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VENUE

Polly Dye
Venue Co-editor

It's hard to believe how quickly time has passed since our last issue! It feels like yesterday we were putting February together, but between busy seminars and long walks in the sun it makes sense for time to move so quickly. Though the past couple of weeks haven't been without their challenges, it is safe to say that I am having more and more fun with every issue. In particular, I have thoroughly enjoyed writing an article on book censorship for the Books section this month, a topic that feels (unfortunately) very apt in today's world. That being said, I believe Venue is a celebration of the resilience of the arts, and I hope you enjoy reading what we have put together. See you after Easter!

Elle McKinnell-Michael
Venue Co-editor

'What happened?', 'How are we in March?', 'What day is it?', endless complaints echo around the Concrete office, the cries of section editors in their droves. We have made it through the grey winter, it'll soon be summer, it's time for our hibernation to end! The weather gets nicer, the office fans are switched on, but Concrete's wonderful writers still submit their work. Maybe one day they'll put their talents to use somewhere else, or brave it outside under the warm sun – not this month though! I hope you enjoy what they have to offer for March, you're in for a treat!

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Last month in music recapped

By Elliott LaCointe

The music world gave us a lot to discuss this February giving us fans a lot to talk about. First, the man who brought one of the best halftime show performances in years, Kendrick Lamar.

On February 9th, a record-breaking statement of a performance by Kendrick Lamar took the world by storm. With over 130 Million viewers worldwide, Kendrick served a memorable and smoothly choreographed concert showcasing the force of talent Kendrick has given us this last year. Performing iconic tracks such as "HUMBLE", 'peekaboo', 'tv off' & more, especially songs featuring the terrific SZA who performed alongside him, Lamar gifted fans & casual audiences an exciting and experimental experience.

However, despite Uncle Samuel Jackson's warnings on stage, Kendrick performed what everyone wanted to hear, his hit 2024 diss-track against Drake, 'Not Like Us' which garnered millions upon millions of views online, a performance that will be remembered for a long time.

February gave two of the biggest award shows in the industry in the Grammys & the BRITs with each show providing something to talk about. Some big wins from the Grammys this year with Chappel Roan winning Best New Artist after her meteoric rise last year as well as delivering a fantastic performance on stage with her hit song 'Pink Pony Club'.

The record and song of the year was shared by none other than Kendrick Lamar once again with the single 'Not Like Us' and the album of the year was given to Beyoncé and her country debut with 'Cowboy Carter', beating the likes of Sabrina Carpenter, Taylor Swift and the previously mentioned Chappel Roan who had a lot to say that night demanding record labels need to be treating their artists with more respect, saying on stage "Labels, we got you, but do you got us?"

More recently, the BRITs gave us some other big wins and statements with none other than Charli xcx winning album of the year with her year defining record 'Brat' taking home the glory over albums from The Cure, The Last Dinner Party & Dua Lipa. In other news from the award show, Ofcom was lit up with angry phone calls over Sabrina Carpenter's raunchy performance. Sabrina caught the nation's attention with a regal showcase of songs of her latest record.

From the rock world, at SNL's 50th Anniversary, Nirvana reunited on stage, with Dave, Krist & Pat performing their hit song 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' with a vocalist unexpected to some but a known Nirvana megafan, Post Malone taking vocals and guitar doing his best to bring out his inner Kurt Cobain. Could the world see a Nirvana reunion tour with Post taking on Cobain's legacy?

Finally, February saw a hilarious inter-

action with a crowd in London a few weeks ago with Mr. Worldwide himself, the club icon Pitbull being greeted to a sea of fans all in bald caps with Pitbull adoring the gesture, laughing alongside the fans and thanking them. Mr. Worldwide, never change.



Above: Sabrina Carpenter accepting her Grammy Award for Best Pop Vocal Album at the 2025 Ceremony (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Coyote Stories: The Crane Wives' Indie-Folk Master-

By Andi Gill

The Crane Wives have always been masters of storytelling, and their album 'Coyote Stories' is a shining example. It's an evocative collection of folk-rock songs that weave together rich narratives, introspective lyricism, and a blend of musical genres. While folk elements still appear, like their acoustic guitars, mandolin, and fiddle, there's an increased emphasis on layered textures and experimental soundscapes.

The album marks a mature step in the band's evolution, moving from the energetic, harmony-laden folk-pop of their earlier works into deeper, more atmospheric storytelling that embraces their now-signature themes of self-discovery, romantic and familial relationships, and the natural world.

**"Time is not your remedy,
no amount of fear will
make you brave"**

At its core, 'Coyote Stories' is about transformation and confrontation of the self. As the album's title suggests, it's also an exploration of the wild and untamed, with coyotes serving as a metaphor for navigating the darker, more instinctual sides of oneself.

I think of the album in two different ways. 'Keep You Safe', 'Hard Sell', 'The Hand That Feeds', 'Sleeping Giants', and 'New Discovery' tell the tale of the singer as a person: where they came from, everything they dislike about themselves, aspects of themselves which were inherited or earned,

and their desire to change. The singer repeatedly confronts the dark reality that they aren't the person they want to be and contemplates the truths they've learned while becoming this person.



Above: The Crane Wives in 2015 (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

'Keep You Safe' is probably my favorite song on the album: I've always had anxiety, so the sentiment of "the older I get, the more fears I collect" is one that spoke to me personally - the lyrics show an understanding born of experience. So although these tracks tell us about the personal journey of the singer, they also convey collective experiences.

Taking special care in 'The Hand That Feeds' to call out the forceful system they have laboured under, they use the opportunity to decry the "American Dream" their father worked for. "He taught me that the hand that feeds, deserves to be bitten when it beats". The Crane Wives aren't just telling

a personal narrative of life, they're speaking to the experience of every American raised with expectations that went unmet by society.

The other tracks on the album, 'The Moon Will Sing', 'Allies or Enemies', 'Unraveling', 'Rockslide', 'Metaphor', 'Little Soldiers', 'Of Everlong', and 'Never Love An Anchor', are the tale of the person they love and how everyone they've loved before has changed them. Sometimes they're telling their current love about their past ones ("Don't look too hard 'cause you won't like the scars he left in me"), and sometimes they're singing backward into their past to speak to one who's already gone ("I loved you like the sun, bore the shadows that you made with no light of my own.").

Throughout the album, they oscillate between the good and bad times with their lovers, and thread themselves through time to tell us about it. The romance in the songs comes second to the personal narrative of how love affected them, which I think empowers the thematic confrontation of the self; the singer is no longer defining themselves by their partner, but rather telling the story of how the partner helped them grow. The album displays their growth both narratively and internally.

'Coyote Stories' reaches its tenth anniversary this year, and I'd strongly recommend giving it a listen even if you aren't typically a folk music enjoyer. It's been a great ten years watching The Crane Wives evolve as a band and, now that they've returned last September after a hiatus, I hope they'll gain the recognition they deserve.

A Warm Welcome: Making a perfect album while you're still at school

By Adam Teschner

Planet of The Apes is a 2023 album that can only be described as a sonic shitpost: a lo-fi cacophony of rap slang and pre-brainrot internetcore birthed from the tomfoolery of a high school friend group in suburban Missouri – West Air. However, a tender moment on that album led me to believe they treated music with some level of seriousness – ‘lost love intermission’ is an entirely instrumental track that reflectively bubbles into a vulnerable post-breakup vent.

My suspicion would be confirmed when I noticed the same wistful chord progression from ‘lost love intermission’ baked into ‘Suncomein’, the instrumental intro track to the debut album from West Air member Caesbrain, A Warm Welcome. A Warm Welcome acts as a fine stamp of achievement, capsuling the peaks of Caesbrain’s initial years of musical refinement and personal growth to Swan Song, his last few months of school-age weightlessness. Thus, the intro’s ‘lost love intermission’ reference feels like Caesbrain taking his roots through the exciting but daunting unknowns of new cinematic heights.

A Warm Welcome proceeds to guide us through the lonely chase for happiness while the goalposts are always moving. In intermittent skits, Caesbrain reluctantly talks to the only audience member to his gig that seemingly exists in a Dawn-FM-like limbo, structuring the confrontation of his situation and traumas to arrive at self-acceptance on the other side. This type of artful album construction can be observed in even the most

“A Warm Welcome capsules the peaks of Caesbrain’s initial years of musical refinement and personal growth to Swan Song, his last few months of school-age weightlessness”

(see The College Dropout or Rodeo), but it takes an astute listener to execute such ideas in your own work. Still, in a world where this inspiration is widely available, it takes something unique to stand out. There’s no reason Caesbrain should think that his particular illustration of the cliched adolescent crisis should outgrow his 20 monthly listeners. At the same time, the fact that artists like JPEGMAFIA and Tyler, The Creator have captivated millions thanks to a similarly eclectic appeal makes it harder for new artists to break in based on sonic experimentation alone. The key to these artists’ success has always been tapping into your own unique energy and hoping the algorithm picks it up.

Although Caesbrain can’t control the latter, he packs an energy that he knows exactly how to propel right out of the speakers.



Above: album cover for A Warm Welcome (Credits: Samuel Johnson; Caesbrain)

The airy production lets Caesbrain double down on to-the-point contemplative lyricism (“They try to keep me underground and my head in the clouds”) while still leaving enough space for his West Air-inherited playful side, a mix of adolescent banter and the arrogance of rap idols. He does well to use his voice without trapping it in any rap or melodic rhyme schemes – it naturally sits between them anyway; his authoritative spoken-word style is distinct enough to make confessional tracks like ‘Lost*’ feel entirely his own.

It’s clear that music is Caesbrain’s calling; A Warm Welcome is proof that making music for yourself is the best way to make something competitive. In a way, it’s a shame that such a polished album arrives at a time when its creator is still obscure – “my best works are non-consequential / if I end it here, tell me is it consequential?”, he remarks at the album’s distressing low point on ‘Alone On The Road’.

Many of you readers know these ups and downs all too well and (speaking especially to the young artists) know the greatness we’re capable of but still share Caesbrain’s humility in getting the opportunity – “A warm welcome was all I wanted, or all I expected”. On behalf of UEA, let’s show Caesbrain & West Air some love and increase those listener counts!



Left: Caesbrain and close friend Ghowlish performing in their Missouri hometown.

The Writers’ Playlist

What have our writers been listening to this month?

‘Gary’ by Blossoms

Could a song about a fibreglass-hearted gorilla stolen from a Lanarkshire garden centre be any good? After hearing this news story in his car, the lead singer of Blossoms, Tom Ogden, wrote arguably one of Blossoms’ most successful hits. The track encompasses the playfulness that Blossoms bring to the indie-rock genre with their catchy melodies and witty lyricism. After seeing them live in late 2024 at the LCR and seeing the love fans have for Gary, the travelling gorilla they brought on tour, I can confidently say yes, a song about a fibreglass-hearted gorilla can be good – it’s called Gary. – **Lilia Colledge**

‘Romance is Boring’ by Los Campesinos!

For some years now ‘Romance is Boring’ has been my favourite album. It has been called indie rock, maximalist, twee-punk, etc. but I find it to have an imperfect sound which makes it something unique and special. Despite themes of death, sex, football and decay, LCI’s lyricism is often mentally and physically poetic. In its fifteen tracks and three act structure the album tells a story of despair that climaxes in ‘The Sea is a Good place to Think of the Future’. Although the sound is love it or hate it, I would encourage you to just give it a go! – **Lillie Clark**

Del Water Gap

While drumming for another band, S. Holden Jaffe spotted his soon to be stage name handwritten in Sharpie on the back of a box truck – Del Water Gap. Jaffe first gained recognition with his single ‘Ode to a Conversation Stuck in Your Throat’, before releasing his debut self-titled album which solidified his reputation for heartfelt storytelling and dreamy soundscapes. “When we’re struggling [...] often we get this horrible solipsistic feeling, like, ‘No one else could possibly feel this bad’”, he shares about his recent work, “it has been very cathartic to see it resonate with a lot of other people”. – **Evelyn Oakes**

Films Coming Soon:

Flow (Gints Zilbalodis)
21st March

Y2K (Kyle Mooney)
21st March

La Cocina (Alonso Ruiz-palacios)
28th March

Death of a Unicorn (Alex Scharfman)
4th April

Re-releases:

Eraserhead (David Lynch)
28th March at Cinema City

Casablanca (Michael Curtiz)
23rd March at Cinema City

Bonnie and Clyde (Athur Penn)
6th April at Cinema City

Bend it Like Beckham at Cinema City

by Isaac Arif

Next month, on the 28th, we are hosting the first ever "Concrete Presents" film screening at Cinema City. If you have long dreamed of seeing the football classic Bend it Like Beckham (2002) on the big screen, here is your chance.

The screening will be accompanied by an introduction from myself, the film editor for Venue, where I'll explain a little further about what makes this film so special and why I selected it. Cinema City also sells a range of popcorn, sweets and drinks or you could go to the bar beforehand for an alcoholic beverage to take into the screening. Simply follow the QR code or visit picturehouses.com to purchase tickets now.

