaje* in Latin America have undoubted medical relevance; but they also exercise a magnetic attraction for thinking about the nation. In this sense, the biological facts uncovered by the geneticists are a slim basis onto which much weightier statements are added by geneticists and others about the character of their *mestizo* nations and the indigenous and black people who form part of them – statements that often threaten to overwhelm the biological basis that apparently supports them. In this respect, it is notable that, after three or four decades of multiculturalist political emphasis on black and indigenous minorities, genetic portraits in both scientific journals and mainstream media are resolutely of *mestizo* nations. This restates the familiar image of *mestizaje* that has long been the key representation of these nations. ■

British Academy Wolfson Professorships

British Academy Wolfson Professorships offer a prestigious opportunity to the most outstanding senior scholars, who already have a significant track record of publication of works of distinction, to have three years to focus on a major piece of research. The offer of uninterrupted concentration on research, freed from normal academic duties, is highly valued and sought after, and is expected to lead to significant outcomes in terms of publication and dissemination. The British Academy gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Wolfson Foundation for the award of four Professorships, which are offered to run over three years each.

A competition in 2017 resulted in the appointment of four new award-holders: Professor Hasok Chang (University of Cambridge) for *Philosophy of Active Scientific Knowledge*; Professor Ian Leigh (Durham University) for *Freedom of Conscience: Emerging Challenges and Future Prospects*; Professor Yaron Matras (University of Manchester) for *Toward a New Epistemology of Urban Multilingualism*; and Dr Paul Seaward (History of Parliament Trust) for *Time, Memory, Space, Culture and Power: Parliament as Cultural Practice, Reformation to Referendum*.

4. See Michael Kent, Ricardo Ventura Santos, and Peter Wade, 'Negotiating imagined genetic communities: unity and diversity in Brazilian science and society', *American Anthropologist*, 116:4 (2014), 1–13. See also Wade, *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom*.

Moving ideas: The British School at Rome, 2009–2017

Christopher Smith reveals how the movement of people and ideas across the centuries has been studied through the work of the BSR



Christopher Smith is Professor of Ancient History at the University of St Andrews, and Director of the British School at Rome (2009–2017). In 2017 he was awarded the Premio 'Cultori di Roma'.

The British School at Rome (BSR) was founded in 1901 to support UK and Commonwealth research on Italy and the western Mediterranean. We host a world-class specialist library of 110,000 volumes, and make a substantial annual investment from our own and British Academy funds to support residencies for over 30 artists and scholars a year, in subjects ranging from antiquity to contemporary art practice, prehistoric archaeology to the post-colonial novel, medieval manuscripts to postmodern architecture, and most stops in between. This makes the BSR Britain's largest and intellectually most broadly based research institute overseas. Since 2009, the BSR has hosted nearly 500 lectures, conferences and exhibitions, and welcomed nearly 5000 residential visitors. BSR staff, research fellows and award-holders have since 2010 produced over 400 publications, of which there are 100 monographs or edited volumes, including several under our own imprint. And we are part of the largest network of foreign academies in any city in the world, as well as the network of British International Research Institutes.

There are so many themes one could choose to illustrate this work, but at the heart of what the BSR does is the facilitation of the meeting of minds and a reflection on how we have discussed the movement of people and ideas may be an appropriate way of illustrating what we do best.

'Orientalising'

How do we trace movement in a world before written records? Over the past 18 months, with the German and

French academies at Rome, and the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, we have been looking at the transmission of ideas from and about the East to the western Mediterranean in the 8th to 6th centuries BC. The culmination was a conference which focused on Italy. The painstaking work of tracing artistic influence in everything from decorative motifs that spread almost virally, to highly wrought gilt silver Ugaritic plates with royal imagery that are found in a handful of Italian tombs, has to be understood within a broader paradigm of the movement of people and the movement of ideas, in which the East was as much conceptual as geographic. Highlights included Stéphane Verger's brilliant reconstruction of the complex decorative schemes in a Gallic chieftain's hoard of bronze vessels, many highly individual reconstructions of Etruscan and Greek motifs, and Corinna Riva's challenging analysis of the inequalities between the parties engaged in exchange activity in the Mediterranean, part of a wider discussion throughout the conference on the mechanisms of the flow of objects, people and ideas.

The beginnings of empire

The last major conference on the transformation of central Italy from 400 to 200 BC was 40 years ago, and the pace of archaeological discovery since then has been rapid. Rome's rise to power was a military and political phenomenon, but its expression was in a flourishing of artistic and architectural innovation.

Two conferences organised this year in collaboration with the University of La Sapienza and with the Rome and Lazio archaeological Superintendencies represent the most significant re-engagement with this theme for many years, and the quantity of new material presented at these events has been truly astonishing. The highlight of the first conference was the first public presentation of a new stretch of the Aqua Appia, constructed in the

4th century BC, and discovered as part of the work on the new Rome underground. Some 18 metres of perfectly preserved aqueduct in ashlar masonry mark the extraordinary capacity of Rome's structural engineers. As we are discovering, it is the fecund combination of skills and ideas, many from the Greek world, but others mediated through Italy, which challenges the idea of a Rome-centred world. Rome's absorptive capacity remains at the heart of any explanation of her success.

This leads us to one of the BSR's own projects at Segni, where a polychrome mosaic of stunning quality (discovered in 2012), and a nymphaeum — delicately decorated with sea shells, and bearing the unique signature of a Greek architect with a Roman name, Q. Mucius — are revealing the richly cosmopolitan culture in 2nd — and 1st-century BC Segni.

Transformations of the Roman world

As the Roman empire expanded, it was transformed by the forces of wealth, its own global reach, and the fragilities of extended power. As a case study in globalisation, the Roman empire is beginning to attract more attention. Our own contributions include the major project at Portus, conducted with the University of Southampton, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the European Research Council. Our Research Professor in Archaeology Simon Keay FBA began the project at the BSR,¹ and he puts its success down to the strength of the collaboration we have been able to build. The outreach is astonishing — 4 million viewers of BBC programmes on Portus, 30,000 participants in a Southampton MOOC, and adverts all over the nearby Fiumicino airport, where 38 million passengers a year see photographs of the evocative ruins, and have increasing opportunities to visit the area.

But the intellectual interest in this extraordinary site arises from its position as the hub of an enormous inter-

national trade network, a network of ports and capital cities. Apart from the archaeological excavations, we have supported restoration and conservation, a detailed GIS model of the lower Tiber Valley, and the first major conference on port epigraphy, to be published in the BSR's series with Cambridge University Press.

The transformations wrought by the economic power that Portus vividly symbolises are visible everywhere — in settlement patterns across the Suburbium of Rome, first revealed by BSR Director John Ward-Perkins in the BSR's South Etruria Survey in the 1950s to 1970s, and in our geophysical and archaeological investigations of the burgeoning urban infrastructures of the Tiber Valley and beyond. Yet, as the exceptional work conducted by my predecessor Andrew Wallace-Hadrill FBA at Herculaneum has shown, much of this population was immigrant. High levels of slavery fuelled the economy and changed society. We also vividly see transformations in our work with Ian Haynes of Newcastle University and the Vatican authorities underneath San Giovanni in Laterano, where Roman houses were destroyed by Septimius Severus' 3rd-century AD cavalry barracks, to be replaced in the early 4th century by Constantine's great basilica church — the change from domestic to military to religion maps changing mechanisms of power and influence.

Our next step will be to join the data from our own surveys with that of the survey by La Sapienza of the Suburbium of Rome and Groningen University's Pontine Region Project, to produce one of the largest archaeological survey databases for the Roman world, with immensely detailed information over the whole of the Roman Campagna.

Endings

Did it all come to an end in AD 410? Sixteen hundred years later, in 2010, scholars from across the world met in conferences organised by the BSR, and the Swiss and German institutes in Rome. This was a case study in the understanding of crisis, of the nature of collapse and the perception of collapse. The reality in Rome in AD 410 was less significant than the impact on those observing from outside, such as Augustine in North Africa, who was inspired to write *The City of God* in response to the disaster. Yet we now know from Portus and Ostia that Roman trade networks continued — the world did not end. But crisis and rupture, as perhaps we are witnessing now, can be cultural as well as economic or political. When the real consequences of the perceived crisis of the Roman empire set in, the result was a catastrophe for Italy and for Europe as a whole. We see it in our survey evidence, in excavations in Rome, in signs of malnutrition in skeletal evidence in areas that had been prosperous, in the collapse of systems of communication. What happened when Rome fell was that people stopped moving.



The impressive late Republican polychrome mosaic at Segni, found in the BSR's excavation which has also located the medieval cathedral. PHOTO: COURTESY OF SEGNI PROJECT.

1. See Simon Keay, 'Scientific Approaches to the Study of Roman Ports', *British Academy Review*, 14 (November 2009), 25–7.

Beginning again

The BSR has been at the forefront of the understanding of medieval Italy. David Whitehouse and Richard Hodges as BSR Directors carried forward Ward-Perkins' interest in the medieval world, practically inventing the field of medieval archaeology with their Italian colleagues. The process whereby Italy begins again after the fall of Rome has been the topic of several events at the BSR. Two sites epitomise this.

We published the last volume of Richard Hodges' excavation at San Vincenzo al Volturno in 2013. Founded in 731, the monastery's location in the central Apennines was highly strategic. In 848, the abbey was damaged by an earthquake, and in 881, the Saracens burned and raided the monastery, and the surviving monks fled to Capua. The monastery was later built on a new site, but whilst the vivid evidence of the earthquake and fire damage has captured attention, the study of the monastic workshops shows exchange and new connections across the Adriatic and into northern Europe being forged as a new economy sparks into life.

Contemporaneously, the church of S. Maria Antiqua at Rome was going through rapid changes, which we can trace in the extraordinary palimpsest of frescoes, recently restored. The subject of an exemplary article by our first



The famous palimpsest wall at the church of S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, described shortly after discovery by the BSR's first Director, and now the subject of a forthcoming publication. PHOTO: CREATIVE COMMONS.

Director, Gordon Rushforth, in the first *Papers of the British School at Rome* (1902), we marked the opening of the restored church with a major conference, also in 2013, in collaboration with the Rome Superintendency and the World Monuments Fund. S. Maria Antiqua's frescoes reveal Rome's use of the cults of eastern saints, some from Syria. The flow of ideas had now resumed, and Rome was once again part of an international world.

Worlds of images

Four successive Assistant Directors at the BSR in my time have studied the way that images track movement of ideas in the early modern world. Stefania Gerevini's work on the use of rock crystal in Byzantine-influenced Venice; Joanna Kostylo's research into the movement of medical ideas through the new medium of print; Tom True's work on the networks of patronage of Renaissance cardinals across Italy; and Sue Russell's work extending from Pietro da Cortona to Herman van Swanevelt, and recently into the Grand Tour – these are all part of the BSR's strong tradition of art historical research.

Apart from their huge contribution to the community at the BSR, the scholarship of all four reflects on the mobility of the visual image, its capacity to move across space and time. Rome is a laboratory for this study, and our access to normally closed parts of Rome has allowed BSR scholars to explore medieval churches, Renaissance villas, baroque palaces and 18th-century collections. We have also been in the Roman sewers, experimented with incense, visited quarries, carved marble and painted frescoes. The deep engagement with materiality that characterises the best art history, the understanding of the mechanisms of making, is visible throughout BSR research, and also in exhibitions, such as the 2017 blockbuster *Sebastiano del Piombo and Michaelangelo*, which involved former BSR award-holder Piers Baker-Bates. There is no doubt that the vital combination of art historians and practising artists is one reason why we have such a strong record of international curatorial practice.

We live in a deeply visual age, but the capacity to look with attention is attenuated by the deluge of imagery. We may not be the first to experience this; the sensory overload of the baroque has been a regular topic of our lectures and conferences. Tracking the shifts of style and technique across the visual arts is not simply a matter of attribution however; it is a cartography of the imaginary, and our most recent work, a conference organised with the Rome Art History Network, with proceedings edited by Tom True, focuses on the movement of artists. To give just one other example, Clare Robertson's acclaimed volume *Rome 1600* (Yale, 2016), written at the BSR, gives a riveting picture of what was at the time perhaps the most international city in the world.

Radical and marginal lives

Nineteenth-century Italy was a place of radicalism and revolution; Garibaldi was the first hero of the print newspaper age, and his exploits were followed across the



'Beyond Borders: Transnational Italy' exhibition, arising from the 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages' project, held at the British School at Rome in October and November 2016. PHOTO: A. PALMIERI.

world – he was an early example of a cult hero, as former BSR award-holder Lucy Riall's biography has shown. Italian radicals were everywhere; Mazzini and Cavour were international figures, and it was an Italian, Panizzi, who built the British Library's famous Reading Room, where Marx wrote.

Italy continued to be a city of radical ideas; futurism, fascism and fashion; cinema and literature; art and the *dolce vita* – all of which have been studied at the BSR. For much of the 20th century Rome exported ideas and people, and Charles Burdett's brilliant AHRC project 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures' culminated in a wonderful exhibition at the BSR (opened by our President, HRH Princess Alexandra). It illustrated the impact of Italian culture globally, and used the Italian situation as a template from which to develop a renewed model for the work of Modern Languages and its applications in the 21st century, which was presented in a lecture at the British Academy in November 2016.

But Italy recently has also been an importer of cultures and, perhaps more controversially, of people. Situated as lightning rod between the north and south Mediterranean, the flow of migrants into Italy, and far too often their death en route, has been the subject of repeated investigation, for instance in David Forgacs' BSR project *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861*,² or in a collaborative project with the British Council on frontiers. For me, some of the most moving have been by our artists, for instance Zed Nelson's prize-winning Channel 4 documentary on Lampedusa, and Paul Gomes' beautiful film of the community of Bangladeshis who scrape a tiny living from selling flowers and trinkets to tourists.

Still moving

The BSR continues to be at the forefront of new ideas and approaches to the world. As these fragments of the wider picture of BSR research and practice show, to study Rome is to study the world, and by bringing artists, architects, writers, historians and archaeologists together, the BSR creates a laboratory of the humanities in which the most challenging questions of our times are reconsidered in the context of deep time and across all disciplines, science, social science, humanities and the arts. It is the movement of people, the coming together of minds, which stimulates and provokes a truly interdisciplinary response, for instance to the critical challenge posed by mobility and its absence, and by the porosity or hardness of borders, physical, cultural and intellectual. As a fundamentally international institution, forging links between the United Kingdom and the world, and inspiring creative research, in one of the world's greatest cities, the BSR has never been more relevant or necessary. ■

British International Research Institutes

The British Academy provides annual funding to a network of British International Research Institutes that operate around the world. They conduct research, collaborate with overseas and UK-based partners, and provide facilities, training and financial, academic and logistical support to researchers. They also run events programmes, held in the UK and overseas. All the research institutes operate as autonomous bodies. A list of the institutes can be found at www.britishacademy.ac.uk/biri.

2. See David Forgacs, 'The "other" in Italy', *British Academy Review*, 16 (October 2010), 27–9.

'It really changed my life completely'

Thirty years of British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships

Five personal accounts of this 'early career' support

In 1983 the British Academy was involved in assessing applications under the University Grants Committee's initiative to introduce more university posts at a junior level (the 'New Blood' scheme). That UGC scheme lasted for three years, 1983–85. In October 1985 the President of the British Academy, Sir Randolph Quirk, wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Sir Keith Joseph, to request funding for a programme of Postdoctoral Fellowships in the humanities and social sciences.

Running since the academic year 1986–87 and with over 1000 awards made to date, the British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme is now the Academy's flagship funding programme for early career researchers, and is one of the most prestigious and sought-after of its type anywhere in the world.

Value of awards made to date:
£175m

The awards encourage the completion of a significant piece of publishable research to help to develop each Fellow's curriculum vitae and improve their prospects of obtaining a permanent post by the end of the Fellowship and build a successful academic career.

And the scheme has been extraordinarily effective in enabling such successful academic careers to be built: 70 per cent of former British Academy Postdoctoral Fellows now hold permanent academic posts, and one in five are now professors.

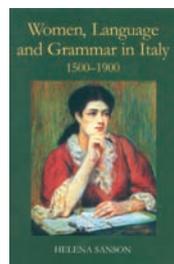
Beside the numbers, there are a host of individual stories of academic lives that have blossomed. Here are just five.

Helena Sanson



Helena Sanson recalls how she discovered that she had been awarded a Postdoctoral Fellowship in 2003.

I was at a moment in my life when I thought that I was not going to have an academic career. It was a little bit more than a year after my viva. I was working for a



company that managed European social funds projects, but I very much wanted to do research again. I remember that, when I got home in the evening, I saw a letter from the British Academy and thought, 'This is going to be a rejection. I am not going to open it'. So I just left it next to the phone and went to have dinner. When I walked past

the telephone again, I thought, 'I will just check the letter and read it', so I opened it. I saw the words 'We are delighted to inform you...' But it was only when I read it twice that I realised that 'We are delighted' means 'You got it!' I called my parents straightaway to let them know. I was very happy. It really changed my life completely.

Dr Sanson is now a Reader in Italian Language, Literature and Culture at the University of Cambridge. In 2011, the British Academy published her monograph on *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy, 1500–1900*; and in 2016 she co-convoked a British Academy Conference on women in the history of linguistics. 'So I have a particular attachment to the British Academy for all the support that I have been given over the years.'

Bonny Hartley



Bonny Hartley, now finishing her first year as a Postdoctoral Fellow, reinforces that perception of the transformative power of the award.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my experience so far. I feel very privileged to be part of such a prestigious scheme, and it has meant a great deal to me to be able to return to the area of research which I am most passionate about. After my PhD, I worked on several fixed-term contracts, and this can often feel like you are moving sideways rather than forward. I am thrilled that, since being awarded a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship, I can work on a significant piece of research, develop vital skills, grow my networks, and get experience teaching at University level – all perfect preparation for a permanent academic position at an excellent institution. I have also been impressed by the excellent training workshops and events laid on by the Academy which not only contribute to giving Postdoctoral Fellows a real edge, but also reinforce the feeling that you are part of a supportive community. One final point: I am expecting my first child in late August, and the British Academy has been very supportive of my plans for maternity leave and flexible working – something which I am extremely grateful for.

Dr Hartley holds her British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Department of Psychology, Social Work & Counselling at the University of Greenwich. Her research project is ‘Masculinity norms and boys’ academic underachievement’.



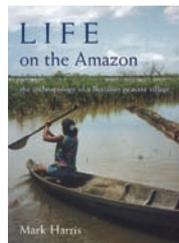
In April 2017, the British Academy held a reception to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme. Professor Catriona Kelly, one of 10 former award holders who have gone on to be elected as Fellows of the British Academy, said: ‘I owe my first job and much of my later success to the award.’

Mark Harris



The opportunity provided by a three-year Postdoctoral Fellowship to conduct a major piece of research is particularly precious, as Mark Harris explains.

A valuable experience of my Postdoctoral Fellowship [awarded in 1996] was being able to explore and experiment with new ideas. I was fortunate to be at Manchester in a department buzzing with innovative approaches to anthropology.



These influences convinced me to follow an intellectual thread to its conclusion, rather than keeping within disciplinary boundaries. The British Academy supported the publication of a monograph that arose from those workings [*Life on the Amazon*, published 2000].

Since the Postdoctoral Fellowship I have extended my anthropological work on Brazil to include historical documentation in diverse archives in Europe and South and North America. I carried out this research because of my earlier confidence and conviction. I am grateful to the British Academy for starting my career, and helping advance it – most recently with British Academy/ Leverhulme Senior Research Fellowship.

Dr Harris is now Reader in Social Anthropology at the University of St Andrews. An article about his Senior Research Fellowship project appears elsewhere in this issue (page 32).



SKYE HOHMANN

Jessie Hohmann



In January 2013, Jessie Hohmann published an article in the *British Academy Review* on 'The true radicalism of the right to housing', arising from her recently completed Postdoctoral Fellowship (2009–2012). Here she reveals how that research work got picked up more widely.

What really bothered me about the right to housing when I started doing my research was that people laughed at me and told me it was not a real human right. So, in the book that arose from my Postdoctoral Fellowship, *The Right to Housing: Law, Concepts, Possibilities* (2013), I tried to provide some justification by looking at space, privacy and identity – the really important things that housing protects. As one consequence of that, in 2015 I was approached by Just Fair, a social-rights charity. Because the UK has signed up to the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, every four years the UK has to report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on how well it is protecting those rights. The UK government had sent in a report to the Committee that had just one line on housing: 'Homelessness acceptances have fallen.' What that means is that the legislation had been tightened, so fewer people were being recognised as homeless, and so fewer people were being protected. The charity asked me to write a report that would show the true picture of English housing policy and how that was failing to measure up to the rights that the UK had committed to. My report was used by charities and civil-society organisations around the time of the 2015 General Election. It then went to the UN, which used some of the language from the report in its concluding observations on the UK. The UN was particularly critical of the impact that austerity policies (such as the bedroom-tax) were having on the most vulnerable and marginalised, including people with disabilities. The levels of street homelessness – rough sleeping – were really criticised on that basis.

Dr Hohmann is now Lecturer in Law at Queen Mary University of London.

Francesca Cornaglia



Francesca Cornaglia, awarded a Postdoctoral Fellowship in 2005, published an article in the *British Academy Review* in June 2008 on 'The Effect of Taxes and Bans on Passive Smoking', demonstrating the application of microeconomics methodologies to the study of human behaviours. Since then, she has extended the methods she developed at that time to a range of other social issues.

I moved into the areas of well-being, and crime, and mental health. We've looked at the relationship between crime and well-being – not for people who are victimised, but for people who live in an area where crime is getting worse. When you consider the cost of crime, victims represent just the tip of the iceberg. The cost to society is much bigger. Crime affects how we conduct our lives: we drive our kids to school instead of letting them walk; we don't go for a walk in the park when there isn't enough light. We change our behaviour because we are scared. This is sometimes an irrational reaction, but it affects our behaviour, our life and our well-being.

I am also working on stress and mental health from an economic perspective. It is about how we can understand recovery from a stressful event by looking at your characteristics and at what happens to you in life, and how we can model it in time. It is a dynamic way of analysing the 'stressors' that hit you. How you react to a stressor and transform it into stress, and how you get back to normality, depend on your personal characteristics and the coping strategy you adopt. We are modelling and testing that using data.

I have also collected data on all bugs in the UK – the movement of spiders, butterflies and ladybirds – for the last 50 years. With the same person who worked on smoking with me, we are now writing a paper on the impact of agricultural production and pollution on the movement of bugs, and the impact that it has on health. So it's looking at how biodiversity is affected by pollution and agricultural production, and how biodiversity affects human health.