How two films made 2024 the year of Chalamet

by Adam Teschner

The wispy hairs above Timothée Chalamet's lip are more of an attempt at a mustache than a full commitment to one. And yet, despite challenged facial hair genetics, it works. In fact, much like Bob Dylan's quirky auteur status, the mustache became iconic as much due to the person wearing it as the hairs themselves.

This quickly became symbolic of the buzz surrounding A Complete Unknown (2024), where the film's traditional press was overshadowed by the enigmatic media antics of its lead star. Chalamet's range was electrifying: explosive when displaying football knowledge on ESPN or arriving to premieres on a Lime bike or styled-out with Kylie Jenner; authentically crossing worlds with Theo Von and Narduar interviews; and excitingly laying a statement of intent with his 'great' SAG Award speech.

This would mask that A Complete Unknown, although decent, did not reinvent the wheel; most of the contemporary appeal for an 83-year-old folk star's biopic would come from a lead actor who could simulate Dylan's 1960s hysteria in real-time in the 21st Century. Upon being assigned this task,

Chalamet would turn his intense admiration for the artist into humility under his brand, having repeatedly expressed that being a gateway to Dylan would be the highest honour this film could achieve.

In this way, A Complete Unknown is far less important as a film as it is the centrepiece and excuse to have the conversations and stunts of the star's media moments - a la Brat. In fact, his first public appearance post-rebrand - gatecrashing the Timothée Chalamet lookalike contest - had nothing to do with the movie, but is it not fair to say that it is spiritually connected to the press tour?

Such a successful rebrand makes it easy to forget that Chalamet had already made an enviable career off a consistently youthful clean-shaven look. Upon remembering this, we realise that Timothée Chalamet held pop culture in two monumental chokeholds in 2024. But while all eyes were on the Chalamet himself for the enigmatic A Complete Unknown press tour, his March occasion was far less about star power than it was about the pensive and spine-chilling rise of Paul Atreides in Dune: Part Two (2024).

Ironic, since Dune's star-studded cast make its posters look like Avengers flicks. But the Dune world is so addictively enveloping that it gives us no room to consider the actors outside their

performances. While the fanfare around A Complete Unknown invites us to appreciate Chalamet's craftsmanship, his Paul Atreides performance engulfs us in the feeling of it, directing his energy entirely inwardly to electrify Paul's transformation from traumatised adolescent observer to tyrannical political mastermind all the more dramatic.

In other words, the story itself is Dune's primary product, a story so dense and abstract that its weight needed to be woven together by an emotional powerhouse of a performance like Chalamet's. Fitting, then, that Chalamet seemed his usual slightly shy and reflective self on Dune: Part Two's press run, letting the film's blockbuster success do the talking for his performance.

Bob Dylan and Paul Atreides couldn't come from more different worlds, and it is precisely Timothée Chalamet's passion and curiosity to weave them together that sets him on his much-anticipated path to greatness. Timothée's 2024 paints him as a humble servant to the demands of his higher purpose and a well-equipped messenger to carry out his task equally well in pop culture as in front of the camera. Truthfully, Timothée always had it in him, but perhaps in line with the philosophies of Chalamet's interviewee Kendrick Lamar, sometimes you gotta pop out and show them.

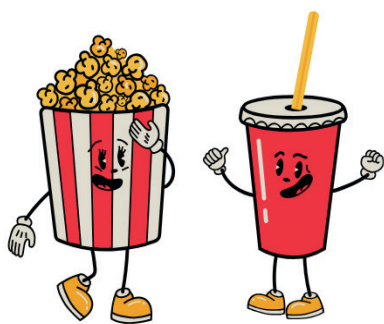


Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

A Postcard from Norwich Film Festival

by Isaac Arif

Opening night. Cinema City was flooded with excitement from film fanatics rushing in for the 2024 Norwich Film Festival. We all rushed to our seats to delve into Shakespeare in Love (1998), the John Madden riff on Shakespeare that won Gwyneth Paltrow best actress at the Oscars. Even though I hadn't seen it before, it was clear why so many love it as the theatre was giggling throughout. This enthusiasm lasted all evening as the film led into a Q&A session with the director John Madden and lead actor Joseph Fiennes who was video called in and projected onto the screen. Staring towards a cinema sized screen displaying Fiennes sipping tea in his home was a bizarre and strangely intimate form of Q&A but it all ran smoothly. Sometimes these events can be awkward due to uncomfortable questions but it was one of the few Q&As I've attended that felt natural. This is partly a testament to Norwich Film Festival's (NFF) ability to ground the festival in the city, rather than creating distance between audiences and filmmakers.

Every NFF screening I attended was sold out. The festival lasts two weeks and has seemingly managed to expand year by year, making itself a cultural staple in the city especially through its use of Cinema City as its sole venue for 2024. Together, they put on the cinema's first 35mm screening in nearly a decade, showing Peter Greenaway's The Draughtsman's Contract (1982), a witty murder mystery that only feels right on film. Getting to experience 35mm film for the first time was surreal. I'm 21 so having grown up only watching digital projection, the grain and texture of film was exciting as it is extremely rare to see film projection outside of London in the UK. The best part of that evening was the pre-film advertisements which were vintage adverts for local businesses.

NFF is particularly known for uplifting short films through a series of themed screenings such as animated, international, East Anglian, student and more. I attended the LGBT shorts night which featured a wide range of stories. From middle-aged mothers having their first queer awakenings to the secrecy of a Grindr hookup, the lineup introduced the audience to distinctive voices from up-and-coming filmmakers. Some of which attended for a Q&A which was a wonderful chance to learn more about the making of and the inspirations behind these films.

The final screening I attended was the Cannes Grand Prix winner, All we Imagine as Light (2024), the latest from Indian filmmaker, Payal Kapadia. Kapadia's meditation on city life gave us a glimpse into the lives of Mumbai nurses as they navigate loneliness, friendship and romantic love. At its centre, Kani Kusruti and Divya Prabha give performances that invite us in like a close friend. From East Anglia a window into Mumbai was opened that left me with tears running down my cheeks.

NFF's programming has yet to disappoint, and I couldn't recommend attending the next one enough. Usually film festivals feel unattainable to everyday people but with NFF, they bring the wonder of cinema right to our doorsteps.

Book your Bend it Like Beckham tickets below!



Isaac's Highlight: Mike Leigh

by Isaac Arif

When you think of British social-realist filmmakers, naturally you'll think of the brilliant Mike Leigh. Known for his improvisation and humanistic looks at the day-to-day lives of British folk, Leigh's films have stood the test of time and continue to speak to this country's dilemmas with a humorous twist.

Most recently, Leigh reunited with Marianne Jean-Baptiste, star of the Palme D'or winning Secrets and Lies (1996) for Hard Truths (2024). Following Pansy (Jean-Baptiste), a depressed woman who can't help but lash out at everyone around her, we see how emotional repression has a domino effect on the entire family and wider communities as Pansy's outbursts do not discriminate. Many of Leigh's films carry this message, as he portrays the realities of working class life with an honesty often unheard of.

Although his work typically follows contemporary life, Vera Drake (2004) and Mr Turner (2014) are period pieces displaying Leigh's stylistic range. At 82 years old, Leigh continues to create compelling comedy dramas of fully realised people that cannot be compared to any other.

Ash Vs. Evil Dead: Burying the dead

By Guy Sutton

You really can't get much better than the original Evil Dead trilogy. A trio of progressively deranged horror comedies that had about as much faith to a straightforward tone as they did to rules of genre consistency. The first was a low-budget horror film, the second was a slapstick horror-comedy, and the third was a Looney Tunes inspired fantasy-action-comedy hybrid. The progression itself starts to resemble a joke when you put the movies alongside each other, but that's what makes them so good. Despite only achieving a cult fanbase and after a 2013 film reboot which sought to modernise the franchise with a grungy, grotesque aesthetic, abandoning any notion of the comedy-horror that grew to define the films, the series was followed up in 2015 with the show Ash Vs Evil Dead, a complete return to form.

The series reunited franchise creators Sam Raimi, producer Rob Tapert, and star, the B-movie legend Bruce Campbell for a true narrative follow-up to the original trilogy. It continues from where Army of Darkness concludes (by completely forgetting to acknowledge it for the first two seasons) following Ash Williams as he navigates his hohum, underwhelming life after returning to the present day from medieval England (this series is completely ridiculous) and accidentally resurrecting a deadite plague. The show was the perfect continuation. Matching the original trilogies penchant for audacity and gore, in many cases, even surpassing it, with numerous gag-inducing set-pieces that came from the furthest depths of the deranged human imagination. Despite the show's consistent quality, it was not mirrored by the show's ratings, which seemed to be gradually decreasing from season to season.

Fans have debated on whatever the reason may be. The primary suspicion was the network the show aired on. 'Starz', a pay television network was the show's home, and without many notable shows for the network to boast about, it's no surprise that the show was experienced more through dodgy piracy sites which unfortunately don't correlate to viewership numbers, ultimately resulting in the show's cancellation. Many fans, myself included, believe that the show would be more at home on streaming services such as Netflix. This led to a fun turn of events where Ash Vs Evil Dead found a new life after finally joining the Netflix family. As with many cult-favourite television programs Ash Vs Evil Dead found a new life on the streaming service, it gave many new fans an opportunity to discover the show and its many morbidly hilarious pleasures. Fans often debated the merits of Netflix reviving the show to follow-up the relatively, almost uncharacteristically bleak cliff-hanger.

Unfortunately, after all this consideration, Ash Vs Evil Dead is about to leave Netflix. This now brings up the question: What will the fate be for the show? Is it something that the fans can preserve in their own exclusive mutual cannon or is it something that will be fondly regarded and referenced in the future. Will it become something that gets forgotten, a figurehead for shows that were doomed from the very beginning. Unfortunately, this fate will always remain up in the air. It falls primarily to the creators and writers to decide upon a way they intend to keep the show alive, if they even have anything in the works. With Bruce Camp



Above: The cast of Ash Vs. Evil Dead at 2016 Comic Con.
Credit: Unsplash.

bell's announcement that he had officially retired the role of Ash Williams, the future seemed solidified. In 2022, however, it was announced that there would be an animated revival of the show with Bruce Campbell reprising his role, this time, a voice role. This is precisely the update fans love to hear, and while animation may not be as respected of an adult medium as live-action is, adult-oriented animated television has become much more impactful lately. Shows like Arcane and Bojack Horseman have provided animation with a solid backbone that supports their appeal to an adult audience. Given Ash Vs Evil Dead's penchant for surreal outrageousness, animation may be a fitting medium for the show.

There have been no updates on this revival since its announcement however, which does form a cloud of doubt over the outcome of this revival, but one thing that I can always be sure of is that I love Ash Vs Evil Dead. It's a perfect continuation of the trilogy and if it's truly over, it will be a fitting send off.

Married at first sight: a 'reality tv show'

By Charlotte Davies

With Valentine's Day past, the season of love is seemingly over for most. However, channel 4 is back with its hit show married at first sight Australia, where struggling singles get blindly paired together as they meet for the first time at the altar. Rather than just being another mind-numbing reality show, this one is founded in the idea that following advice from the love experts (John Aiken, Mel Schilling, and Alessandra Rampolla) and complying with their tasks that lasting love with pursue. However, despite it being a very entertaining show, the debate as to how real this 'reality' show truly is has gotten more attention in recent years.

The main question amongst all the international branches of the show appears to be 'is it scripted?' While the simple answer is no, as multiple past cast members have stated that they were never given a script or forced to memorise lines, there are other production aspects which hint to a heavily controlled environment, such as having to repeat thoughts to the camera. Firstly, there are the matches. Over numerous seasons there have been pairings which simply, in the eyes of the audience, do not make sense. Most notably in the previous season this being Ellie and Ben. It seems baffling that a woman so clearly wishing for dreams of a perfect family life be paired with a man so undecided of what he wants, especially in terms of such a life changing decision, such as having children. Although, within the same season a wildcard par-

ing of Tori and Jack had an unexpected success rate, with the pair being together over a year after meeting at the altar. Therefore, both experts and producers appear to play with the idea of high risk, high reward pairings in each season, with whether it works being down to the individuals.

Secondly, like all reality shows, editing plays a large role in how both narratives play out as well as how the audience is supposed to perceive individuals. From purposely playing suspenseful music during conversations, to the order in which couples enter the dinner parties, much of the group events in the show are heavily produced. However, it should be noted that the drama which ensues and emotions that emerge are far from constructed. Within such a tense and scrutinising process, it is understandable that conflict would naturally arise.

Despite this, those who are clearly orchestrating it within the show are almost always called out as it goes against the purpose of the show which is to find love. Therefore, the apparent 'fakeness' is ultimately not true despite what the edit wants to make audiences believe.

Over the last season, both contestants and producers have made a large effort to call out controversial behaviour amongst particularly the male contestants. This need was highlighted after a series of misogynistic comments made during a

Credit: Unsplash



fight between 2024 contestants Jack and Lauren. Since then, the backlash Jack received permanently ruined his public image as well as ensured the show expressed their immense disapproval publicly to all involved. With comments as harmful as those he made, these actions were not scripted, while also highlighting the dangers of reality TV if feuding cast-mates are left without intervention.

Despite the highs and lows of each season, MAFS does have a good success rate with some of their previous casts staying together and eventually getting legally married (as on the show no marriage certificate is signed). So, while I'm certain the drama we all love will ensue, hopefully long-lasting love will also blossom.

Sex Education: Feminism and Intimacy go together like Birds of a Feather

By Lara Parsons

(This review contains spoilers)

The charm of Sex Education (2019) lies within each drastically unique character within it.

It's a feel-good show about the sex lives or, lack thereof, of British sixth formers. The series raises the question of what is considered taboo – the balance between matters that should be kept private and ones that should be spoken loudly. Whilst the show, at times, vastly exaggerated sexual activity in secondary schools, each episode holds a didactic tone that leads towards destigmatising speaking up on matters of the heart and body.

As well as the show's comedic and satirical elements and heartwarming messages, I most value the perception of womanhood and inclusivity the show evokes. Development lies at the heart of every character. When I think about my favourite female character on television, I think of Maeve Wiley (Emma Mackey). Not only does she harbour a love for feminist literature as I do, but she sees the world vividly. She sees its bounds, its confinements behind windows. There are barriers that she tries to break but there's so much beneath the surface. Maeve's journey to success as a writer, despite family struggles working against her, serves as an inspiration, a role model to younger viewers. To say that Maeve Wiley is a complex character is palpable; com-

batting problems with trust and abandonment to achieve her goals whilst simultaneously letting new people in shows a strength of character – a depth I am not often attuned to.

Many contemporary romances in popular culture aren't inherently misogynistic, but don't have female focused storylines. Female characters in romances don't often go through the same elements of personal change that male characters might. Several tropes involve a man changing aspects of his life to fit a woman, but in Sex Education, meeting Aimee Gibbs (Aimee Lou Wood) was an influential milestone in Maeve's relationship with herself. Aimee's first impression was a typical popular girl you might find in school, playing the dumb blonde stereotype before challenging it. Aimee breaks away from this and befriends Maeve, opting for a friendship that is personal and kind, replacing the kind of superficiality Ruby, Olivia and Anwar offered her. After feeling discouraged by their maternal figures, Maeve and Aimee adopt motherly roles for one another, giving necessary advice to navigate their lives. A big part of Aimee's storyline is her sexual assault which could, undeniably, mimic many women's experiences. Victims might think to report it would be silly or dramatic. Or they might start to question, the way Aimee did, whether it was their fault. Aimee worries about her smile and outward kindness, questioning if she didn't smile at him, would the stranger have treated

her the way he had? Sex Education treads carefully with Aimee's story, with Aimee Lou Wood winning 'Best Female Actress in a Comedy Programme,' delicately portraying all the potential setbacks that might emerge from nonconsensual acts, such as being unable to ride public transportation. Aimee goes on to experience trouble in her relationship with Steve and her own body. She turns from confidence to fear. Taking Aimee to the police station, Maeve sets an example for younger viewers. Nothing is too small to report.

Season 2 Episode 7 ends with one of my favourite portrayals of female solidarity. Several of the female characters sit beside Aimee on the bus, and despite their differences and lack of common interest, they come together to help Aimee challenge her fears. Their support helps Aimee feel safe enough to revisit the site of her assault.



Credit: Unsplash.

The Simpsons: Shaping a Generation's Humour

By Guy Sutton

Since its debut in 1989, The Simpsons has transcended its origins as a prime-time animated sitcom to become a cultural institution. With its sharp wit, surreal humor, and satirical commentary on American life, the show has had an undeniable impact on multiple generations. In my opinion the show has shaped not only animated comedy, but the humour of an entire generation. Even today you'll hear countless writers referring to The Simpsons as a touchstone for the American cultural zeitgeist. And while countless fans enjoy debating when the show began its much-maligned decline in quality, you tend to hear less of people referencing the undeniable impact in comedy. I for sure have a lot of opinions on the show, considering it's in running for my favourite show of all time: personally I mostly watch from seasons 2-9 and although I do think the show should've bowed out and enjoyed its legacy years ago, I would like to embrace the impact The Simpsons had on a generation.

The show's sharp, acerbic wit, (decidedly) democratic social commentary, and cynical jabs at popular culture and the political world became the norm for numerous comedy programs and animated shows that followed, leading to an upsurge of adult oriented animated programming. It can all be traced back to this show, to such an extent that famed and equally beloved shows such as South Park, Beavis and Butthead, and King of the Hill were allowed to thrive and became equally vital to the nineties counter-cultural zeitgeist. You can truly sense 'The Simpsons' DNA in all these shows, and it makes it interesting how each of these programmes' writers were able to reshape

the influence and build off it. Importantly, however, The Simpson's satirical nature, ran equal to the increased social consciousness in the youth, further provoked more active and outspoken stances that only becomes more prevalent today.

What made the show notable upon its debut in 1989, was, what was considered, a far more honest depiction of a blue collar American nuclear family, especially in contrast to the more glamorised depictions in American media during the mid-eighties. The father was an oafish man prone to bouts of rage, the wife was unhappy with her droll stay-at-home life, the eldest son is a rebel who fails at school, the middle child is completely neglected, and then there's a baby. The Simpson family became synonymous with the chaotic dysfunctional family unit, so much so that it provoked uproar among politicians who lambasted, what they perceived to be a lack of a moral compass. The Simpsons aired during a period where the nuclear family unit was actively promoted by American politicians, making the show feel like a radical shock to the system, albeit one with a ringing truth pulsing under the surface.

It was this very depiction of the unexceptional, 'average' family unit that also holds an influence over the comedy landscape, and not just in animation. Shows like Ricky Gervais' The Office took a strong influence from the show in its depiction of the ordinary and irreverent take on human interaction. The influence is strongly felt in much of Mike Judge's comedy, which is even more scathing and cynical than Matt Groening's. However, despite its influence over what seems like every comedy



Credit: Unsplash

show, its unfortunate decline, in my opinion, can be traced to when the show started trying to fit in with its protégés, losing the well-drawn characters and dynamics in the process, turning the show, unfortunately, into just another cartoon.

I still consider the show to be one of the most important of all time. It changed the way people look at the world, their ideas on what makes a strong family, and its impeccable comic timing and comedic writing have ensured that The Simpsons lives on in meme culture. It's truly a show that, no matter how much further it falls from grace, it will never truly die.

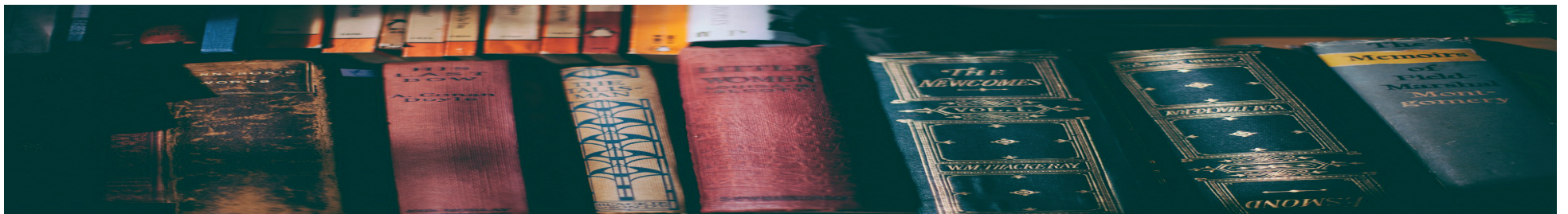
"In March I'll be rested, caught up and human."

- Sylvia Plath

The Decline of Public Libraries: Losing a Lifeline for Communities

By Evelyn Oakes

Photo Credit: Clem Onojeghuo on Unsplash



Since 2016, over 180 council-run libraries in the UK have either closed or been transferred to volunteer management, with more deprived communities being four times more likely to lose a publicly funded library during this period.

Public libraries serve as essential 'third places'—community hubs beyond home and work—offering invaluable resources and fostering social connections. For children, libraries cultivate a love of reading and provide safe spaces for socialising. Libraries were a memorable aspect of my childhood, particularly taking part in the annual Summer Reading Challenge, which simultaneously sparked my love for literature. The elderly also benefit from programs that teach digital literacy, helping them navigate an increasingly online world. Moreover, libraries host community groups, mitigating isolation and strengthening social bonds. Their closure disproportionately affects these vulnerable populations, stripping communities of vital support systems.

Library closures reflect broader societal shifts towards individualism and digitalization, resulting in increased social isolation. As communal spaces diminish, opportunities for social interactions and community engagement wane, raising concerns about the long-term impact on social cohesion. Without these shared spaces, many individuals—particularly those in marginalised communities—face greater difficulty accessing educational resources, digital support, and opportunities for community engagement. At the same time, the rise of technology has significantly altered how we engage with reading and social interaction. While digital advancements have made books and information more accessible, they have also contributed to declining library use. Moreover, the sense of community that libraries foster—where people gather, discuss literature, and connect over shared interests—is being eroded by an increasingly digital and isolated world. Libraries encourage focused reading, intellectual curiosity, and real-life social interactions, all of which are at risk in a time when screens dominate our daily lives. As society becomes more reliant on technology, we must recognize and protect the unique role libraries play in fostering human connection and lifelong learning.

The Arts Everywhere Fund

One of the most significant recent initiatives is the £270 million Arts Everywhere Fund, announced by Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy in February 2025. This fund is designed to support England's cultural infrastructure, including libraries, museums, and galleries. The investment will provide financial relief to struggling libraries, allow for crucial infrastructure improvements, and build long-term resilience for these institutions. The goal is to ensure that libraries remain accessible and sustainable, particularly for communities that rely on them the most.

British Library North: Expanding Access

Another major government pledge is the creation of British Library North, a new branch of the British Library set to be established in Leeds. With a £10 million investment, this initiative aims to make cultural spaces more inclusive, particularly for young people who may feel disconnected from traditional institutions. By expanding the British Library's reach beyond London, this project seeks to make knowledge and literary resources more accessible to communities in the North of England.

Libraries Improvement Fund

Additionally, the government has allocated £4.9 million to 27 library projects as part of the Libraries Improvement Fund. This investment is part of a larger £60 million boost to cultural venues, including museums and libraries, to modernise facilities and enhance services. The funding aims to strengthen libraries' role as vibrant community hubs, ensuring they continue to provide valuable services such as digital literacy programs, social groups, and educational resources.

While government funding is essential, public support is equally crucial in ensuring libraries continue to thrive. One of the most direct ways to help is by using library services regularly—borrowing books, attending events, and participating in community programs all contribute to demonstrating their value. Volunteering at libraries, whether by helping with literacy programs or assisting with events, strengthens their role as community hubs. Additionally, donating books or fundraising for local libraries can provide much-needed resources. By supporting and actively engaging libraries, the public can help ensure they remain a vital part of our communities.

While these initiatives signal a commitment to preserving libraries, concerns remain over whether they are enough to counteract years of closures and underfunding. Libraries serve as more than just places to borrow books—they are essential third spaces that foster community connections, support digital inclusion for the elderly, and provide safe learning environments for children. Ensuring their survival requires sustained investments and recognition of their social value. The recent government pledges offer hope for the future of public libraries, but continued advocacy and funding will be necessary to keep these vital institutions thriving for generations to come.

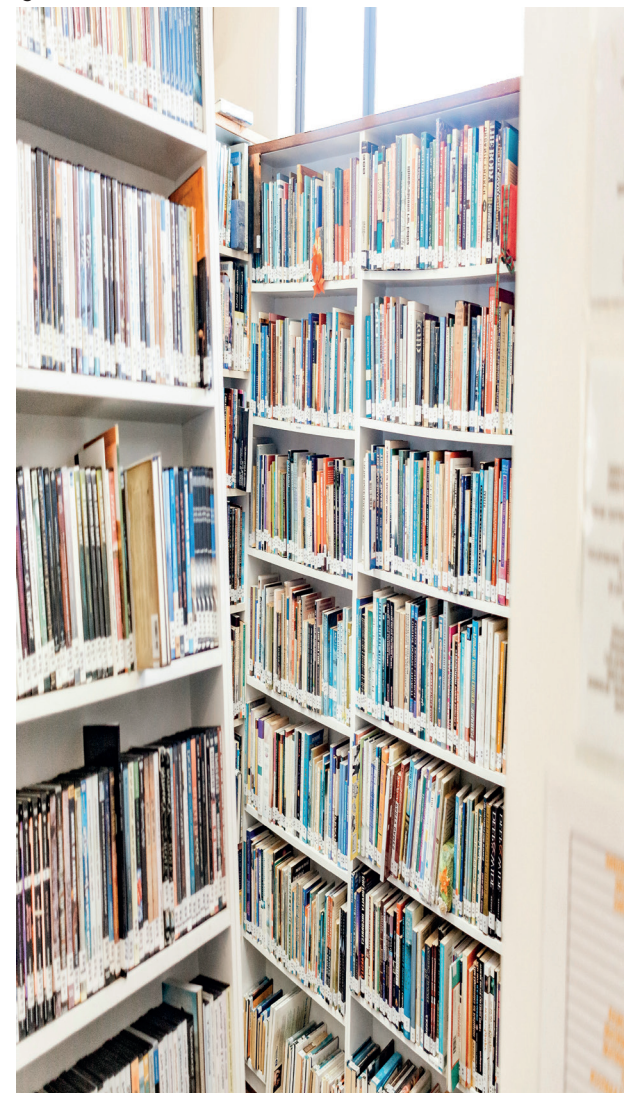


Photo Credit: Sincerely Media on Unsplash

Censorship in Books: is it ever acceptable?