When I was a teenager, my dream was to be an ethologist, studying the behaviour of animals. My dad said, 'Francesca, that is really not a profession – just leave it.' As a second best, I am pretty happy with analysing the behaviour of humans from an economics perspective. ■

Dr Cornaglia is now a Reader in Economics at Queen Mary University of London.

Where ants dig up gold: 'India', selfhood and the myths manufacturing a nation

As India seeks to define its identity in its 70th anniversary, *Bihani Sarkar* reveals that it has always been the subject of myth-making



Dr Bihani Sarkar is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the Oriental Institute, University of Oxford.

Ideas of country, nation and state emerge through a process of creating an essence or essences, of manufacturing a single identity and memory for a collectivity, however diverse. The formation of India, like other countries, has been complicit in this process — never more so than now, when legends of heroes from epic yore shape the ideology of divisive Indian politics. A young 'nation' born in 1947, 'India' is even today uncomfortable with the idea of nationhood, and many of the problems it faces — regional spats with the central government for example — arise, in one sense, from this intrinsic discomfort, from a fundamental inability to

square a modern political canvas with its heterogeneous, varied, segmentary past. And so it creates a new myth for itself, the age-old myth of the Kingdom of Rāma projected onto the modern principles of democracy, in an attempt to come to terms with ancient and modern while appealing to sources of authority and claiming parity with them.

But my aim in this piece is not political commentary. It concerns rather Art. When in the current political environment myth seems only to be propaganda, a sinister tool of refashioning nationhood to serve partisan politics, I wish to remind us by looking at ancient stories that what the modern nation-state has used as a mode of power and control was once a tale (*kaṭhā*) about making a homeland (*deśa*) in the absence of a land. Free of a political agenda, it could be beautiful, a dazzling play of the imagination, the ground of our emotional core, a

site where longing and identity were gently given form (*mūrti*). I wish to restore myths of homeland to the status of Art. By looking at grand stories by authors who envisage India as a totality, let us explore how that process of manufacturing an Indian homeland unfolded not within the realm of politics, but within the realm of history, poetry and storytelling — within, that is, the realm of thought, imagination and conversations between people. In searching for a homeland, our storytellers, historians and writers have created wondrous new entities, other 'India's, other myths. I am interested in tales and their creation, and India is a treasure trove of tales, including those about its own self (of country — *deśa*), of narratives entwined with words that, while containing allusions to other stories — as in the ripe prose of the Sanskrit writer Bāṇa — open up into other narratives about selfhood. My interest lies in these intriguing tales and the purposes they serve as figments of fantasy, such as those that children hear from parents and grandparents.

Persians and Greeks

When in 515 BCE Darius the Great, the Persian Emperor, conquered the river Indus — called Sindhu in Sanskrit — and the lands surrounding it, he called it Hindu. The ancient Greeks spelled the name of the river as Indos and referred to everything south of that river as India. And so the mythologising of an Indian space began. To Herodotus, India was the glittering if inchoate land of riches, in which gold-digging ants are to be found, of which everything east of the Indus was composed only of sand. According to him the tax that Indians, in his time the dwellers of the Indus basin, paid Darius was gold dust that those same ants had dug up. Here is ar-

guably our earliest perception of an 'India' (in the case of Herodotus the perception was indirect, based on reports from the Persian world).

What denoted the Indus basin to the Persians, the land of gold dust to Herodotus, became a much broader spatial entity to later interpreters. Megasthenes, a traveller to India, writing in the wake of Alexander's conquest of Punjab and the greater knowledge that that event imparted, considered India to extend right from the Caucasus mountains in Central Asia to the southern seas. His 'India' is a gigantic rhombus. This is a land of plenty, though now no more the autonomous yielder of gold but of the riches yielded by alluvial plains, mountains and the teeming basins of the Indus and the Ganges abounding in people, beasts and crops and watered by bi-annual rains.

The lands east to the town of Palimbothra (Pāṭaliputra), which was visited by Megasthenes during the early Mauryan rule, were called Prasii (Prācyā in Sanskrit). To Megasthenes, Prassii and everything east of the river Beas, the limit of Alexander's travels, had once in a distant time, been conquered by Dionysus, a Hellenisation of an Indian god, who remains obscure. This 'Dionysus' granted the people of those eastern parts knowledge of constructing cities, civic law as well as of storing fruit, wine-making and dance. He was also considered the mythic founder of Pāṭaliputra — a significant appropriation considering that Pāṭaliputra was at the centre of political eminence from 300 BCE, at the time Megasthenes visited India, till the 4th century CE. Subsequently, Megasthenes continues, India had been conquered by Heracles, perhaps a Hellenisation of the Indian Kṛṣṇa, who was revered by the Sourasenoī, people of the Śūrasena kingdom in the Gaṅgā-Yamunā doab, in their cities of Methora (Mathurā) and Kleisobora (Kṛṣṇapura). Herakles imparted martial knowledge as well as knowledge of pearl-fishery to the Indians. Herakles's daughter Pandaia was made queen of the land of Pandaia, perhaps a reference to the southern Pāṇḍya kingdom named as early as in the Aśokan edicts, and so his divine seed spread southwards unifying the great 'continent of Circe' into a single Hellenised realm.

This is perhaps the earliest portrait of an India which combined the North and the South of the country — though implicitly the age-old dichotomy between the two, present even today, still underlies Megasthenes' account. Primarily though, the Greek myth of India is an attempt to contain epic scale — revealed no doubt by the increase of Indo-Greek mer-

cantile contacts at this age — through the notion of conquest by divine kingship: the Greek gods, and the seeds of those gods, are the ones who discovered India and granted political order and shape to it. Their conquest extended to the waters of the southern seas penetrating deeper into what lies in it: pearls, symbols of the luminous, calcified, transportable essence of India that was shipped to Greece. From Darius' gold, the essence of India has now transmuted to these desirable white orbs. In both legends India, in spite of its unending girth and teeming swarms, is something that can be picked up from the bowels of the earth, carried, touched, used, admired.

Kālidāsa

Nature, as the essence of selfhood, as the *mūrti* of a *deśa* physical and spiritual, as order in the divine and on earth, remains at the heart of the great myth of an India even within legends of *deśa* created by Indian writers. To Kālidāsa, one of the greatest of Sanskrit poets, the essence of an India, in his poem the *Meghadūta*, is tied up with cycles of rainfall and the bounty that explodes at their commencement. Unlike the tactile objectivity of the Greek conception, longing and pathos permeate Kālidāsa's essence of the country, an image of the Imagination itself, which always seeks integration, and the natural, spiritual harmony implicit in the universe. The *yakṣa*, the semi-divine being who is the speaker of the poem, pines for his beloved, separated from him in the northern parts of India. But his message — delivered, perhaps in madness, to an insentient monsoon cloud, the *meghadūta*, the cloud-messenger of the title — will never reach her. In this sense the *yakṣa*'s conjuring of a *deśa* becomes a substitute for the journey to be united with love. The sentimental homeland conjured in the message of the *yakṣa* to the cloud is an illusion that attempts, in vain, to mask

the pain of separation (*vipralambha*); but it is also a metaphor for the giant, elemental scale of the mystical union that Kālidāsa envisages true Love to be. At one level, for Kālidāsa and his love-lorn *yakṣa*, India is the territorial trajectory revived by the moisture of the monsoon from the burning heat of the summer, as the nectar of love revives the torment of lovers. But at another level, it forms the thing that divides lovers, the giant something/someone obstructing the gaze, a mysterious overwhelming expansiveness that enters the range of vision of a searching frustrated eye looking for something else. And the gaze of the storyteller has travelled upwards to the sky, and he is looking down, as if from that imagined vantage point



This 1960 Indian stamp depicts the scene from Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* in which the *yakṣa* appeals to the cloud to carry his message of love and pathos to his beloved.

things would become easier to identify, and the mammoth, corpulent India would become more minute, more manageable, so that its contours contain not country but Love, and the earthiness of its landmass grows into projections of the inner richness of Love's emotions and possibilities. *Deśa* becomes a playground for bringing to mind, recollecting, meditating, fantasising, all activities expressed by the root meaning to love *smṛ*. Myth making (granting form, symbol, meaning) again. In one sense the perspective of the cloud parallels the troubled perspective of the historian of an 'India', looking down at the ineffable object so that the act of looking becomes an act of containment and control. Myth making again?

The entire poem seems to be implicitly a conversation about perception as an abstraction, or, one might also say, about seeking knowledge. Images of union ☒ to Kālidāsa the goal of knowledge ☒ are projected onto the Indian landscape, which becomes the verdant image of erotic consummation. Rain is semen. Dried rivers are women yearning for sexual consummation. The cloud makes love to them as he sheds water, says the *yakṣa*, and fills their womb with liquid. The cloud will watch cranes commune with the fragrance of opening lotuses on his journey. Mountains are breasts over which he lingers. The lightning is his wife. From the city of Vidiśā in Madhya Pradesh, he will travel, the *yakṣa* says, to Ujjayini, the great ancient city in central India, and eventually to Kurukṣetra in the northern plains, to Gangotri, the source of the Ganges, further upwards to the Himālayas, then to Śiva's dwelling, Kailāsa and finally, to the legendary land of Alakā, on the slopes of Kailāsa, where his beloved dwells, making love to all these places on his way. 'India' represents an imagined progress towards the corporeal, emotional and divine union that all Love craves, and her physical body, which the *yakṣa* sees as cognate with Nature, is really the larger symbol of that great union, the symbol of one reaching home. At the last resort though this 'India' is a myth created by a mythical being told to a cloud, who will inevitably diminish and disappear. Kālidāsa's 'India' is elusive, untruthful, the ramblings of a love-maddened being. The only truth that Kālidāsa imbeds in the poem is Love, and the rapturous grief at the centre of true love.

Modern perspectives

On to contemporary histories of India. Teleological perspectives ☒ such as those by Burton Stein, Herman Kulke, Dietmar Rothermund, and Romila Thapar ☒ have also been complicit in the construction of the idea of a single nation, for they tell stories of how a single entity began, progressed and culminated in modernity. There have been in recent years many narratives (and I use the term deliberately) of the 'great India'. Adopting the *longue durée* view has become part of the historiography of our many Indias, in spite of the fact that as a singularity India lacks a gravitational force. Some

historical/mythicising strategies have not changed from those discussed above. Grand discussions of an Indian nation, beginning with Herodotus, Megasthenes and even today by serious historians of India, all start with a scansion of geology and ecology. The physicality, the palpable materiality of a *deśa* seem to have always served as points of comfortable entry in the act of creating a story, a *kathā* about an Indian selfhood. Further enabling the modern historians' view of the single great Indian nation is the great burden of perception. Historians of India warn of the baggage of colonial perceptions that have shaped our imaginings: India as chaos, as the land of mystery and religious awakening, of orthodoxy, of ritual, of unchanging essences, of despotic kings and rigidly stratified societies. Cutting across these is the image of India as the great Civilisation. Scholarship has shown that this civilisation, its political lineages and languages interconnected an area stretching from as far away as Syria, where Indo-Aryan words have been found in the records of the ancient Mitanni people, to Cambodia in the east, where impressive Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist temple complexes and inscriptions composed in literary Sanskrit have been recovered. We are told that we are contending with not just a varied geographical landmass, nor only a political unit with shifting outlines, nor indeed a staggering range of languages, ethnicities, religions and scripts, but a sprawling segmented idea, an intersection of concepts that encompassed a wide geographical extent, that arose over time.