By Polly Dye

The books that fill our shelves, sit in library collections, and create bookshop displays are not just randomly placed – they have been carefully selected and approved to be there. But who decides what we can and cannot read?

In America, the incumbent Republican party is increasingly pushing for book censorship, specifically targeting literature that critiques authority and challenges social norms. Classic books such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and literature centred around the LGBT community have been their recent victims, being outlawed from some schools and libraries. This raises fundamental questions about who controls access to literature and what is deemed as unacceptable content.

But what actually is book censorship? Censorship in general is defined as the regulation of free speech, and, when applied to books, is clarified as the act of an authoritative body suppressing certain ideas within a book. Though the Trump Administration sets out to ban certain books entirely, tamer forms of book censorship exist. This includes curriculum restrictions, in which schools and universities themselves can exclude books from their curriculum due to objections from parents and advocacy groups. Another form is self-censorship, where authors avoid certain topics in their writing due to fear of legal trouble or backlash. Age restrictions (preventing younger readers from accessing inappropriate material) and redaction (cutting out individual offensive words or content to align with modern sensitivities) also fall under the book censorship umbrella.

Though the Republicans' actions are objectively damaging to American schoolchildren (who arguably should be allowed to form their own opinions about literature), some forms of censorship can be positive. For example, books that spread false or dangerous claims about minority groups – commonly seen in older literature – can increase discrimination. Therefore, to avoid this, publishers may choose to revise outdated language (such as removing slurs) to make the reading experience of these texts less harmful to readers. Consequently, if books like these are restricted from public domain or somewhat censored, a space for more inclusive literature that accurately represents these diverse

communities can be created. Thus, this allows for marginalised voices to be heard whilst protecting minority groups.

However, this raises complex questions about who decides what counts as harmful literature. So where do we draw the line? Should the responsibility to censor books lie with authorities such as governments, schools, libraries, publishers, and even the authors themselves? Or, should readers have complete freedom to choose their own reading material? If this power lies solely with governments, it risks political or ideological bias as authorities might seek to ban books that critique their policies, suppressing intellectual diversity. Ironically, oppressive and controlled political environments are the very thing a lot of banned books tend to critique, George Orwell's *1984* being a prime example of this. Over the course of this novel, Orwell's protagonist, Winston, comes to realise the dangers of the totalitarian regime he is living under and attempts to resist it. Regarding these sorts of literature, what authorities (such as the Trump Administration) fail to recognise is that these books are cautionary tales for people like themselves, and not instruction manuals of rebellion for readers to follow. If those in power truly believe their policies are fair, then they should have no fear about their citizens being inspired by the themes of revolt they read about in texts such as Orwell's. A more reasonable approach might be for libraries and schools to have greater influence over what books should be censored and how, as they are institutions with a more direct knowledge of books and their impacts on readers, rather than leaving this power to centralised government control.

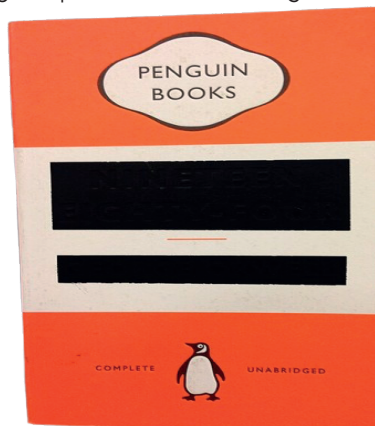


Photo Credit: Sally Wilson, Wikimedia Commons

But the dilemma doesn't end there! Even if censorship is left to educational institutions, the ethics of book censorship are further complicated when considering how to decide what qualifies as offensive, dangerous, or inappropriate material. Subjectivity remains an issue – one person's idea of harmful content might differ from someone else's. In fact, one person may view 'inappropriate' or 'offensive' content as valuable in terms of its historical legacy and/or educational purposes, creating a further divide in opinions.

There is a slippery slope here – is there a way to collectively agree about what content to censor? And, even if one type of content was chosen to be restricted from books today, it may lead to further censorship in the future that could limit free expression, thus reducing the diversity of literature. Additionally, the ethics of book censorship are often a shifting debate, changing over time. Books that were once banned for being deemed as 'too controversial' such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain are now considered as 'essential' literature and are often taught in secondary schools. Both books were originally banned for racist language, but are now celebrated for their insightful critiques of racism and slavery in America's Deep South. As these novels are now seen as prime examples for sparking meaningful discussions about race and morality, it raises the question of whether offensive language within certain books should be withdrawn in order to protect readers from its offensive implications, or if it should be preserved to create an awareness of the wrongness of this sort of language. In today's increasingly polarised world, it seems hard for both of these options to be simultaneously feasible. However, this issue may be solved by releasing editions of the novel with redacted offensive content, and leaving some editions of the novel as they are. In this way, readers can take authority over what content they are reading, allowing them to decide for themselves what they feel comfortable with.

Ultimately, there is a fine line between protection and suppression, ensuring the ethics of book censorship remain complex. Though certain restrictions can protect vulnerable groups, excessive censorship risks stifling free expression. However, as long as our responses to literature do not lead to harm, the freedom to read, question, and critique should be ours alone.

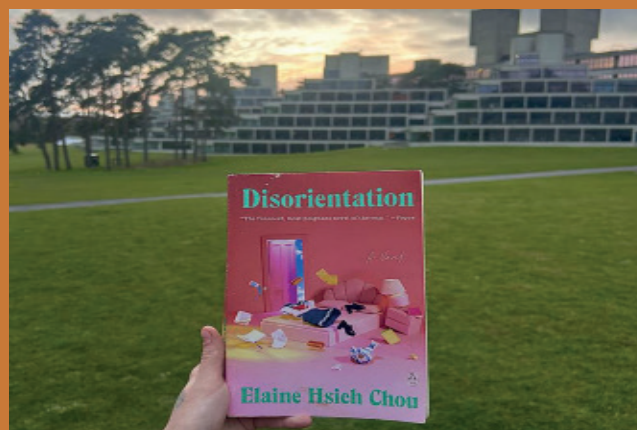
Disorientation by Elaine H. Chou – a sharp, satirical unravelling of race, academia and self-deception.

By Liv Mephram

What happens when the pursuit of knowledge and the fear of academic failure is entangled with racism, misogyny and self-perception? Elaine H. Chou's 2022 debut *Disorientation* delivers a fiery campus-based satire that raises important discussions surrounding internalized racism and the separation of art from the artist.

Ingrid Yang, an exhausted eighth year PhD candidate, is drowning in her dissertation on the canonical Chinese-American poet Xio-Wen-Chou, a figure so over-analyzed that originality feels impossible. When she stumbles upon a shocking revelation in the Chou archives, Ingrid is thrust into a whirlwind of self-discovery, unravelling long held truths and exposing institutional racism at a breakneck pace. Set in the familiar throes of chaotic and political academic life, there were so many unexpected twists and turns despite the novels' cast of "extreme" stereotypical caricatures.

I'd say that Chou's character portrayal was the highlight of the novel for me. The caricatures were pitch perfect, especially when paired with Ingrid's naïve, sometimes grating narrative voice. They allow the audience to better witness Ingrid's journey of self-discovery – through Ingrid's relationship with the cis-



white men in her life, the novel directly confronts you with the fact that Asian-American women have historically been imagined, sexualised, dominated and controlled by white men – both in societal perceptions and lived realities.

This satirical debut nails the complex themes of belonging as a woman of colour, aiding a more direct confrontation of internalised racism. Ingrid's narration as a Taiwanese-American and her relationship with a white man leads her to confront her own self truths, transforming her perceptions of an Asian American woman's place in American society.

For a debut novel, the range of significant themes it addresses is impressive. Despite exploring multiple important issues, the story remains engaging as we follow the unfolding scandal without feeling overwhelmed. In this way, it shares a satirical tone with *Yellowface* by R.F. Kuang – who, incidentally, spoke about her novel at UEA Live in October last year. Similarly, *Disorientation* delves into themes of race and the complexities surrounding the right to tell a story. The prose is light yet sharp and funny, yet I must admit, the depth took me by surprise, given the cover art. I initially discovered it on the more literary side of "Booktok" making me think it was more of a rom-com or account of female disillusionment in society. It gave those vibes, with even more to admire – a satirical rollercoaster that blended serious moments with some entertaining leftist-versus-leftist clashes, all set against the familiar backdrop of academic life.

While the satire can become excessive at times, it becomes more balanced by revealing some sobering truths that overall make it a hilarious but thought provoking read. These days, my favourite novels are those that can make me think and laugh without becoming too disoriented (get it?).

Photo Credit: Liv Mephram

Creative Writing

Editor: Sasha Ouvry

March's theme was **Horoscope**. If you're interested in submitting to us, you can join the Concrete society through the UEA SU website to get added to the Concrete Writers team, where next month's theme will be posted on 29 April. We look forward to reading your work!

Until Hebe

It's not possible to
print the first words
unsaid: the lady with folding curls and
an echo that resounds
out in calling and blisters does
her husband's ironing so he might
have a shirt for his work and
light pooling then
sinking. Her shirt is
wrinkled by whatever it is that
tugs her
out of place. It's all with a smile
that she hums this quiet away –
trill trilling. To till and into
Tomorrow. Trill trilling.
Till –

*'Time and Truth', Giovanni
Battista Tiepolo, 1696-1770*



WOMAN IRONING

TANZER

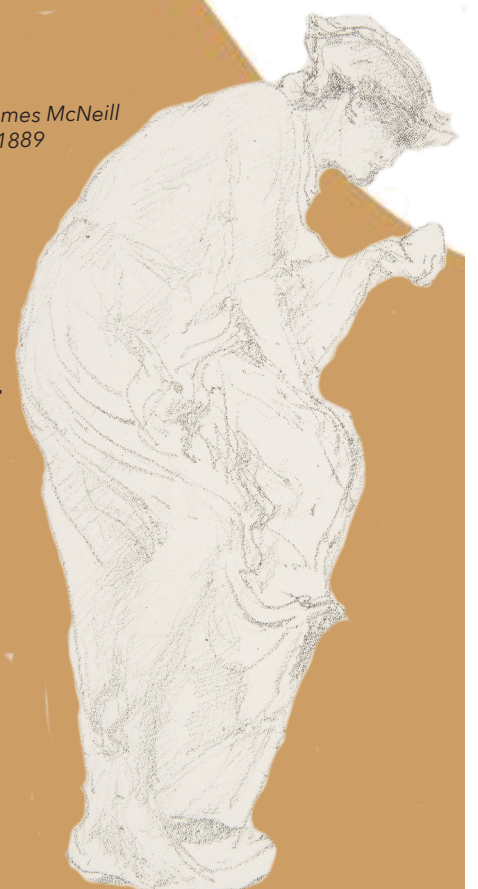
*'Woman Ironing', Julius
Tanzer, 1935-43*

Something about twisting Hebe

Co-op, aisle 3:
the man that sucks breath
as I pass. Wind whittling
us and the gap
becomes traffic,
becomes broken branches,
becomes steps I haven't taken.

the space between
call and echo, are
all answers. What about her
being clean but not tidy –
something about that
small animal
desperate to leap out

*'The Horoscope', James McNeill
Whistler, probably 1889*



Autumnal Skies under

a

Asa Williams



Credit: Unsplash

Every poem is an archipelago of the soul and I
blink galaxies into existence each night, Warm through the
sheer idea of chaos reigning far above me

Nebulae whirling up up up (the big up) from where I lie
stretched out in the grass

Inhaling and exhaling a universe fresh with creation,

Inhaling and exhaling those wide horizons and deep sunsets.

That slow cosmic waltz way up in the sky,

Orion and the Great Bear in an undignified two-step

Whose rhythmic sway is dictated by seasons and space.

My face is cold with night and wet with dew

And still the stars turn.