The idea of India has also assumed the form of a living personality. Just like people, that personality can be full of contradictions: an expansive enough concept that could accommodate tensions arising through cultural variety and political autonomies. In 19th-century Orientalist perceptions, India evoked on the one hand a seductive perfumed bejewelled 'woman', filled with ancient lore and mysticism that could enrich the modern European drive for civilisational perfection, and on the other, the very heart of darkness, a chaos to be governed, a brutish, pitiable antediluvian Caliban. The very opposite image was held by the indigenous anti-colonialist movement of the late 19th century. It projected the young nation it was fighting to reclaim as the wholesome, ennobling 'Mother India', and further granted mythic persona to her by casting her as a sexually desirable but virginal goddess along the lines of the all-encompassing Goddess or Devī of the classical age to whom heroic sacrifices were made by warriors.

And these days, the persona of India seems to be reiterated by its political contours. As a student of geography studying an outline political map of the subcontinent, along with many others of my generation in Indian schools, I was, in routine introductions to the physical contours of the country, confronted by a human, or humanoid, shape, a visual representation of India as a body. Students still see this same strangely suggestive body.

As a singularity
India lacks a
gravitational force

A crested head crowns it swallowed by the gargantuan breadths of Central Asia; arms embrace on either side the countries and coastlines of Western and South East Asia; a thick trunk tapers off into expanses of sea. Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh form the muscles and sinews of its shoulders. The rhombus of Megasthenes is now a horned monster.

Stories and histories

Let me now end with myself. In spite of being a well-intentioned historian, my language too creates poetic form in the act of recovery (I use the feminine pronoun when speaking of India). Already the boundary between history and story blurs, and I ask myself: am I a historian or am I a storyteller? The same can be asked of all the other storytellers and modern historians we have assessed so far. Paradoxically the methods that scholars learn in all good faith so that they can diminish myth-making nevertheless lead to, in the sober act of recovery and analysis, a construction. Those sources and means and questions that we are required to ask in the name of rigour form the tools and craft putting flesh on those constituent images dancing before our gaze. But perhaps we place too great a distinction these days between story and history. According to the classical Indians, whom I study, *fabula* and history were one and the same: telling something from the past — as also something from philosophy — was poetic speech; and historicising — and telling in general — involved granting form, rhythm and aesthetic expansion to the spectator, conjured through the entertaining ability of a raconteur-artist. Moreover, the word *kathā* carries within itself the sense of natural, informal dialogues, which lingers to some extent in modern vernacular usage. (*Kathā balā* in Bengali means for instance to have a conversation.) So the conception of history, or tale-telling, contains within itself the sense of informality, of everyday conversations containing the germ of truths, but self-proliferating with dynamic magical energy so factual conceptions become, with an organic life force of their own, acts of fashioning, making, manufacture, artistry.

And so one can argue: was there ever an India that historians have made the focus of their gaze? Or were there stories — enchanting, shimmering if chimerical phantasms, in the absence of anything secure — sto-

ries of making nationhood, of granting shape, of limiting, defining, prescribing, of search and discovery of a *deśa* of one's own. In writing histories of ancient India, are we not to some extent doing the same as those early fabulous stories of country — painting portraits, creating shapes from the furnace of facts of what was? Are history and art not bedfellows, even though their relationship is thought to be — at least in the present day — contradictory?

And here are some conclusions that our survey about the process of mythologising about the homeland lead to. There are many different Indias, many different encapsulations. All are fabrications that spiral with their own life-essence into glorious *kathās*, the kindred-image of which is impregnated in themselves as the icon of the majestic country. The roots of self and nation lie in the entanglements between history and storytelling. History shows us that there never has in fact been a stable India. Communities that have peopled the sub-continental landmass have always projected their beliefs onto the surroundings they encountered and the spaces they imagined to lie beyond. It is through a process of interpreting environment, of naming and mythologising space that the idea of an India begins. What is 'India' is in fact an expansive network of systems, patterns, symbols and expressions — the constituents of figurative

formation itself — that various peoples and communities have created, partaken of, and shared in common. The stories of a homeland have always seemed to be an attempt to locate the ideal points that contain her, to cast a network encompassing infinite microcosms. Nevertheless, the perceivers have not been ideologues. They have been potently aware, even in undertaking that attempt of story-telling, of the unstable, illusory nature of their vision embedding in their descriptions of permanence intimations of mistrust, hollowness and the unreliable nature of structures micro- and macrocosmic. And in the year of India's 70th anniversary let us hope that modern political myth-makers are as aware as them of the imaginative dynamism underlying the tales they abuse as static ideology to impose power. ■



Bharat Mata, or 'Mother India', by Abanindranath Tagore (nephew of the poet Rabindranath Tagore), watercolour, 1905.

Heroic Shāktism: The Cult of Durgā in Ancient Indian Kingship, by Bihani Sarkar, is being published in summer 2017 as a British Academy Monograph.

Imagining new worlds: forging 'non-western' International Relations in late colonial India

Martin J. Bayly reveals an Indian dimension to the development of International Relations studies



Dr Martin J. Bayly is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the London School of Economics.

For some time, the academic discipline of International Relations has comforted itself with the notion that its origins lie in the noble quest for peaceful coexistence after the horrors of the First World War. Given an institutional footing here in the United Kingdom with the establishing of the Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth in 1919, and rooted in the longer standing traditions of 'political science' in the United States, International Relations has maintained its European and North American creation myths.

Yet in August 1919, the 13th edition of the leading American journal *American Political Science Review* published an article by the Indian sociologist and political theorist Benoy Kumar Sarkar. The paper, titled 'Hindu Theory of International Relations', drew upon a wealth of Hindu spiritual texts (the *Vedas*) published by Oriental Societies in India, the United States and elsewhere, outlining a doctrine of *mandala* or 'sphere of influence'. Described as underlying the 'Hindu idea of the "balance of power"', he presented the doctrine as pervading multiple texts in the longstanding tradition of Hindu 'speculation on the subject of international relations', including the famed 4th-century BC political writings of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and Kamandaka's *Nitisara*.

Sarkar's work demonstrates that envisaging the 'international' was not just the preserve of imperial powers seeking a new framework for international co-operation



Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar, from the March-April 1917 issue of *The Hindusthane Student*.

as with ideas of 'Greater Britain'.¹ Nor was it solely the product of a rising American great power delineating a strategy for the enacting of its prestige and power in what would become known as the 'American Century'.²

1. Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

2. Stanley Hoffman, 'An American Social Science: International Relations', *Daedalus*, 106:3 (1977), 41-60.

The activity of ‘thinking the international’ was forged in global projects of imperial power and anti-imperial resistance. In India, this reimagining of international order would resonate in the theory and practice of India’s foreign policy long after independence, and in many ways leave a legacy that exists to this day. In this 70th anniversary of India’s independence this story is worth recalling.

Internationalism

Sarkar was not alone in his efforts to propound an Indian vision of international affairs. From its creation in 1910 onwards, the earliest issues of the *American Journal of Race Development* – the forerunner to *Foreign Affairs* – included articles by North American and South Asian scholars alike covering developments in India such as the state of the Indian national congress, the status of the Sikh diaspora in Canada, and Indian attitudes towards the future of world order after the Great War. Indeed, for internationalist thinkers in India, envisaging a post-imperial concept of India’s role in the world carried with it a distinct national and often *political* project.

This movement was global in its impact. In the ‘internationalist moment’ of the inter-war years, a thriving community of political writers and publishers flourished both in India and abroad. Many held connections with ‘nationalist’ papers in America such as *Young India* and *Hindusthane Student*, publishing articles propounding anti-imperial visions of history and futurist visions of pan-Asian solidarity and renewal – ideas that were matched with projects of pan-Islamism, and pan-Africanism elsewhere. Mobility was key in the spread of these ideas as Indian scholars from across the ideological spectrum partook in a vast array of intellectual exchanges, buoyed in no small part by advances in international travel.³ Many embarked on lecture tours in Europe, America, and East Asia, often using such opportunities to check on the progress of disciplinary trends in those countries. Benoy Kumar Sarkar’s exhaustive lecture tour of the United States in March–June 1949 took in no fewer than 25 university and college appearances, as well as numerous meetings with commercial bodies, financiers, chapters of the Federal Reserve, learned societies, and Indian diaspora associations such as the Vedanta Society of Chicago and the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York.⁴ These connections between independence movements in South Asia and receptive communities of solidarity in North America, in particular, seemed to herald new patterns of vibrancy in international thought.

Yet was this merely an intellectual movement? Late-colonial Indian internationalism was part of a global network of philanthropy and capitalist funding of projects that provided new visions of international order as power shifted from declining European powers towards the superpowers of the United States and Soviet Russia. In the North American context, these global networks of scholarly exchange were frequently sustained by funding from organisations including the Carnegie Endowment, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, thus connecting the spread of learned knowledge with the expansion of global capital.⁵ Sarkar’s trips were funded by the Los Angeles-based Watumull Foundation, established by a US-based Sindhi merchant, as well as the New York-based Institute of International Education. These developments showed that ways of thinking about international affairs were becoming linked with now dominant centres of economic and cultural power.

Indian Council on World Affairs

A major shift in this privatisation of policy knowledge revolved around the formation of international affairs think-tanks. India was part of the movement towards the ‘private’ accumulation of useful knowledge to inform the conduct of statecraft with the establishing of the Indian Council on World Affairs (ICWA) in 1943. Modelled on the Royal Institute of International Affairs (‘Chatham House’), and presenting a founding vision of an ‘independent organization in India for the objective study of international affairs’,⁶ the ICWA adopted a more policy-orientated posture. Yet its founding Managing Director, A. Appadorai would become a key discipline builder in Indian international studies, including playing a central role in the establishing of the School of International Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, which remains a leading centre for the study of international affairs in India today.⁷

As the ICWA demonstrates, the purposes of these ventures also crossed the scholarly and administrative divide, with many dividing their writings between academic texts, political advocacy (including on behalf of ‘nationalist’ movements), and policy advice. Appadorai’s advocacy for the ICWA took him to London in 1948 – much to the suspicion of nervous Foreign Office officials, who feared his ‘Communist’ sympathies – where he established links with Chatham House and successfully lobbied the UK government for official publications on UK domestic policy with which to develop the ICWA

3. Benjamin Zachariah, ‘Internationalisms in the Interwar Years: The Travelling of Ideas’, in *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1917–39*, edited by Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah (Delhi: Sage, 2015).

4. Tarak Nath Das, *India in America: The Diary of Professor Benoy Sarkar’s Travels and Lectures in the U.S.A.* (Ann Arbor: Craft Press, 1949).

5. Inderjeet Parmer, *Foundations of the New American Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

6. British Library, London, India Office Records [hereafter ‘IOR’], L/1/1/116, ‘The Indian Council of World Affairs: Constitution, Rules, and Activities’, 1946, p. 38.

7. See for example, A. Appadorai, ‘University Teaching in International Relations in India’, *India Quarterly*, 10:1 (1954), 52–71.

library.⁸ Indeed the ICWA had been founded on the principle of providing useful knowledge for a newly independent India, carrying with it ideas of national renewal and purpose. The first edition of the organisation's journal *India Quarterly* spoke of an 'all pervading sense of helplessness in public life in India ... it appears as though, politically, economically and socially, we are still groping our way to those ideas and institutions which will enable us to be ourselves'.⁹ The edition incorporated papers on 'Approaches to the Indian Constitutional Problem'; 'Stabilization of Currencies and Prices'; and what would become a regular section on 'India and the World'. This policy advice fed into wider projects of post-war global governance too, including within the nascent United Nations organisation. Appadorai was one of many whose scholarly work and insights contributed to intergovernmental organisations such as UNESCO.¹⁰ The close relationship that the ICWA cultivated with administrative power was clear in the 1947 Asian Relations Conference. Sponsored by the Congress Party, the conference comprised nearly 400 delegates, official and unofficial from across Asia, establishing the Asian Relations Organization and laying the foundation for the 1955 Bandung Conference, an international conference of newly independent states, which would later evolve into the 'non-aligned' movement during the Cold War.

'Counter-knowledge'

Whilst these examples locate parts of the scholarly and practical enterprise of international affairs in India in wider 'global histories' and sociologies of knowledge, attention to more learned approaches rooted in universities and their faculty reveals alternative patterns. Here international studies emerged as an exchange and dialogue between European and non-European traditions of political thought. In many cases this included strong voices of dissent and resistance against dominant European forms of knowledge. In such examples, 'political science' was a tool against the powerful, almost as a means of 'counter-knowledge'. The inter-war era was a particularly fertile period for the voicing of South Asian dissent in the field of international thought. Writing in the *Journal of Race Development* on 'The World and the Next War: An Eastern Viewpoint', M.N. Chatterjee turned the corpus of 'western' peace studies, including the work of Nobel Peace Prize recipient Norman Angell, against the supposedly 'civilised' warring European

powers. Referencing his own experience in the Glasgow slums as evidence of the hypocrisy of western moral superiority and the devastating impact of class hierarchies, Chatterjee predicted a future conflict between East and West, as the West faced the inevitable demand from the East for greater justice in international relations.¹¹

In December 1938, the first Indian Political Science Conference was held at Benares University under the auspices of the newly formed Indian Political Science Association (IPSA). Representatives from all but three of the Indian universities were present, and inaugurated the ceremony with the singing of the independence movement song *Bande Matram*, first sung by Rabindranath Tagore at the 1896 session of the India National Congress.¹² Giving the Presidential Address, the Prime Minister of the United Provinces, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, railed against the use of science (including political science) as part of an imperial project. He advocated a new political science in the service of independent India by 'throwing into the Ganges ... many of the text-books on political science ... [to] lay the foundation of a real working basis for political realization.'¹³ The IPSA's journal *The Indian Journal of Political Science* began publishing in 1939, presenting the proceedings of the recent conference and articles on subjects including reform of the League of Nations, and a 'Muslim political theory of rebellion'.

But whilst resistance was an important theme, many sought to merge different traditions, producing surprising patterns of thought that seemed to resonate with, and even feed upon, European approaches to theorising international relations. Taking a less activist position, writing from the Hindu University Benares, on the eve of the Second World War, the Oxford-educated S.V. Puntambekar, for example, reflected on the shared role that mythological forms played in the development of both European and non-European political thought. Delineating 'realistic, idealistic, and utopian lines' of political thought, Puntambekar channelled ideas that resonated with E.H. Carr, one of the most prominent figures of international thought in inter-war Europe. Carr's contemporaneous *The Twenty Years' Crisis* sought to castigate those 'utopians' who believed in the possibility of peaceful coexistence through 'idealistic' institutions such as the League of Nations, instead arguing for a more 'realistic' understanding of international relations that would put 'power' at the centre of calculation. For Puntambekar, this analysis emerged as a

'Political science' was a tool against the powerful, as a means of 'counter-knowledge'.

8. IOR/L/I/1/116.

9. 'Ourselves', *India Quarterly*, 1:1 (1945), 3-5.

10. Appadorai, 'University Teaching'.

11. M.N. Chatterjee, 'The World and the Next War: An Eastern Viewpoint', *Journal of Race Development*, 6:4 (1916), 388-407.

12. Gurmukh Nihal Singh, 'The First Indian Political Science Conference', *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 1:1 (1939), 107-112.

13. G.B. Pant, 'Presidential Address', *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 1:1 (1939), 113-19.

far more expansive discourse on political theory incorporating Christian, Hindu, and Islamic ‘myths’ of political thought and their modern equivalents.¹⁴ Puntambekar thereby provided a more cosmopolitan vision of international political thought.

Yet it was B.K. Sarkar who was perhaps most vocal and most eclectic in his intellectual resources. In his essay on ‘The Futurism of Young Asia’, Sarkar lodged a wide-ranging assault on the ‘race-psychologies’ of ‘Eur-America’, critiquing their denial of history and the unfair treatment of non-Europeans by European thinkers that had repeatedly denigrated the cultural and intellectual achievements of the ‘East’. Turning to the *orientalisme* of the ‘West’, and its emphasis on the ‘immorality, sensuousness, ignorance, and superstition’ of the ‘East’, Sarkar drew a parody of Occidental methodology, interpreting the Iliad as evidence for Europeans as ‘fractious; immoral; licentious; polygamous; in thrall to despotic government and the rule of tyrants’.¹⁵ Here, Sarkar drew upon European history as a means of lodging a protest at the intellectual treatment of India by the ‘orientalists’ of the west.

Conclusion

The richness and vibrancy of international thought in South Asia provides a number of insights for International Relations as a discipline, and for the social sciences as a whole. Attention to international thought in South Asia reveals the global connections of scholarly networks, challenging the notion that the discipline of International Relations disseminated from the ‘west’ to the ‘rest’. Instead, the ‘non-west’ is revealed as a critical site for the constitution of political science and International Relations, encompassing multiple forms of dialogue, contestation, and resistance. This was a discipline that was ‘global’ at birth and South Asian thinkers played an active role in its practices.

Equally important are the forms of knowledge that were generated in these exchanges. Anti-imperial and anti-colonial projects produced new ways of thinking about the purpose of social science. Often this resulted in a more emancipatory vision, one that often questioned the presumptions of race and hierarchy that were embedded within notions of ‘great powers’ and their authority to rule. This attitude also led to a questioning of the centrality of European histories. Long before the



The first Indian Political Science Conference, held at Benares Hindu University, on 22–24 December 1938.

post-colonial moment in the arts and social sciences in the west, intellectuals in South Asia were therefore questioning the ‘hegemonic’ knowledge of the west. In these examples, social science and International Relations in particular was a tool of resistance, even emancipation, against the intellectual dominance of imperial and post-imperial states.

Yet these projects also interacted with powerful forms of capital and state power. The dependency upon the funding streams of philanthropic organisations, as well as the tendency to mimic learned societies in the west, and draw upon their knowledge resources created tensions between emancipatory visions of international order, and the regeneration of pre-existing hierarchies. The need for ‘useful knowledge’ to inform Indian statecraft in post-independence India led to the prioritising of policy relevant scholarship at the expense of the cultivating of distinctly South Asian contributions to political and international thought. On the one hand this explains the curious absence of South Asian international thought in the disciplinary histories of International Relations (including those written by South Asian scholars). On the other hand, it makes the recovery of these ideas all the more important, to widen the geographic and intellectual scope of International Relations and the social sciences as a whole.

Finally, as this history shows, when international politics transitions to new centres of political, economic and cultural power, so the ideas that inform international politics transition too. As diplomats and politicians come to terms with the shift from post-Cold War US supremacy, prevailing ideas of international order may once more be up for debate. ■

14. S.V. Puntambekar, ‘The Role of Myths in the Development of Political Thought’, *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 1:2 (1939), 121–32.

15. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Futurism of Young Asia and other Essays on the Relations Between the East and the West* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1922), 4–6.

Neural plasticity: don't fall for the hype

Mirko Farina warns us not to get over-excited by claims for brain improvement



Dr Mirko Farina is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at King's College, London.

'Neural plasticity' is by no means a recent discovery: evidence about it has been accumulating over the last century. So it isn't surprising that neural plasticity has long been viewed (in both psychology and neuroscience) as an important property of the brain at all levels and across all species.

Neural plasticity (also known as brain plasticity or neuroplasticity) is the capacity of the brain to compensate for injury and adjust its activity in response to new situations or changes in behaviour or environment.¹ This is achieved through the promotion of brain reorganisation. This capacity is not necessarily restricted to infancy, and is typically retained by the individual throughout the lifespan.²

The changes occurring in the brain take place mostly at the level of the connections between neurons. New connections can form or old ones can be rewired so that the overall organisation of existing synaptic connections can change. This process typically leads to structural (anatomical/morphological), functional (physiological) and neurochemical changes in our brains, but also sometimes to the generation of new neurons. This latter phenomenon is called neurogenesis, and it has been proved to exist across all mammalian species.

Recent neuroscientific research has confirmed the central role of neural plasticity in human cognition,

and highlighted how training and intensive practice can cause such changes (structural and functional). This can be illustrated through the following case studies.

Case studies

In a widely discussed study, Eleanor Maguire and colleagues³ showed that extensive training in spatial navigation can result in increased size of the hippocampus — a seahorse-shaped structure located next to the midbrain which, among other things, is involved in the consolidation of information from short-term to long-term memory, and in the representation of a person's current location and heading, or spatial cognition. In Maguire's research the subjects tested were all London taxi drivers, who varied significantly in the number of years of experience. London streets are intricate and highly complex, and cab driving requires a considerable amount of 'improvisation': the cab driver has to find short cuts, needs to avoid traffic jams, and must be able to change routes on the fly as a function of the day of the week. Cab driving in complex cities such as London thus necessitates incessant retrieval of appropriate episodic memories and rather complex, strategic driving decisions.

To find out whether or not extensive cab driving could cause structural changes in the brain, Maguire *et al.* performed magnetic resonance on the brains of London cab drivers and then analysed the volume of their hippocampi. Researchers found out that relative to

1. Neural plasticity has been defined as 'the changes in neural organization which may account for various forms of behavioural modifiability, either short-lasting or enduring, including maturation, adaptation to a mutable environment, specific and unspecific kinds of learning, and compensatory adjustments in response to functional losses from aging or brain damage'. G. Berlucchi and H. Buchtel, 'Neuronal plasticity: historical roots and evolution of meaning', *Experimental Brain Research*, 192 (2009), 307–319.

2. See for example M. Farina, 'Three approaches to human cognitive development: Neo-nativism, neuroconstructivism, and dynamic enskillment', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 67:2 (2016), 617–641.

3. E.A. Maguire, D.G. Gadian, I.S. Johnsrude, C.D. Good, J. Ashburner, R.S. Frackowiak and C.D. Frith, 'Navigation-related structural change in the hippocampi of taxi drivers', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 97 (2000), 4398–4403. E.A. Maguire, K. Woollett and H.J. Spiers, 'London taxi drivers and bus drivers: a structural MRI and neuropsychological analysis', *Hippocampus*, 16 (2006), 1091–1101.



the hippocampi of matched control subjects (including bus drivers who drive the same number of hours but on rigid routes), the posterior portion of hippocampi of the cab drivers showed a substantial enlargement. This structural difference was likely related to cab driving because it was proportional with the number of years of experience as a taxi driver. This study is interesting because it shows how the overlap of and integration between long-term memory and spatial cognition, in response to environmental demands, can lead to local plastic changes in the structure of an adult human brain.