Let us melt into that great nothingness, shattered as stardust
and moonbeams and stay out just a little longer my dear.

Study of a Man & Woman Walking

After Francis Bacon

Sasha Ouvry

He comes to me at the dawn of a sleepy,
one-eyed spring. Too early
for a songbird to be wound
from its box,
for our shadows to do anything but lie
in wait of the sun.

Around the garden, three-legged and
humming to familiar quiet. His
hand tightens, delighting
in warmth. Soon, we will have used
up all breath for questions

& apologies.

'Man and Woman Walking', Adriaen van Ostade, 1610-85



'A woman turning to walk away from a man', José Guadalupe Posada, 1880-1910



Interview

Editor: Elle McKinnell-Michael

Oscar Welchman, current Environment Officer for UEA Students Union.

By Elle McKinnell-Michael

I sat down with Oscar, current student Environment Officer for the SU, to talk about sustainability on campus, the role of the arts and media on climate action, and to learn more about Climate Week at UEA!

Would you like to introduce yourself to Venue's readers?

I am Oscar Welchman, He/him. I'm the Environment Officer, which is a volunteer position at the SU. I'm also an environmental activist. So, I actually attended the United Nations Conference on Climate Change last November and campaigned specifically on the presence of the fossil fuel industry and fossil fuel lobby within international climate change decision making. I was working, actually, as a youth representative - a Youth NGO Civil Society representative, and I was alongside the UK Youth Climate Coalition, which is a big group who gets involved with international climate change decision making. That's one of the things I get up to. Climate change isn't my whole life, by a long way! I'm learning Japanese at the moment, I lived in Japan last year. It's a big passion of mine! One day I would like to be fluent, and I'm conversational now. So that's kind of a hobby of mine I suppose. Also, I'm an English Language and creative writing student, so I like writing and I'm really passionate about it! That's what I get up to!

Touching more on your role as Environment Officer, you mentioned it's a volunteer position, what sort of work does the role involve? Do you feel happy with how you've been able to affect change at UEA?

So, it's really what you make it. Some people do very little-to nothing as officers and I think that's a shame. Other people get very

involved, and I feel really lucky to have gotten very involved.

First of all, one of the first things I did was something called the 'Student Sustainability Network'. It's a big network of now over 150 members. It's now an official new group called the 'SU Sustainability Working Group', which has representatives from all the different sustainably minded clubs and societies, student groups and some student officers. Anyone can attend these meetings, and the idea is there's lots of different sustainable societies, sustainable causes, sustainable campaigns and activism on campus, but they often don't communicate with each other very well. They stay within societies, or they don't communicate with the SU. It's about information sharing and capacity building - community building.

I have been really lucky to work on that with a big coalition of people, a big group of people, and together that's perhaps been what's helped engage lots of people with climate week as well. We now have about 30 volunteers running climate week. We were able to build that number up through advertising on social media but equally through advertising on the Student Sustainability network.

But also, I do lots of other things. One thing that's really important to me and I've been working on lots is interactions with the UEA staff and the UEA staff sustainability team, which is this big extensive thing. There's the sustainability management team, and then below them there's all these different implementation teams for different areas. So, you've got the transport implementation team, the water implementation team, the energy implementation team, biodiversity... waste. I'm on waste specifically, but what I've been trying to do is to get - I'm working on this at the moment - to get students in every one of those implementation teams holding UEA accountable and making sure that students are aware of what's going on, and then feeding back through the SU Sustainability Working Group on what they've learned and what's going on in the different areas of sustainability on campus. [Discussing UEA] They've stopped publishing an annual sustainability report, they stopped publishing it in 2017, so it's been a long time since there has been an annual sustainability report, but they're getting back on it. It's a pivotal year for them and for choosing how to be sustainable. I think it's important students are really involved in that.



You've mentioned a lack of accountability and a lack of transparency. You've mentioned things like bureaucracy and a lack of communication, what would you say is the biggest barrier to sustainable change on campus and more broadly in wider society?

I think it can be hard to approach. People just don't understand it. You know, it's scary. It's scary to think about, and it's big, how can one individual learn to tackle it and make a meaningful difference? You know, it's not really easy to answer, it's difficult to approach. I really believe in making sustainability a community-based activity. For example, what's been wonderful this year is there's... a biodiversity volunteering team run by an amazing staff member on campus, and students and people from Norwich just go and work on different areas of the grounds, helping out with the biodiversity on campus, and it's so fulfilling. I've done it, I love it, it's a really good example of what sustainability can mean for people. Often it doesn't touch people's daily lives. It feels like a big political discussion when really, as far as I'm concerned, it's apolitical. It's an obvious truth and obvious fact, no matter where you sit on the political spectrum, that we need to change our practices to be more sustainable. That's why I was able to create the student sustainability network. I think it's all about...just capacity building, community building. It shouldn't be about individual sustainability, it's about togetherness.

What would a fully sustainable campus look like to you? What would a green campus offer in terms of services, infrastructure and initiatives?

It's a difficult question because...fully sustainable - at least net zero - would indicate a kind of circular economy; UEA does have a net zero goal. I believe it's 2045. In case you don't know what net zero is, it's just about produc-



ing net zero emissions. In other words, any emissions that are produced are then retaken back in. It's a threshold to try and reach for any company, for any industry, for any government, any nation. It's difficult to do that, but I think actually the practices which are involved with it are important because it's about making UEA a sustainable, net zero place with clean water, with good, sustainable public transport etc. etc.

There's the arguably more important part, which is engaging students, all students, in sustainability, and I think that's the important part. That's something that I've been really working on with the Student Sustainability Network and I think, for example, one thing I'm trying to bring to campus - and it's coming very soon - is the charity shop. It's going to start by opening monthly and then hopefully open weekly in the future at some point. It's going to be selling secondhand books, clothes, textbooks, CDs, you name it, you know. It really encourages circular economy. I think it'd be a really nice initiative on campus for students to get involved with, just second hand purchasing and donating to charity. I think as well often people don't think about the waste they generate. Low plastic or zero waste food shops are great. It's a really nice way for people to get used to a more sustainable lifestyle.

Is it more about changing people's lifestyles rather than the available services?

We're a university, and what a university does is it's an education forum, right, and it teaches people how to go towards the future and do what they want to do. Fundamentally, no matter who you are, no matter what you're going to go and do, sustainability should be a part of it, as far as I'm concerned. So, I think if we are engaging people who are here for an education, we should be engaging them to



think sustainably, no matter how they're being educated.

Venue readers are interested in arts and culture; how do you think that media can be used to fight climate change? What's the way forward in terms of art, literature, film, TV and music? How do you see the content we consume driving us toward a green future?

Do you remember the post office scandal? There was, I think it was a Channel 4 or Channel 5 TV series that was made about the scandal, exposing it, and it was very popular. A lot of people watched it, and it really brought the scandal into the mainstream. By creating a piece of fiction, a piece of entertainment, a piece of media that the general public will watch that will also educate them about issues that are going on. I think that was a perfect example. What can people do to help, to engage with and understand what sustainability looks like - because it's complicated, right? It can be about food. It can be about habits. It can be about travel. It can be about so many different things, and that's overwhelming. I find it overwhelming. Anyone would find it overwhelming. The media has such potential to do that by either implementing sustainable practices into normal TV shows, normal movies and books. It's just a normal way of life; It's a healthy way of living. Or, by creating amazing documentaries or based-on-real-stories, fiction series and movies.

So, you'd say that getting more eyes on the effects of climate change is important, especially those who aren't already sort of looking at mainstream news or engaging with the intelligentsia.

Yeah, I think that's right. Often the people who are reading the articles that are most important are the people for whom it's least important that they read it, because they're already aware and engaged. And I don't blame people for not reading those articles. They're heavy, they're scary, they're sad. But if you can make someone feel like the arts do, you know, make someone feel beautiful, happy, excited, and then also engage them in real world problems - like Seaspiracy does - like other movies and documentaries do, then no wonder they're more successful than the new stories that do tend to only reach a very small audience.

You've already mentioned the impact of the fashion industry in the project to set up a charity shop on campus, which seems like an important note on the impact of the fashion industry on waste and climate change.

Yes!

The edition comes out on March 18th in UEA's 'Climate Week' - Tell the readers about Climate Week and any events on the 19th, 20th and 21st that you're looking forward to!

So, Climate Week is completely student run. It's coming to UEA, it's not 'UEA climate week', but it's 'Climate Week at UEA' because it's run actually by an external institution, something called 'Youth Climate Solutions', which is founded and run by a second-year Environmental Sciences student called Jazz Brook. She is organising Climate Week, and she's organised all of us volunteers around her and around this group, which is incredible that she's been able to do this and props to her for it.

Climate week is effectively a five-day series of many events, talks, workshops, club and society engagements, stalls and more, and it's kind of for everyone. You know, there's bits of it for everyone because like I said, sustainability and environmentalism are for everyone. There's an environmental or sustainable careers fair that's coming to campus, which can help people look for careers that are specifically sustainability focused. But then again, I would also argue that all careers should be somewhat sustainable. There's a sustainable lifestyle fair as well where we're having local businesses come onto campus selling their stuff. We're having lots of different UEA institutions coming to talk about how to recycle properly and stuff like that. I'm running my charity shop for the first time during that time, so the charity shop will be coming to UEA for the first time!

Greenpeace is going to be involved as well and they're going to be giving a talk, lots of societies are doing events and talks, there's many climate journalists coming to speak, and I believe local government is coming as well! *I would strongly suggest you check out the Youth Climate Solutions Instagram to see the events in detail!*



Images and Venue front cover credit: Maggie Read.

Beyond the Male Gaze: The Women's Perspective

By Lilia Colledge

The male gaze, term coined by Laura Mulvey in 1975, has dominated art for centuries in the objectifying and sexualised portrayal of women.

This can be seen as early as the Renaissance, in paintings such as Sandro Botticelli's Birth of Venus, where Aphrodite, goddess of love, is depicted as nude. Ancient culture, unlike modern society, had no such stipulations surrounding nudity, with art typically presenting both men and women without clothes. This same attitude was translated to their gods and goddesses, who were presented in similar likeness. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Botticelli presents Venus in this way, as he attempts to be faithful to the culture he is presenting.

However, it is notable that there is a clear difference in the degree of nudity that the male and female figures display. While Zephyrus, the god of west wind, is covered everywhere apart from his chest, two of the three female figures are notably more exposed with their right breasts being depicted. This certainly suggests that the male gaze is present within this painting, as the attitude of nudity is not consistent across genders. Another example of the male gaze in art is in Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' Grande Odalisque, which depicts a woman in languid pose as she looks over her right-shoulder.

Ingres' elongation of the female's limbs demonstrates a desire to portray women in an idealised way that goes beyond the natural. In both cases, it is clear that the nudity of the female body is done to please the audience rather than convey a message in its own right. Art becoming a commodity is essential in understanding why art has been dominated by the male gaze, as, throughout history, the audiences of art have been predominantly male and thus catered to their preferences.

Now, in a world where art is no longer simply for male consumption, there has been an attempt to look beyond the male gaze, looking back at women in art who have been brushed aside and forward to the exploration of the female gaze. This can be seen in Wangechi Mutu's Yo Mama, which is a collage piece that depicts a female figure stamping on the head of serpent her stiletto.

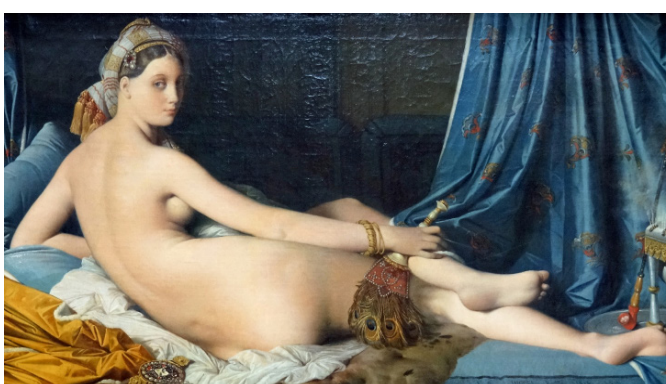
The figure presented is a representation of radical Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti, who was significant in the fight against female genital mutilation. While the femininity of the figure is central, the sexualisation of it is absent, with the body of the female representing a powerhouse of strength over the phallus-like, invading snake, that has symbolic links to the Bible and Eve, whose downfall has been part of the villainising narrative of women for centuries.

Another example of this can be seen in Mary Beth Edelson's Some Living American Women Artists, a subversive take on Leonardo De Vinci's The Last Supper. According to Edelson, she had "the double pleasure of presenting the names and faces of many women artists, who were seldom seen in 1972 . . . while spoofing the male exclusivity of the patriarchy." This piece simultaneously gives standing to female artists overlooked in history while giving them power, without objectifying them, by putting their faces in place of Jesus and his disciples. Senga Nengudi's R.S.V.P I outright rejects the idolisation of the female body inherent to the male gaze in her performance-based sculptures made of pantyhose.

The piece presents opposing ideals, with some of the sand-filled structures drooping and bulging, while others are taut and firm, representing the different forms the female body can take, especially when going through pregnancy and childbirth. can be seen earlier in art history, in pieces like Auguste Toulmache's The Reluctant Bride, where he presents a young woman angered by her arranged marriage. Not only is this subversive in its depiction of outright rejection of expected female behaviour, the pose that the central female figure adopts is slouched, rejecting the idealised image of the female body in favour of presenting a less attractive, rebellious message.

Ideas more subtly challenging the male gaze can be seen earlier in art history, in pieces like Auguste Toulmache's The Reluctant Bride, where he presents a young woman angered by her arranged marriage. Not only is this subversive in its depiction of outright rejection of expected female behaviour, the pose that the central female figure adopts is slouched, rejecting the idealised image of the female body in favour of presenting a less attractive, rebellious message. The piercing, direct look of the central female also challenges the traditional demure presentations of women in art history, whose gazes are often portrayed as looking to the side or down, making it hard for audiences to ignore her presence and the refusal to conform it represents. In comparison to art that caters to the male gaze, where the figures are made to be looked at, but unable to look back, the steely look of the woman directly stares down the viewer, almost daring them to try and make her an object to be observed.

Credit: Wikimedia Commons



Credit: Wikimedia Commons



Frida Kahlo is also another artist that goes beyond the male gaze in her paintings. This can be seen in one of her most famous artworks, The Two Fridas. It depicts two versions of herself, connected through an artery that is wounded. The uninhibited, graphic depiction of the hearts and the artery symbolise the pain that Kahlo feels at the rejection and separation from her husband. Instead of making this a piece that adheres to the male gaze, it embodies the female gaze in its bold addressal of the brutal reality of female anatomy and the pain she feels. A step further in this depiction of female suffering can be seen in her painting The Broken Column. While it does grapple with female nudity, it is done in a way that goes beyond the sexualisation of the female form that a male gaze painting might present. The striking depiction of the spinal cord that takes centre stage in this painting exposes the harsh reality and pain of spinal surgery and the toll it takes on the body. This is furthered in the littering of nails that stab into her flesh, demonstrating that the nudity of the female body here is an attempt to display the physical vulnerability the human body has, rather than an idealised form of femininity. A continuation of the suffering the female body endures is continued in some of her other works like My Birth and Henry Ford Hospital.

Both these paintings explore the reality of childbirth and complications that come with it, with Henry Ford Hospital depicting a miscarriage that Kahlo had. In My Birth, the naked body of the mother is presented as giving birth to the head of Kahlo, where below there is a stain of blood. Nudity, in this painting, is not sexualised, but there to represent the grotesque realities of birth and the toll it has on the mother, with the enlarged head symbolising the extreme pain that some mothers experience while giving birth. The overlooking of the Virgin Mary, in the throes of grief, suggests a certain helplessness in the female's suffering as she is forced to watch on in sympathy.

Again, in Henry Ford Hospital, the nakedness of the female body can similar be seen as demonstrating the suffering that Kahlo has endured. There is no idealisation of the female body here, but an emphasis on the realities of experiencing something as painful and traumatic as

a miscarriage. The six objects that surround the figure, including a foetus and snail, referencing the apparent slowness of time she felt during this event, all culminate in the melancholic but strikingly honest depiction of her experience.

With March marking Women's History month, it reminds us of the importance of giving voices to those that have been previously ignored in history. By giving attention to female artists that have been overlooked and striving to look beyond the male gaze in art, by presenting different narratives than just the sexualisation and idealisation of women, who have historically been made as props or part of the scenery to be merely observed for nothing other than their appeal to men, we open up the art world from its male-dominated history.

Looking at the variety of artists that have challenged this narrative, by rejecting female expectations in society and exposing the realities of the female body and female suffering, it demonstrates the wealth of diverse perspectives that we gain from giving light to these voices, allowing us to garner a broader understanding of modern society outside of the male perspective.

'My Wife's Lovers: The First, Not So Crazy, Cat Lady.

By Annabel Knill

The title of a painting can reveal much about its context, including the intended perspective, setting, or the identities of the figures depicted. Without the title *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), Eugène Delacroix's piece becomes simply a chaotic battle scene, confusing many art historians over the identity of the central woman. The title emphasizes the female figure as the personification of Liberty, leading revolutions to victory and the paintings overall political message. Furthermore, René Magritte's meaning behind her painting *The Treachery of Images* (1929) would be lost without words.

However, this is not the case for Carl Kahler's 1891 oil painting, commissioned by American billionaire Kate Birdsall Johnson, titled *My Wife's Lovers*. Given the stir caused by this lavishly languid artwork, it's safe to assume that Kate's husband, Robert C. Johnson, held a modest position in her hierarchy of affections and that is second to all her 42 cats depicted in the painting *My Wife's Lovers*. Perhaps becoming the first known crazy cat lady, Kate Johnson paid the huge amount of £5,000, around £170,000 today, for this massive 1.8m x 2.6m (6 ft x 8.5 ft) painting. Although it has been disputed, it is believed that Johnson owned around 350 cats in her summer house in Buena Vista, California, leaving her cats half her fortune in her will.

Having never painted a cat before Kahler spent three years studying the anatomy of cats, capturing all 42 cats in turn surrounding the central cat named Sultan. Lending the painting in 1893 to Chicago World's fair, in the next year it was acquired by Ernest Haquette for his Palace of Art Salon in San Francisco. After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake the *My Wife's Lovers* survived, shining bright in the wreckage of the salon it was housed, which was not so lucky.

It's therefore safe to say that cats really do land on their feet, all 42 of them!



Credit for both images: Wikimedia Commons.



Fanart vs Fine Art: Distinction or Desecration?

By Andi Gill

My first instinct when asked "Is fan art a form of real art?" was simply no. There's some insanely good fan art out there, and much of it is inspired by classical painting and portraiture, but it was hard to fight my instinctual desire to separate colored-pencil drawings from a Rembrandt. Initially, I decided that it was because fan art portrayed fictional characters. Real art is portraits of real people, real scenes, real objects, right? But then, some of the most celebrated classical art depicts stories from the Bible.

Salome holding the head of St. John, The Creation of Adam, The Last Supper; aren't these fan art of the Bible? You could argue that it's different because it's religion, and a personal level of devotion is involved, but then I could argue that I've met Star Wars fans who are more devoted to Princess Leia than some people will ever be to a religion. The line cannot be drawn on whether or not the subject is worthy, or else Rembrandt may find himself kicked out of the "fine art" club.

Then is it technique, perhaps, which sets fine art apart from fan art? Initially, again, my instinct is yes, because clearly a pencil drawing cannot be equated to an oil painting. But even if that's true,

Credit: Wikimedia Commons



and one could argue that it isn't, many fan artists use classical painting techniques.

There are portraits of Daenerys Targaryen that could blend in at the Louvre, and paintings of Arwen and Aragorn that would look perfectly in place next to a Millais. Fan art doesn't just copy techniques, either.

here are online artists whose real names may never be known, yet their work has pushed the envelope for other artists. A fan artist for *Sword Art Online* invented a new way of creating brushes in online software and shared it for free so that other artists could use them. Aside from technique, fan art has helped real causes in society. Fan artists have repopularised commissioning art for loved ones, a practice which had rapidly faded out of modern art culture. Fan artists have used their Patreons to raise money for charities, wildfire relief, and hospitals. Perhaps most importantly, fan art has given artists a path of income in a time when AI is wreaking havoc on the world of fine art with increasingly uncanny imitations. Fandoms have rallied around their artists, and while many traditional artists are celebrated in their communities, few of them have communities so vast and so dedicated as a fandom.

Lastly, I considered whether the label is what sets them apart. Fan art is sometimes relegated to just one word, fanart, because it doesn't deserve to be called art, since it clearly isn't real art... yet, after considering how to distinguish the two from each other, I think my instincts were wrong. For every argument I could set forth, a counterargument could be made, a counterexample could be seen. And isn't the purpose of art to challenge our thinking?

International Theatre Institute's World Theatre Day

by Lilia Colledge

27th March marks this year's World Theatre Day. Being celebrated since 1962, the day invites all those involved in the theatrical world and those who appreciate it as an artform to celebrate the joy it brings, and the work that gets put into performances across the world. This year, celebrations are happening in Rio de Janeiro from 27th-30th March. Every year, an author message is released by a leading industry figure, expressing their takes on theatre. This year's author is Theodoros Terzopoulos, who is an internationally acclaimed director of the theatre being given many awards like the Grand Theatre Award of the Hellenic Association of Theatre Critics, Performing Arts 2024 and Best Direction Award 1994. His message poses a series of questions, ranging from the theatres' concern with the climate crisis and the human condition. He powerfully opens it by asking, "can theatre hear the SOS call that our times are sending out, in a world of impoverished citizens, locked in cells of virtual reality, entrenched in their suffocating privacy?" This raises questions about the place theatre still holds in a world being consumed with technology.

Theatre has always been concerned with expressing stories, but this has developed across history: from the Ancient Greek tragedies celebrating Dionysus; to the medieval period where theatres were dominated with expressing Christian messages; to the Renaissance, where one of history's most influential playwrights, William Shakespeare, emerged with his comedy, history and tragedy plays. In

many regards, his plays are like festivals, facilitating roleplaying and licensed social mobility for the duration of their enfoldings. It is fitting then, that festivals are used today to celebrate the theatrical world and express people's love for this artform.

For most of history, the theatre has been a central part of human connection and community, bringing people together from all social classes for a unified moment - but the question that Terzopoulos seems to ask is whether it still has the same place in our lives as it did for the rest of history. Technology has facilitated the rise of many different forms of entertainment, ranging from television to radio and film to name a few. In this regard, theatre's centrality has taken a back step as people's attention splits between varying different artforms. Theatres were also hit hard during the pandemic, but five years on, theatres seem to be thriving. I think that people have continued to go to the theatre, despite the impact of technology, because of its unique ability to connect with its audience in a way that surpasses storytelling to collaboration and communication. Theatre is able to engage with its audience in real-time, breaking the barrier of disconnect by calling for audience involvement, - making it more of a cooperation between audience and actors, rather than something to simply watch passively. I think this is added by the close proximity of the action, making audiences feel involved in the sto-

ry. Notably, there is no performance without an audience, highlighting the importance of this two-way engagement. Another thing that makes theatre stand out against the other forms of entertainment is that it allows for moments of undivided attention that are hard to find elsewhere in the modern world. For me, the one time when I don't feel the absence of my phone niggling in the back of my mind is when I'm at the theatre. Great performances allow me to get fully invested in the story unfolding like no other artform can.

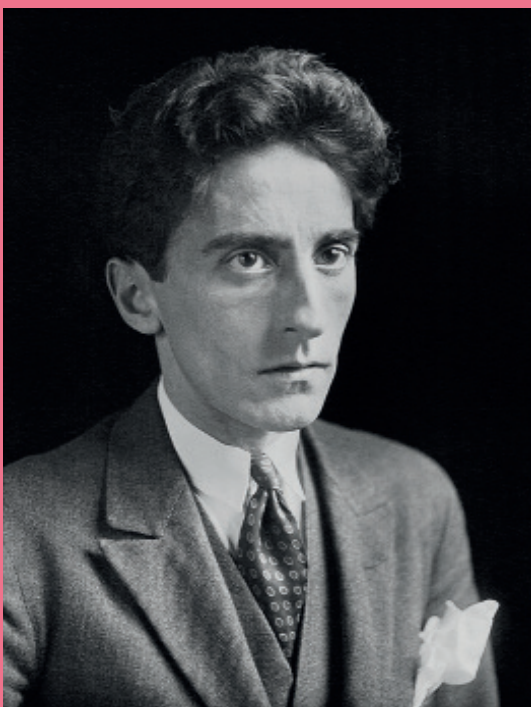
In Norwich, we have a wealth of theatres, including the Norwich Theatre Royal, Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich Playhouse and Stage Two. So, as we get closer and closer to World Theatre Day, why not check out some of the great shows being performed, varying from 'Lay Down Your Burdens' showing between 28th-29th March at the Theatre Royal and a take on Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard* at Maddermarket on 25th March, to celebrate this fantastic day.



Above Right: A 2008 production of *The Laramie Project* at Mary Institute and St. Louis Country Day School

Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Credit: Wikimedia Commons



John Cocteau, Speaker for the first World Theatre Day

Why do we have World Theatre Day?

By Hannah Foley

World Theatre Day was initiated in 1961 by the International Theatre Institute ITI.

A key part of this event is a key speaker giving a speech on the theme of Theatre and a Culture of Peace. The first World Theatre Day Message was written by Jean Cocteau in 1962. In his speech, he describes how in theatre audiences have an "almost childlike soul, leaving its beliefs and opinions in the cloakroom, ready to pick them up again after the performance." His words have become key to the goals of World Theatre Day, speaking about the magic of theatre, and its unifying force.