Several other studies also report evidence of functional cortical changes following perceptual deficits and/or training. One striking example in this context is the case of sensory substitution.⁴ The term sensory substitution refers to the use of a sensory modality to supply environmental information normally gathered by another sense. Sensory substitution devices thus provide through an unusual sensory modality (the substituting modality) access to items of the world that are generally experienced through another sensory channel (the substituted modality). The principles of sensory substitution have been aptly formulated by Bach-y-Rita, who — among the first neurologists to recognise the enormous potential for recovery that brain plasticity offered to patients suffering from losses caused by brain damage — conducted experiments with the potential of the skin as a medium for transmitting pictorial material. Bach-y-Rita's seminal endeavours have led to the production of

two categories of systems. Visual-to-tactile substitution devices that convert images into tactile stimuli, and visual-to-auditory substitution systems that transform images into sounds. Recent research on sensory substitution suggested that these systems work by exploiting the cross-modal plasticity of the sensory cortex; the ability of the sensory cortex to pick up some types of information about the external environment irrespective of the nature of the sensory inputs it is processing. Specifically, these studies have shown that blind people, after consistent training, can substantially rewire their occipital lobe, normally recruited for vision, to perceive objects via other sensory modalities (touch or hearing).

Analogously, it has been shown that stroke victims can occasionally regain mobility in their paralysed limbs through intensive physiotherapy that compels them to train the paralysed arm by constraining the mobile one.

The hype

All these case studies — examples of serious and grounded scientific practice — demonstrate that neural plasticity is central to contemporary neuroscientific research. They also show the importance of neural plasticity for the development of some of our unique cognitive functions.

However, the study of neural plasticity has also inspired a plethora of popular science books⁵ that have transformed the notion of neural plasticity into a panacea to solve all sort of difficulties and problems that humans can encounter throughout their lives. These

4. See M. Farina, 'Neither touch nor vision: sensory substitution as artificial synaesthesia?', *Biology & Philosophy*, 28 (2013), 639–655. M. Auvray and M. Farina, 'Patrolling the boundaries of synaesthesia: a critical appraisal of transient and artificially-acquired forms of synaesthetic experiences', in *Synaesthesia: Philosophical and psychological perspectives*, edited by O. Deroy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in press). J. Kiverstein and M. Farina, 'Do sensory substitution extend the conscious mind?', in *Consciousness in Interaction: The role of the natural and social context in shaping consciousness*, edited by F. Paglieri (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012), pp. 19–40. J. Kiverstein, M. Farina and A. Clark, 'Substituting the Senses', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*, edited by M. Matthen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 659–78.
5. For example, S. Helmstetter, *The Power of Neuroplasticity* (2014); R. Hanson, *Hardwiring Happiness: The practical science of reshaping your brain – and your life* (2013).

books hype plasticity, and claim to teach their readers methods to rewire the brain to change attitudes, improve health and fitness, reach personal goals, overcome negativity, increase mental sharpness and clarity, and have even promised to super-charge thinking through a set of strategies that help harness mental powers.⁶

Even acclaimed researchers have sometimes indulged in the hype. For instance, in his most recent book, Michael Merzenich pitched a particular subscription-based brain training programme which he argues can teach a number of 'scientific methods' to rejuvenate, remodel, and reshape the brain at any age.⁷

Studies of this type have led to the development of a fast-growing brain training industry, which basically aims to make profits out people's fears and hopes. Particularly popular in past years was the *Mozart effect* – presented in a set of studies and books⁸ that led parents to play musical pieces to their infants in the hope that this would induce improvements on their mental development and spatio-temporal reasoning. Other examples of popular 'brain training' apps include *Luminosity*, *Peak*, *Elevate*, *Fit Brains Training*, and *Cognito*, which all claim to improve cognitive and perceptual skills through reiterated training, thereby allowing their users to perform better – for example, at school or at work.

How to avoid the hype

At this point a number of questions naturally arise. When studying neural plasticity, how can we avoid the rampant 'neuroessentialism' – the invoking of evidence from neuroscience to justify claims at the psychological level⁹ – that has become so dominant in contemporary popular science? And what sort of evidence is required to make scientifically valid claims about our brains and their plastic nature? These are difficult methodological and conceptual issues in both neuroscience and philosophy of science. I certainly don't have all the answers to these questions, but can put forward a few basic suggestions that might be helpful for any plasticity enthusiast willing to explore these issues further.

We certainly require serious scientific studies (like Maguire's), which make modest, testable, precise and accurate claims about the nature and scope of neural plasticity. When studying neural plasticity, and when relevant, we also need clearly to highlight the mechanisms through which it happens – e.g., homosynaptic mechanisms, which involve changes in the strength of a synapse that are brought about by its own activity; heterosynaptic mechanisms, which involve changes in the strength of a synapse brought about by activity in another pathway; biochemical (molecular) mechanisms underlying protein

synthesis – as well as the level to which it applies (individual, species).

When talking about the power of neural plasticity, we also require more systematic and careful analysis of the different kinds of neural plasticity which are normally invoked to account for such diverse phenomena as neuronal changes, the growth of new neurons, or improvements in specific cognitive abilities after rehabilitation or training. Most importantly, we must be extremely careful in avoiding the empty usage of scientific terms from neuroscience to justify claims at the psychological level. So we must avoid referring to the general notion of neural plasticity to explain all sort of changes (neural, cognitive, psychological, etc.) that take place in our brains.

But even if we do all this, and manage to avoid the hype, the study of neural plasticity on its own is unlikely to bring any revolutionary insights into the study of human cognitive development or evolution. This is because these phenomena are too complex to be understood by studying just neural plasticity. Thus, an important way of improving and enriching our explanations of complex phenomena in which neural plasticity may be directly involved is to identify the many different forms of plasticity (besides neural plasticity) that may actively contribute (jointly or independently of it) to such phenomena. So, when studying neural plasticity it is crucial to emphasise that this is only one of the many varieties of plasticity observed in humans (along with, for instance, morphological, physiological, or behavioural plasticity), and that the study of neural plasticity can benefit from being placed in context.

The fact that the adult brain is much more malleable or flexible than previously thought is certainly an important take-home message and perhaps even a liberating one. A richer, deeper, and more encompassing understanding of neural plasticity surely promises the possibility of a better world where people can recover from physical and emotional damage to their brains, and maybe even augment their capacities so as to allow for greater productivity, intelligence, or socialisation. But it is paramount, when looking at this phenomenon, to pay attention to the actual details of the research and not just extrapolate vaguely about 'rewiring' and its potential amazing applications. It is also important to learn the specific conditions that bolster neuroplastic changes in our brains, and so it is crucial not to inflate its potential significance into excessive realms of nonsense. Neural plasticity is certainly a ubiquitous phenomenon but is no panacea to all our problems. Don't fall for the neural plasticity hype! ■

6. M. Feldenkrais and M. Kimmey, *The Potent Self: A study of spontaneity and compulsion* (1992).

7. M.M. Merzenich, *Soft-wired: How the new science of brain plasticity can change your life* (2013). The programme is Brain IQ (www.brainhq.com).

8. For example, D. Campbell, *The Mozart Effect: Tapping the power of music to heal the body, strengthen the mind, and unlock the creative spirit* (1997).

9. <https://mindhacks.com/2010/06/07/neuroplasticity-is-a-dirty-word/>

The Victorians and French novels

Juliette Atkinson introduces us to the Victorians' conflicted relationship with the French novel



Dr Juliette Atkinson is Lecturer in English at University College London. She was a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow 2009–2012.

In March 1844, Elizabeth Barrett wrote to her friend Mary Russell Mitford:

I meant to send you *Zizine* & I have sent instead *Moustache*, as representative of Paul de Kock. And now it has come into my mind, that there is a good deal of offensive matter in this *Moustache*, & that after you have read it, you will do well to throw it into the fire.¹

In Charlotte Yonge's novel *The Young Step-Mother* (1857), Albinia Kendal tends to her husband's three difficult children. She is appalled to see her stepson Gilbert smuggle beneath his pillow a translation of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (1844), 'one of the worst and most fascinating of Dumas' romances'. Gilbert, pleading to hear what happens to d'Artagnan before the book is snatched away, asks Albinia if she knows what it is about. She answers:

Yes, I do. My brother got it by some mistake among some French books. He read some of the droll unobjectionable parts to my sister and me, but the rest was so bad, that he threw it into the fire.²

LITERATURE AT A STAND.



"I SAY, JIM, VICH DO YOU GIVE THE PRUFFERANCE? EUGENE SHUE OR HALEXANDER DUMAS?"

This March 1847 *Punch* cartoon by Thackeray depicts two hackney carriage drivers discussing the rival merits of the French authors Alexandre Dumas and Eugène Sue.

1. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, [13] March 1844.

2. [Charlotte Yonge], 'The Young Step-Mother. Chapter VII', in *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger Members of the English Church*, 13 (January 1857).

The same year, the *Saturday Review* shared its misgivings:

When the teaching contained in the light literature of France, during the last thirty or forty years, is looked at by itself — apart, that is, from the ‘thrilling interest’ of the plot — we feel amazed at the forbearance we displayed in not throwing the novels of a Sand or a Sue into the fire.³

A final incident. In 1860, 23-year-old Algernon Charles Swinburne went to stay with the Trevelyans at Wallington Hall. One day, his biographer relates,

Sir Walter Trevelyan came into the drawing-room and found a French novel lying on the table. He asked how it got there, and was told that Algernon had brought it as a gift. It was nothing worse, I believe, than a volume of the *Comédie humaine*, but he was a rash man who in those days recommended a French book to an English lady. Even if she made no objection, her male relations were sure to take umbrage. Sir Walter Trevelyan threw the book on the fire with a very rough remark, and Swinburne marched with great dignity out of the house.⁴

Such stories might lead one to wonder whether any French novels escaped conflagration in Victorian England, but each one involves more than the mere

censure of improper literature. Barrett — who memorably described French novels as ‘immortal improprieties’ — jokingly presents book-burning as a theatrical act of cleansing that does not impede the enjoyment of cheeky novels.⁵ Paul de Kock’s indelicacies are sufficiently substantial for her to worry about shocking Mitford, but negligible enough to have slipped her mind; she has read the ‘offensive matter’ herself, and expects her friend to. The incineration of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* is equally problematic. Beyond the feeble excuse that Dumas’s novel had slipped

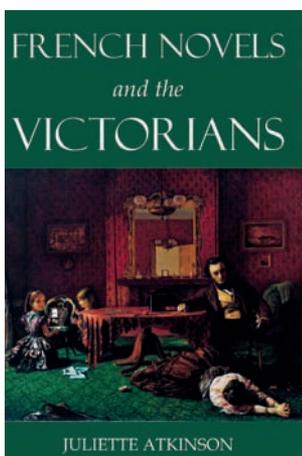
into a batch of books by ‘mistake’ (and what are these unnamed French books?), Albinia’s brother would have had to read a good deal of the novel in order to identify the ‘unobjectionable parts’. The auto-da-fé again smacks of performance, a cautionary tale being acted out for two impressionable sisters. Like Yonge, the *Saturday Review* raises the possibility of separating the excitement of French plots from their moral dangers, and the ‘thrilling’ nature of the novels somewhat lessens the hardship involved in the reader’s ‘forbearance’. The critic implies that the novels the public (including himself) had been placidly consuming for almost half a century had lulled them into forgetting that they were dangerous. The wake-up call did not come from amongst their ranks but, as he goes on to explain, from the French critic Eugène Poitou, who in vividly painting the horrors of French novels had brought to the Victorian public’s attention the perils they had narrowly escaped. The critic compares the resulting discomfort to that of ‘a man who discovers that he has been feeding for years at his favourite *restaurant*, not on ordinary healthy viands, but on cats, rats, and toads, ugly and venomous’. What was more upsetting: to discover that one had been eating

rat, or that one had enjoyed it? As for the fate meeting Swinburne’s gift of a Balzac novel (an anecdote that has been repeated in different forms), the husband’s outburst appears to have as much to do with control over his wife’s reading habits and a reaction to the connotations surrounding French novels in general than with the book itself. It seems

highly unlikely that this would have been the first encounter that Lady Paulina Trevelyan, friend of the Pre-Raphaelites and Brownings, would have had with French fiction. Gosse’s account is, furthermore, laced with condescension regarding the moral preoccupations of his forebears: to him, Balzac is of course harmless and the husband’s overreaction a specimen of antiquated Victorianism.