In the event's aims they describe sharing joy, and enjoyment of theatre, as well as promoting theatre in all its forms worldwide. But key to the event is also raising an awareness of the value of theatre, particularly to help gain support from governments and opinion leaders.

The Laramie Project, written by Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project was a reaction to the murder of Matthew Shepard. In 1998, the 21-year-old student was attacked due to his sexual orientation. The play has helped to tackle homophobia, raising awareness in schools, and inspiring individuals. After viewing the project, Dan Walton donated over 500 books and other media to the University of Wyoming's Rainbow Resource Center. The campus office remains the largest LGBTQ library in the state of Wyoming. In 2009, the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act was passed in response to the murders.

Through storytelling, an audience is allowed to adopt the "child-like soul" described by Jean Cocteau. Audiences generate empathy for the characters and storyline they see on stage, and allows a space for diverse voices they may not otherwise hear. It is a plat-

A Review of Jamie Lloyd Company's Much Ado about Nothing

By Lilia

Jamie Lloyd's direction of *Much Ado about Nothing* deals with the complexity of Shakespeare's timeless comedy, balancing the tragedy that is scarcely missed in the harsh treatment of Beatrice and the joyousness of reunion at the end perfectly. By reimagining the play with a 1990s disco/club twist, Lloyd is able to capture a moment of fuchsia exuberance that is infectious, especially paired with the classic hits that intersperse Shakespeare's verse.

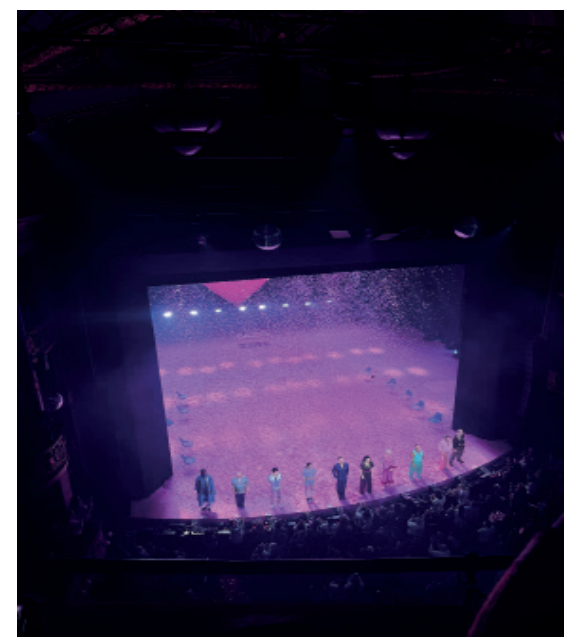
Big names, such as Tom Hiddleston and Hayley Atwell, bring this hedonistic world to life. Nothing expresses the sybaritic world of the play more than the stage, which is constantly covered in a layer of vibrant, pink confetti. Not only is this visually effective, but it is also a great comedic device.

A staple of Shakespeare is playing with who can and can't hear conversations within the diegetic world, and *Much Ado about Nothing* is no exception. Towards the middle of the play, Tom, as Benedick, conceals himself in a dramatic flair beneath the piles of confetti, causing much laughter from the audience.

This action is increasingly exaggerated to comedic effect, with ridiculous throwing of confetti and hilariously obvious hiding behind a large, inflated heart while the very people Benedick hides from are aware of his presence. The reception of this pivotal scene is testament to the clever use of staging in this production, maximising the dramatic irony that Shakespeare's plays favour so much.

Another extremely effective piece of staging can be seen in the party scenes, where the actors are all donned with elaborate headdresses. While interchanging groups of actors take centre stage with their discussions, those not involved perform party scenes in 'slow motion' behind, depicting scenes of revelry that slowly descend into a hazy, psychedelic trance as the play hurtles towards tragedy.

Lloyd's production rejuvenates this classic, making it a must-see show of 2025 before it finishes in April. Simply euphoric.



Credit: Lilia Colledge

A Review of Girl on the Train at Norwich Theatre Royal

By Lilia Colledge

Adapted from Paula Hawkins' novel, *Girl on the Train* has been touring the UK. I was lucky enough to see it for my birthday on opening night when it came to Norwich Theatre Royal. This performance was my first experience with a thriller at the theatre. While I am familiar with thrillers on film and television, I wasn't sure how this would translate to stage, especially considering my unfamiliarity with this particular story.

I was pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed this performance. I think the production was extremely successful in creating a chilling atmosphere through the eerie music that pervaded the play and the dark lighting that dominated most of the stage, with the exception of one harsh light that always seemed to be on Rachel, played by Giovanna Fletcher, creating a stifling intensity. Also, a claustrophobic feel was created through the 'slow motion' transitions, replicating the experience in London train stations,

where time almost seemed like it sped up as Rachel was pushed around in her drunken state on the train. Through this, the performance was able to capture this sense of movement that is essential to a train journey.

Fletcher, a famous author, podcaster and Queen of the Jungle in 2020, fantastically brought the unreliable Rachel to life, through her on-point mannerisms and altering of speech to make it seem slightly slurred. The stage leant well to this oppressive intensity that Rachel seems to feel internally as she suffers from memory loss and struggles to piece together the truth to understand who committed the murder. This culminates in the powerful ending of the play, where a loud train horn pierces the air, and the lights of the stage emulate that of an oncoming train to end the dramatic discovery of the murderer's identity. All-in-all this was a great introduction for me into stage thrillers and I will certainly be going to see more in the future.



Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Upcoming Performances

By Hannah Foley

With this month being World Theatre Day, what better time to make a visit to the theatre? Here's a brief look into local performances coming up.

On our very own UEA campus, you may have just missed out on the Drama and Musical Theatre Society's performance of *Our House* - however keep an eye out for their next Performance and New Theatre Showcase, also known as PANTS, for a more casual environment full of great talent. The start of this month the UEA drama studio also hosted Minotaur Theatre Company's *The Bacchae*.

On March 26th-29th, Sacré Théâtre will be performing *Le Chasseur français* by Boris Vian at UEA Drama Studio. The play is about a popular newspaper, suspicious about some of the messages in its personal column, who hires detectives to snoop on the arranged rendezvous. Sacré Théâtre are a French language theatre company, who have performed since 1999.

UEA's Burlesque Society is hosting a Fundraiser Show alongside Snapdragon Cabaret. You can watch their cabaret night on March 20th in the LCR. All proceeds are going to the charity Eating Matters. You can expect burlesque routines, drag acts, dance numbers, and even a little standup comedy.

The cast for Norfolk and Norwich Operatic Society's production of *Les Misérables* has just been announced, which will be performed at the Norwich Theatre Royal later this year. This is part of a nationwide project allowing 11 amateur companies to produce their own versions as part of the show's 40th Anniversary Celebrations this year.

At Cinema City, there are various showings this month of pre-recorded live performances.

This includes The Royal Ballet and Opera's *Romeo and Juliet*, and National Theatre's *Dr Strangelove*.

The Fashion Police Investigates: The 2025 Oscars

By Jade Drever

The Academy Awards showcase the very best the industry has to offer to the world of film. But it's time to call in the Fashion Police to investigate this year's style hits and misses. So, let's take a dive into the outfits of the Oscars with the five best and worst looks from the red carpet.

Best

5 - There's nothing I hate more than the inevitable onslaught of men wearing plain black suits to events and that's why I'm so thankful for Colman Domingo. When it comes to fashion (and acting of course) this man never misses. He wore a gorgeous red Valentino suit jacket with wrap tie, black lapels, and black suit trousers. This effortlessly stylish look has made me even more excited to see what he brings to the table as one of this year's Met Gala co-chairs.

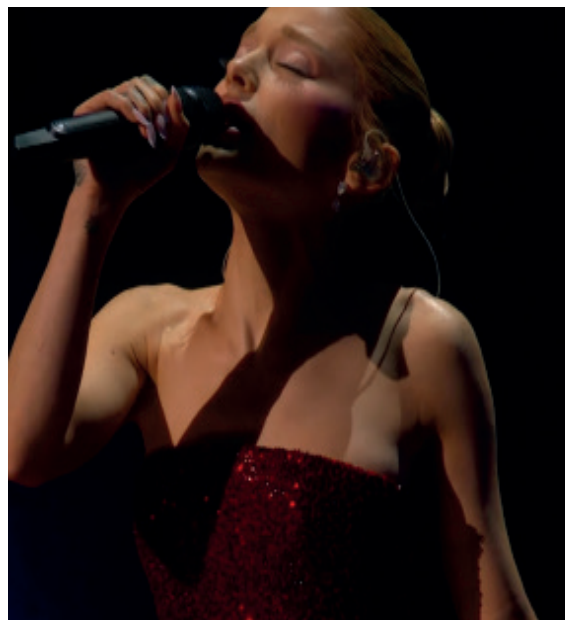
4 - Before performing in the James Bond tribute, singer-songwriter Raye served old Hollywood glamour in a beautiful Vivienne Westwood dress. The corseted, off the shoulder dress was complete with a sparkling silver and ruby necklace.

3 - Fellow James Bond tribute performer and K-Pop star Lisa turned heads in a stunning Mark Gong tuxedo. This black and white number played on the traditional suit style, adding a certain femininity with its floor length silhouette.

2 - Actress Storm Reid stunned in a gorgeous Alexandre Vauthier gown. The red mini dress was paired with a matching flowing, frilled cloak, creating a fun and playful look, perfect for the red carpet.

1 - And finally, actress Lupita Nyong'o

donned my favourite look of the night. She looked ethereal in a simply stunning Chanel look. The A-line white dress was complete with delicate pearl beaded spaghetti straps and netted bodice. This gave the illusion of an exposed bra which was also a very popular trend of the night.



Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Worst

5 - Now, I have very mixed feelings about Best Actress winner Zoe Saldana's look. I love the rich burgundy colour and the netted, diamante top, however, it's the silhouette of the skirt that I just cannot get past. The strange bubble layers awkwardly dividing her frame

into three sections ultimately did nothing for this look.

4 - Best Supporting Actress nominee Ariana Grande wore her final Glinda inspired dress (until the sequel), designed by Schiaparelli and De Beers. The nude, structured bodice and champagne, glittering skirt created the effect of what I can only describe as a lampshade.

3 - Unfortunately, Zoe Saldana cannot escape the scrutiny of the Fashion Police as her after party look also falls onto my worst dressed list. Saint Laurent paired a long sleeve, scoop neck, black top that was just too casual for the Oscars, with a nude, ruffled, high-low skirt which ultimately reminded me of intestines. I'm almost certain this was not the response they were hoping for, but here we are.

2 - While I applaud legendary actress Whoopi Goldberg for taking a fashion risk at a largely formulaic event, this Christian Siriano dress was simply not the way to go. This wet look, latex ballgown (words I am convinced should never be put together again) was just too strange, and while metallics were certainly trending on the red carpet this year, this vinyl look just missed the mark.

1 - Finally, actress Sarah Paulson gave us undoubtedly the worst look of the night. My initial reaction was quite literally 'mutated red blood cell.' This puffy Marc Jacobs dress served more globules than glamour with giant padded blobs on her shoulders, behind, and hemline. At least she could take a nap on those pillows during Adrien Brody's 'record breaking-ly' long acceptance speech.

The Anti-Aging Epidemic

By Andi Gill



Credit: Wikimedia Commons

"Take off my morning shed with me!"

"Come with me to get my lower blepharoplasty!"

"Let me show you the best place to get botox in NYC!"

Scrolling on Tiktok, you're bound to see at least a few

videos like these from time to time. It starts to feel strange, though. 19-year-olds talking about anti-aging skincare when they still look like minors. 30-year-olds giving advice to their younger selves about how they should have started reapplying sunscreen multiple times a day; helpful on paper, but the undercurrent of the video whispers maybe then you wouldn't look like this, all wrinkled and damaged. Society seems to have pushed the anti-aging narrative so hard that even those who don't show any visible signs of aging are getting "preventative" botox.

I understand the impulse behind aesthetic enhancements perfectly well. Everyone has insecurities, bits and imperfections they would love to have permanently fixed. And in a world where people, especially women, are constantly told that "beauty is pain," it isn't that surprising that so many have jumped in feetfirst without knowing the potential consequences. Botox is a toxin that paralyzes the muscles in your face. Repetitive use of botox has not been scientifically studied enough to know what the long-term effects are. Yet, because plastic surgeons can't see any short-term issues, it's been touted as perfectly safe. Although I don't think people who choose

to have aesthetic surgeries, or manage their aging process through skincare, should be shamed in any way, it is necessary to take a step back and think critically about what the long-term effects will be. In 20 years, will filler reversals become common practice? With more research being done on filler migration (wherein the filler material used to make skin look plumper in certain areas begins to spread outward), we now know that filler doesn't just stay in place, and in fact can spread to the entire face. What does this do to our lymphatic system? It's obviously conjecture, but injecting fluid into the system designed to keep fluid levels balanced seems like it will have side effects, and given that the other job of the lymphatic system is to defend against infections, I'm afraid for what they'll be. Are botox and filler becoming the lead makeup of our time? Will the Kardashians become the 21st century equivalent to Queen Elizabeth I, applying more and more cosmetics to hide the damage wrought by them? It's already been speculated that Kylie Jenner had to be treated for filler migration, and if a billionaire with some of the best aesthetic treatments in the world has already started suffering the consequences, it can't be that long before the anti-aging epidemic claims more victims.