These responses — denouncing French novels for the benefit of others while consuming them oneself, engaging in theatrical gestures of vilification that already smacked of cliché, making distinctions between literary and moral values and using contemporary attacks on French novels as a means of displaying one’s greater sophistication — are all central to the place of French fiction in Victorian England. The *London Review* stated in 1862 that, ‘By a French novel, we understand something more than a novel written in French’.⁶ It is the cultural impact and significance of the ‘French novel’ that my book, *French Novels and the Victorians*, sets out to explore. ■

‘By a French novel, we understand something more than a novel written in French.’



3. ‘French Literature’, *Saturday Review*, 4:92 (1 August 1857).

4. Edmund Gosse, *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London: Macmillan, 1917), 71–72.

5. Elizabeth Barrett Browning to John Kenyon, 1 May [1848].

6. ‘Balzac’, *London Review*, 5:115 (13 September 1862).

Looking back at 'The next thirty years'

Stefan Collini revisits Lord Bryce's Presidential Address of 1917



Stefan Collini is Emeritus Professor of Intellectual History and English Literature at the University of Cambridge. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2000.

Does any work remain to be done in the disciplines covered by the British Academy? 'Or can we foresee a time when much of our material will have been exhausted?' This disquieting question was posed by Lord Bryce in his final Presidential Address to the Academy a century ago in July 1917.¹ Bryce acknowledged that the fields covered by the Royal Society could confidently anticipate making fresh discoveries and recording new findings, but he wondered aloud whether there might not be whole domains of scholarship (in what it was not yet common to call 'the humanities') where no new sources would be unearthed and no fresh interpretations would be needed. There is, he conceded,

'a *prima facie* case for those who suggest that a time may come when, in some branches at least of the Academy's work, there will be no more work to be done' (p. 6). In order to consider, and ultimately to reject, this possibility, Bryce undertook a quite remarkable task, one it is impossible to imagine any of his successors attempting a hundred years later. He devoted his final Presidential Address to a survey of the state of knowledge in *all of the disciplines represented by the Academy*.

To bring out the full, mind-boggling ambitiousness of this undertaking, it may be worth emphasising what Bryce did *not* do. He did not confine himself to generalities; he did not rely on potted summaries by others; he did not collate reports from the British Academy's subject-based 'Sections'; he did not issue a press release about the importance of the work the Academy had done; he did not list books published by Fellows or prizes won. Rather, he, in his own voice and on the basis (apparently) of his own knowledge, provided detailed analyses

THE NEXT THIRTY YEARS

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BY

THE RIGHT HON. VISCOUNT BRYCE, O.M.

Delivered at the Annual General Meeting, July 19, 1917

THE time has now arrived when I must quit the presidential chair, which indeed I would not, but for your friendly pressure, have continued to occupy so long. It has proved impossible to carry through some of the things which four years ago I had hoped to accomplish, but you are aware of the difficulties with which the Academy has to contend. One is the want of funds; another the want of a local habitation in which we can place our books and meet at times most convenient to ourselves. Grateful as we are to the Royal Society and the other learned Societies which allow the Council from time to time to assemble in their apartments, we often feel ourselves in the position of him who is called in the *Iliad* an ἀρίπυρος περιπόρευς, and sigh over our wandering homelessness, trusting that the State will before long lodge us as it has lodged those elder sisters. A still greater obstacle to the prosecution of our work, when we compare ourselves with the Academies that sit in Paris, Rome, Berlin, or Petrograd, is the distance from London at which a large majority of the Fellows dwell. This makes it hard to secure a good attendance at meetings, or an adequate discussion of papers read, or the formation of Sectional Committees representing the full strength of a section for some special topic with which, as it may happen, there are only five or six members of a section qualified to deal. Some of these difficulties have made themselves more severely felt in war time. We may hope that with the return of peace, which can hardly be long delayed, they will diminish.

Among the enjoyments which have accompanied the labours of the Chair, one has been the listening to many admirable papers, some by our Fellows, some by persons, eminent in their several walks, whom we have invited to address us. The standard maintained has, I venture to believe, been as high as that of any learned body in any other country. Nor must I forget to refer to the remarkable

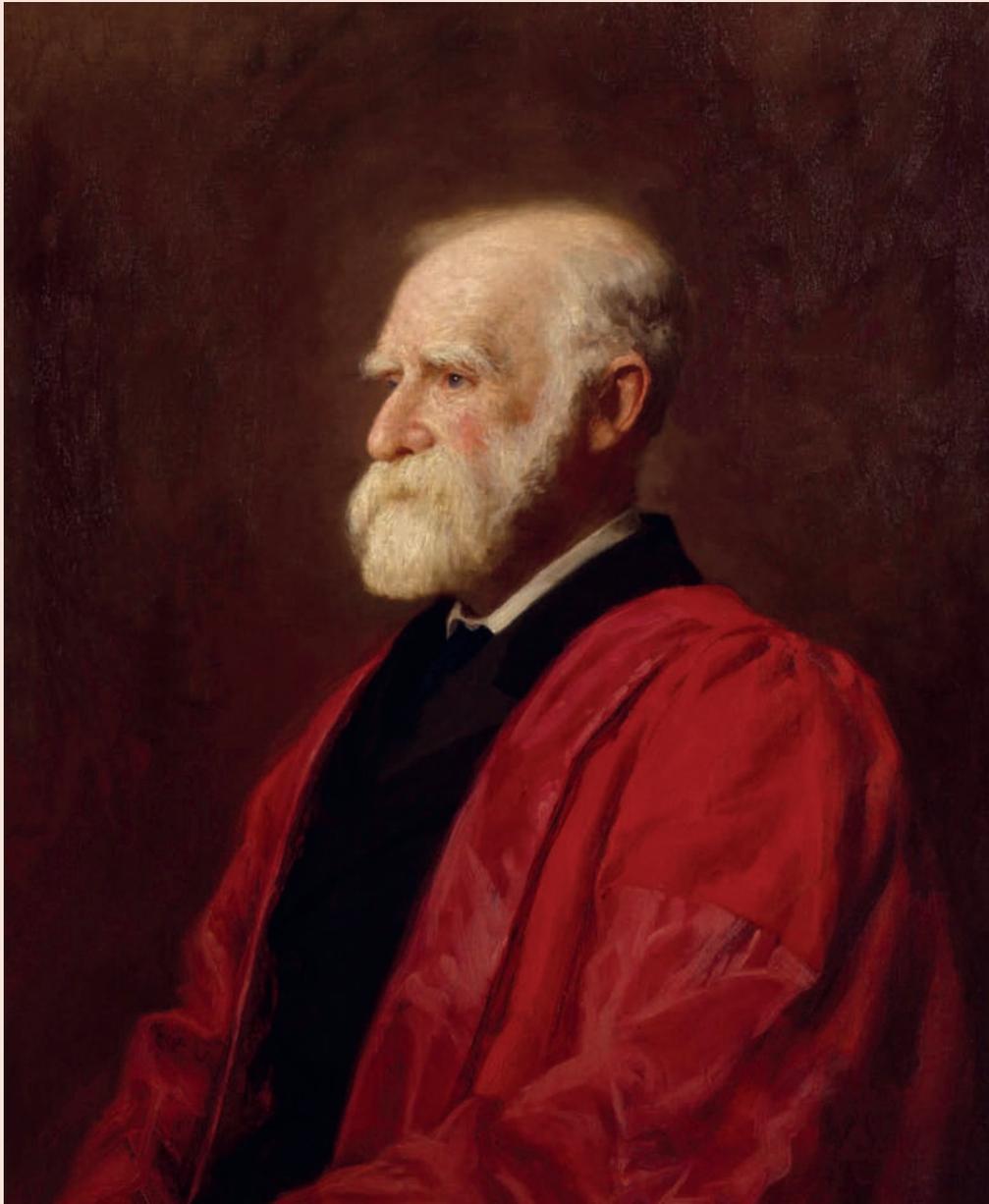
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of the state of scholarly understanding in the various fields, not confining himself merely to English-language publications. In the words of his biographer, H.A.L. Fisher (who became President of the Academy in 1928 and was himself no narrow specialist), Bryce's address was 'an extraordinary manifestation of the width of his own knowledge and interests'.²

James Bryce (created Viscount Bryce of Dechmont in 1914) had already enjoyed several successful careers before he succeeded Sir Adolphus Ward as President of the Academy in 1913. Born in 1838 of Scottish and Ulster

1. The Right Hon Viscount Bryce, OM, 'The next thirty years', Presidential Address delivered at the AGM, 19 July 1917, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1916-17, pp. 1-31. (Hereafter page references to this Address are given in the text.) Bryce's Presidential Address can be read in full via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/presidential-addresses

2. H.A.L. Fisher, *James Bryce, Viscount Bryce of Dechmont O.M.*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1927), p. 278.



James Bryce, painted by Ernest Moore, 1907. This portrait hangs on the walls of the British Academy, on loan from the National Portrait Gallery.

descent, educated at Glasgow and Oxford, he had made his mark early with his remarkably precocious study of *The Holy Roman Empire*, a synoptic account that ranged from the 5th century to the 19th, published when he was only 26. Thereafter, he mixed academic life with various forms of public service. From 1870 to 1893 he was Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford, but from 1880 to 1906 he was also a Liberal MP, rising to be Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1905-6. He wrote on a wide variety of subjects, he supported numerous liberal causes, and he was an indefatigable traveller. A series of strenuous journeys across the United States underwrote his three-volume *The American Commonwealth*, published in 1888, which long remained the classic account of the working of American political institutions. It was partly on the basis of the high regard that this book won for him in the USA that he was appointed British Ambassador to Washington in 1907, a post he held till 1913.

Increasing age seems not to have diminished Bryce's zest for gathering first-hand information. When preparing his large-scale survey, *Modern Democracies*, eventually published in two volumes in 1921 (when its author was 83), he followed what Fisher described as the method used in *The American Commonwealth*, 'that of personal observation coupled with the systematic interrogation of trustworthy witnesses':

He consults 'impartially-minded French friends'. 'An eminent and fair-minded Swiss citizen' gives him information on one point. 'A careful and experienced observer' writes to him from Australia on another. He cites answers to questions about the judiciary in the United States put to him in Kentucky in 1890 and in California in 1909. He makes a special

journey to Switzerland in 1919 to clear up diverse points. Books, of course, are consulted, but they are subordinate to these first-hand sources of information.³

Little wonder it has been observed that ‘as a political scientist his genius largely consisted in an infinite capacity for taking trains’.⁴

Bryce, in concert with his good friend, Henry Sidgwick, had played an active role in the discussions that led to the establishment of the British Academy in 1902, and he became one of its founding Fellows, serving as the initial chair of the ‘History and Archaeology’ Section. Such was his standing in both the political and scholarly worlds (by the time of his death he had received degrees from 31 universities) that he seemed an obvious choice to become President of the Academy on his return from Washington. He, always a keen walker, remained physically and mentally vigorous, though a century later eyebrows might be raised at the appointment of a man who would be 79 when he finished his term of office. His age did mean that he was essentially a Victorian figure, one of those ‘lights of Liberalism’ who had come to political maturity in the 1860s and who retained an unshakable confidence in intellectual progress.⁵ His Presidential overview of scholarship has some of the sweep and grandeur of, for example, John Stuart Mill’s celebrated ‘Inaugural Address at St Andrews’, which had been delivered exactly 50 years earlier. It is certainly possible that some of the younger specialists in the various fields Bryce surveyed may have found his characterisation of the issues in their own discipline simplistic or antiquated: even the admiring Fisher conceded ‘it may be said that his knowledge of any one civilization was below the standard of the specialist’, but nonetheless his concluding judgement saw the Address as marked by ‘a masterly ease and command of detail’.⁶

The areas Bryce discussed included Archaeology and Anthropology, History (ancient, medieval, and modern), Philology, Literary History, Mental and Moral Science, Economics, Jurisprudence, and Political Science. These then-conventional labels may conceal the true scope of some of these subjects from the modern reader: under ‘Philology’, for example, was to be found the greater part of work in Classics and later European literatures as well as Linguistics; ‘Mental and Moral Science’ embraced Psychology as well as Metaphysics and Ethics; and so on. It may now seem unthinkable to try to range over all these disciplines with any authority, but Bryce was clearly undeterred. Characteristic of his confidence are statements such as this: ‘Another topic which

needs more investigation than it has yet received is the influence upon racial character and aptitude of environment, and especially of contact with other peoples, as compared with what may be called the inherited quality of the race’ (p.8). Or this: ‘Among other subjects, the careful study of which is needed, may be mentioned the Greek kingdom of Bactria and its relations ☐ indeed the relations of Greek culture generally ☐ with India, North-Western India, and the Far East, the kingdom of the Nabathaeans, and that of the Ephthalites or White Huns, the early history of Arabia and above all of Mohammed and his surroundings’ (p. 15).

And in case that might not be enough to keep several Sections occupied, he pronounced no less authoritatively on other desiderata of scholarship: ‘So also we need a history of Iceland, a subject on which little has been written, except in Danish, since the days of Konrad Maurer.’ Similarly, ‘On the ecclesiastical side of history ... much still remains obscure. So also some of the mediaeval heresies and sects (in particular those Bogomils whose origin and westward extension raises interesting questions) need to be further investigated and the relations between them cleared up’ (p.15). The business-like briskness of ‘need ... to be cleared up’ catches Bryce’s positivistic assurance: though scholarship was not likely to soon be exhausted, many matters could be definitively settled.

Although Bryce’s range may have been remarkable, his intellectual tastes were, as the tone of that last remark may suggest, somewhat narrower. His commitment was to *Wissenschaft*, systematic knowledge (he and his contemporaries could still use ‘science’ as the English equivalent without qualms), and he understood genuine scholarship to rest on thoroughly empirical foundations. Temperamentally, he was devoted to energetic fact-finding (that endless quizzing of the locals that marked all his travels), and he had little taste for philosophical speculation. But he was also influenced by what he considered to be the appropriate mode of enquiry for subjects deserving of recognition by the Academy. On these grounds, he lodges a mild reservation about ‘the mental sciences such as Psychology, Ontology, and Ethics’ where ‘we enter a field only one part of which can be said to deal with concrete facts capable of being studied by the ordinary methods of science’ (p.22). Similarly with literature, where

we treat the material from a point of view different from that of the literary critic. The more any question tends to become a question of taste and the

3. Fisher, *Bryce*, p. 266.

4. Stefan Collini, Donald Winch and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 243.

5. See Christopher Harvie, *The Lights of Liberalism: University Liberals and the Challenge of Democracy, 1860-1885* (London: Allen Lane, 1976).

6. Fisher, *Bryce*, pp. 307, 278.

interpretation of an author's genius, and the less it is a matter for elucidation by history, so much the more does it seem to fall outside the domain of this Academy. (p.20)

A century later, Literary Criticism, Art and Music, Metaphysics and a whole host of theoretical enquiries are now included in the British Academy's embrace, but Bryce spoke with the accents of late-19th-century positivism in being hesitant to include such enterprises under a body set up to represent (in the terms of its Charter) 'Historical, Philosophical, and Philological Studies'.

If his intellectual or methodological sympathies were somewhat restricted, his linguistic and geographical range was impressively catholic. Commenting on the difficulties involved in using the 'appalling profusion of material' represented by journalistic sources in the modern period, he remarks: 'To use it for historical purposes would seem hopeless had not the thing been done, as for instance by Mr James Ford Rhodes in his history of the United States, by Aulard and de la Gorce, and, in a lesser degree, by Häusser and Treitschke and Lamprecht, as well as by Spencer Walpole and other English writers' (p. 12). Bryce not only read widely in several languages: he also knew many of the leading scholars of the day. Discussing what might still need to be done in Roman history, it seemed natural to him to begin a sentence thus: 'The last time I saw Mommsen I asked him whether he could hold out any hope that he would carry down his history from Julius Caesar at least to the days of Constantine' (p. 14). Such acquaintance also enabled him to feel he had a finger on the pulse of the scholarly world in the present, as when he informed his Academy audience: 'A book on Witchcraft was occupying the most learned of all American historians, Mr Henry C. Lea, at the time of his lamented death, and what he had done toward it will shortly be published, with the additions of a highly competent scholar' (p. 16). It should be no surprise to learn that, in gathering material for his treatise on *Modern Democracies*, Bryce had corresponded with Lea about the details of municipal government in the United States.⁷

Some of Bryce's observations still seem uncannily topical. For example: 'Of all the departments of enquiry that have sought to describe themselves as sciences none is today in such disorder as Economics' (p. 24). But others seem almost unfathomably remote. He devotes a surprising amount of space to 'the reform of the spelling of English' as one of the 'practical problems which claim the attention of our philologists'. 'Bringing the spelling of our language into accord with its pronunciation' is

treated as a self-evidently desirable aim, and whatever the practical obstacles 'the thing will have to be done some time or other, and it grows no easier by postponement' (p.20). Although spelling reform remained a fashionable topic in the inter-war period, energetically championed by George Bernard Shaw among others, it has disappeared from the Academy's pre-occupations in the past half century. Forecasting the future direction of scholarly enquiry is always a hazardous business, but it is at its most vulnerable where presuming that a demand or impulse external to scholarship itself will long continue in its current form.

And of course it is especially risky to pronounce that nothing new is to be expected in a given area of scholarship. Though in general Bryce celebrated the prospect of large scholarly territories yet to be explored, he did venture one such valedictory judgement:

One branch of work which long occupied many acute and learned scholars shows signs of coming to an end. It is the emendation of the texts of the Greek and Roman classics. Those of all the greater authors have now been brought to a state in which little more remains to be done, there being practically no new light to be expected from the recension of old MSS or the discovery of any others. (p. 21)

This judgement, however defensible at the time, may now, arguably, seem a little premature in the light of Classical scholarship in the intervening century.⁸

But perhaps the most striking feature of Bryce's address when viewed from the present is its lack of defensiveness. His is a survey of scholarship that feels no need to attempt to placate the assumed hostility of those who do not understand the nature of that activity. Nor does his prose exhibit any of the nervousness or boosterism displayed by attempts to justify such scholarship in terms of its putative contribution to some quite extraneous, and often irrelevant, practical purposes. Bryce writes as the president of a learned society, a body confident of the value of learning, not as the anxious spokesman for an institution under pressure to claim a social and economic efficacy it may not in fact possess. And that, a century later, may not be the least salutary aspect of his address. As Fisher noted of Bryce: 'He believed in the Academy, and by his belief and his ungrudging willingness to spend himself in its service he did more, perhaps, than any other Fellow to raise it to its rightful position and to secure that it should fill worthily the position which such a body should hold in the world of organized learning.'⁹ ■

7. Fisher, *Bryce*, p. 266.

8. See, for example, the recent comments on the continuing story of textual emendation in the Introduction to C.S. Kraus and C.A. Stray, *Classical Commentaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

9. Fisher, *Bryce*, p. 279



Revolutions

From Bolshevik forces marching on Red Square in 1917, to social media's role in the Arab Spring uprisings, in autumn 2017 the British Academy explores revolution in all its historic glory.

We mark key revolutionary anniversaries, including 100 years since the Russian Revolution, 150 years since the publication of Karl Marx's *Capital*, and 500 years since Martin Luther's Reformation. We delve into the lives of key revolutionary figures, discuss what constitutes a revolution, and explore the ongoing fight for women's rights.

**Saturday 30 September 2017,
11.00am, The British Academy**

Karl Marx in London

Walking tour

Karl Marx spent the final 25 years of his life living and working in Soho. Join Dr Lucia Padella for a walk back in time to the 1850s and discover where Marx lived, worked and met fellow revolutionary thinkers.

**Tuesday 3 October 2017,
6.30pm, The British Academy**

What is a revolution?

Panel discussion

In today's society where the latest iPhone can be called a revolution, we explore the true meaning of the term and whether today's 'revolutions' are revolutionary at all. The panel will explore art, music and history to ask when is a revolution a revolution?

**Wednesday 4 October 2017,
6.30pm, Leicester Cathedral**
**Speech, script and social media:
How communication technology
has changed religion**

Panel discussion

Join our panel as they discuss whether developments in communication technology – from the invention of the printing press to the rise of social media – are catalysts for religious change.

Organised in partnership with St Philip's Centre.

**Thursday 19 October 2017,
6.30pm, The British Academy**
**Fighting for freedom: Rebellion, revolt
and revolution in the Caribbean**

Panel discussion

The Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) heralded the beginning of the end of slavery in the Western Hemisphere, and the overthrow of colonial powers. Successive revolutions have shaped the region's political, economic and cultural landscapes today, as slavery has been challenged, and freedom sought. Join our panel for a fascinating insight into the legacies of rebellion, and the challenges faced today across the Caribbean.

**Tuesday 31 October 2017,
6.30pm, The British Academy**
**Russia in Revolution: An empire in crisis,
1890 to 1928**

In conversation

The Russian Revolution of 1917 transformed the face of the Russian empire, politically, economically, socially and culturally. To mark the centenary of this epochal event, Professor Steve Smith FBA discusses his latest book, offering a panoramic account of the history of the empire from the late nineteenth century to the end of the 1920s.

Live subtitling will take place at this event.

**Thursday 9 November 2017,
6.30pm, The British Academy**
Research spotlight: Russian Revolution

Talks

New research highlights that there is still so much to learn about the Russian Revolution and its impact on the course of world history. Hear current and former British Academy award-holders explore the topic further in this social evening of short talks.

**Tuesday 21 November 2017,
6.00pm, The British Academy**
**Karl Marx's changing picture of the
end of capitalism**

Master-Mind Lecture,

by Professor Gareth Stedman Jones FBA

Marx's conception of revolution and the end of capitalism did not fundamentally change in the 1840s (as is usually thought), but in the 10 years leading up to the publication of *Capital* in 1867. He now conceived of the end of capitalism as a process, not an event.

**Tuesday 5 December 2017,
6.30pm, The British Academy**
Thinkers for our time: Sylvia Pankhurst

Panel discussion

A leading campaigner for women's and workers' rights, Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960) helped shape the policy and the methods of the suffragette struggle. She attended the Royal College of Art, and as both an artist and an activist, she placed visual imagery, performance, costume and colour at the heart of political activism and argument. Join our panel as they discuss Sylvia Pankhurst, her creative approach to fighting oppression and the contemporary resonances of her work. ■

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