Style and Sustainability: The Realities of Fast Fashion

By Rachel Ellis

Confession: I sometimes buy fast fashion. I learned about its impact in high school, and how to sew my own clothes, and I follow slow-fashion and under-consumption online. Fast fashion is everywhere, available all the time, quicker and easier to shop than ever before. But what really is fast-fashion?

It's often mentioned in climate and ethical discourse, and the OED definition is "inexpensive clothing produced rapidly by mass-market retailers," c. 1975. But to understand how it started, we look further back. Vogue explains that the late-1800's fashion industry designed and produced two annual collections: Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer, not the rapid trend cycles dominating today.

Textile production changed drastically after the industrial revolution: mass production, mass marketing, mass consumption. Increased production means increased demand, increasing trends - and repeat. By the 1990's, high-street brands accelerated the cycle to weekly micro-seasons, and today e-commerce giants Shein and Temu use algorithmic analysis to add up to 10,000 new items daily.

Accessibility and affordability of clothing essentials is important, as is individual expression through fashion, but the industry's sheer scale vastly outstrips necessity into problematic excess, presenting huge sustainability issues across production, consumption, and waste management.

Cheap mass production needs cheap materials and cheap labour. A 2023 report found that 50% of fibre production uses petrochemicals. Oil-based fabrics like polyester shed microplastic fibres, ending up in water systems as remote as the Arctic. Natural fibres like cotton or linen eventually biodegrade, rather than pollute, and garments usually last longer. It's worth noting, however, that producing natural or recycled fabrics can be resource-heavy, so overproduction issues remain.

Fossil fuels aren't just used for fabrics: the UN holds the fashion industry responsible for up to 10% of global emissions. According to Yale Climate Connections, Shein is the industry's biggest polluter. In 2023, they doubled their annual emissions and produced 16.7 million metric tons of CO2.

YCC partly blame Shein's use of AI for real-time analysis of consumer buying data: by tracking live sales, the brand can get a garment from design to online in just ten days. Resource-hungry AI helps the brand capitalise on micro-trends, along with massive copyright infringement and worker exploitation. Workers clock-in 75-hour weeks in dangerous conditions, often only highlighted in our media after tragedies like the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh, which killed over 1,000 people and injured thousands more.

It can be easy to forget the realities of fast fashion, with mostly overseas manufacturing and brands 'greenwashing' their image. Shein's website presents optimistic sustainability targets, like using 31% recycled polyester by 2030 (currently 3%), and other brands do too: 'Primark Cares' pledge to "strengthen the durability" of their garments by 2030, and H&M offers shoppers vouchers for donating unwanted clothing in store for recycling. But these are just sales tactics dressed up in the language of sustainability, aiming to drive profit and continue the fast-fashion cycle.

A Parliamentary report says we buy more clothing per person than anywhere in Europe: Oxfam found that the average Brit only regularly wears 44% of their wardrobe. The first step towards sustainable fashion must be slowing down our purchasing - new or second hand. While donating unwanted clothing feels like helping, donations outmatch demand, and much is shipped abroad or dumped at sea.

In Ghana, second-hand clothing imports devastate local textile production and pollute waterways, which charity The Or Foundation works to counter. Their project "Stop Waste Colonialism" evidences the damage done to the Global South by Western fashion commerce and highlights the hypocrisy of major brands' sustainability commitments. The "TagUrt" campaign tracks brand labels found during beach cleanups and identified 2800 brands 2023-24 - including items from recycling schemes like H&M's.

There's a lot more to say about the injustices of fast fashion, but there has to be space for action. Awareness goes a long way; being a conscious consumer helps people, planet, and purse.

Being mindful when browsing and asking ourselves if we really need a new pair of jeans or that trending shirt helps to slow down overconsumption. Clothing rentals are ideal substitutions for wear-it-once occasion-wear. Often when clothes wear out, simple repairs can extend the life of favourite items. I love the #visiblemending trend and BBC's Sewing Bee always gives me new ideas. Honestly, you can't go wrong with the classic "Reduce Reuse Recycle" mantra.

When we need to buy something, there are loads of great second-hand options: charity shops, vintage (or vintage charity shops - kudos Sue Ryder!), car-boot sales, or online. Buying new? 'Vote with your wallet': supporting circular fashion brands like Unfolded or The R Collective shows demand for sustainability.

The most important thing you can do is keep your head out of the sand. Big corporations get away with exploiting workers and resources when we don't pay attention but keeping the conversation going pressures businesses and regulators to make changes. With fast fashion, everyone pays the price.

A Look into Three Female Fashion Icons

Women have had an enormous impact on the world of fashion, and this women's history month, we have decided to look into three female style icons from throughout the twentieth century to now that have sparked conversation across households, making their wardrobes well-known even to those who are not invested in the fashion world.

Marilyn Monroe

As far as fashion icons of the 20th century, there are few that are quite as well-remembered famous as Marilyn Monroe.

In 1956 Monroe met Queen Elizabeth in a dress that broke all established protocols for meeting royalty. A gold lamé gown probably made her look queenly herself rather than 'conservative' in accordance with the established rules. One of her most famous dresses was the sheer beige Bob Mackie dress she wore to sing happy birthday to President John F. Kennedy. Aside from the white pleated dress she wore over a subway grate, this was probably her most famous outfit of all time. The impact of this dress can still be seen in nowadays in Kim Kardashian's controversial choice to wear the exact same dress to the Met Gala a few years ago. Just like all actresses from Golden Era Hollywood, Monroe's life was filled with just as many scandalous outfits as it was real life scandalous moments.

- Robyn Srikandan



Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Princess Diana

Princess Diana was more than just a royal - she was an undeniable, influential force in the fashion world. Her style was radical, often breaking royal protocol with her iconic, effortless combinations of oversized sweaters paired with cycling shorts. Her relatable fashion choices were bold, ultimately cementing her status as a trendsetter, and her revolutionary casual style continues to inspire today's generation. High-profile celebrities like Bella Hadid frequently mimic Diana's signature aesthetic, proving that her influence over fashion remains strong. Even after her passing, Diana's fashion legacy endures - the mark of a true fashion icon.

Though she was celebrated for her off-duty style, per

haps Diana's most iconic fashion moment was her renowned Revenge Dress: a striking, off-the-shoulder black gown worn the same night Prince Charles publicly admitted to his infidelity. With this dress, Diana not only radiated sophistication but also made a compelling statement of resilience and independence. This reinforced her status not only as a fashion icon, but as a symbol of female empowerment.

- Polly Dye

Zendaya

Zendaya's celebrity status extends far beyond her on-screen presence as an actress. With the help of her stylist, Law Roach, she has cemented herself as a cultural force in fashion.

Her style evolution has been as powerful as it is intentional. Following Giuliana Rancic's offensive remarks about her dreadlocks at the 2015 Oscars - where she stunned in a white off-the-shoulder Vivienne Westwood gown - Zendaya has continued to champion Black hair, ensuring its representation remains a central conversation in the industry. Recently, she has seamlessly melded her acting and fashion careers through her mastery of method dressing, with standout moments in her Challengers-inspired novel tennis ball shoe heels and her Dune-inspired Mugler robot suit.

Zendaya embodies a sense of "cool" that can't be manufactured. It is not about the look, but boldness she emulates in her unapologetic expression of fashion.

- Charlotte Ward

Gaming

Editor: Abby Eastwick

Sims 4: The Death of the Sequel

by Elle McKinnell-Michael

In May 2024, EA announced they had created a team to invest in the core game experience of the *Sims 4*, noting their particular focus on 'previously reported issues, quality assurance and game optimisation for future releases'. This announcement came at a time of great speculation about a fifth installment to the *Sims* life-simulator series, given that it had been nearly a decade since the release of *Sims 4*. Later, in September, EA released a shocking announcement, claiming that they are going to 'disrupt the sequel model', as they revealed plans for a huge new *Sims* platform, as well as the so-called 'Project Rene'.

EA has since clarified their plans for the new *Sims 4* platform, adding to their planned optimisation of the game with the announcement of new features like a marketplace, social and creator tools, and more. EA described their mission to keep *Sims 4* alive, stating that they 'will be updating the core technology foundation for the product' and that they 'will release fun and exciting content for many years to come'.

Project Rene, however, appears to be a completely new

endeavor for the company. While the game is said to be set in the same universe as the original *Sims* franchise, the format will differ greatly. Straying from the original franchise's single player format, the Project Rene installment will feature single-player and multi-player capability; it will also be available on mobile devices.

Project Rene is still under development, with EA yet to announce a release date, however it is confirmed to be free-to-play. This announcement reflects a wider departure by EA from the pay-to-play model. In 2022, EA announced that the *Sims 4* base game would become free, with optional paid expansions. The *Sims* franchise has always been known for its costly DLCs, but the switch to this model could be seen as a modernisation of the series, a departure from the paid video game model – a vestige of CD games which are now widely considered obsolete in PC gaming circles.

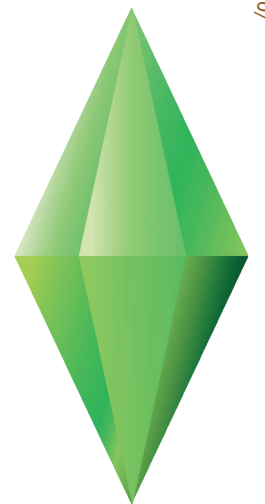
MMORPGs like *RuneScape* and *Furcadia* have followed the free-to-play model for decades, and mobile games like *Clash of Clans* and *Pokémon GO* have been free since their release, but for a long period of

time it was expected that larger-scale PC and console projects were made to be purchased at a high initial cost, with little need for future purchases. Games like *Fortnite* and *Apex Legends* drove the change to the F2P (free-to-play) model, discovering huge profits were available in this format, even for blockbuster releases. Now, even huge games like *Overwatch 2* and *Call of Duty: Warzone* have aligned with this model, in which in-game currency, cosmetics or battle passes can be purchased by the player.

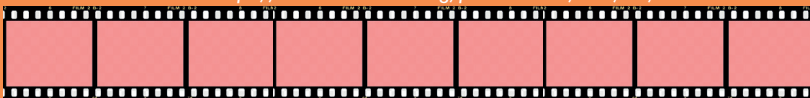
EA's plans for the *Sims* franchise signal new developments for the company, with many 'Simmers' upset about the systematic changes revealed for the new projects. However, these changes didn't come as a surprise for many fans of the franchise - they're simply reflective of a changing industry.



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Hideo Kojima always wanted to make movies. According to the man himself, 70% of his body is made of them. So how did he end up becoming one of gaming's first, and greatest, auteurs?

As a child, Kojima was obsessed with watching movies. It was through his father, Kingo Kojima, that Hideo developed both this love for film and the anti-war sentiment that would take centre stage throughout his future work. His father's death when he was just 13 is also perhaps why fathers play such prominent roles in his work.

Despite having ambitions to become a film director, Kojima decided in his fourth year of college to join the game industry, joining Konami's home computer division MSX in 1986 and releasing his first game, *Metal Gear*, a year later. Kojima's early games were critically acclaimed in Japan, with him releas-

ing a sequel to *Metal Gear*, as well as *Snatcher* and *Policenauts* (*Snatcher*'s spiritual successor), the latter of which he calls his "independent film" compared to the "blockbuster" *Metal Gear* franchise.

It was with the release of *Metal Gear Solid* for the PlayStation in 1998 that Kojima truly became internationally famous in the gaming community. It is hard to overstate just how groundbreaking *Metal Gear Solid* was upon its release in 1998, as it managed to reconceptualise the stealth-action genre and pushed the boundaries between games and cinema in a way that had been envisioned, but never fully committed to, before. With the game's success, Kojima had already cemented himself as a master of his craft.

Throughout the 2000's Kojima directed, designed, produced and wrote a slew of *Metal Gear* games, including the original *Metal Gear Solid* trilogy, *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* and *Metal Gear Solid IV: Guns of the Patriots*, which are often cited individually as some of the greatest games ever made. He also produced the oft-forgotten *Zone of the Enders* series. After the release of 2015's *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (MGS:V), Kojima left Konami and formed Kojima Productions.

This new studio's first game was 2019's *Death Stranding*, which declared itself the world's first "strand-type" game. In true Kojima fashion, *Death Stranding*

was incredibly prescient, with its themes of connection and isolation bearing eerie similarities to the COVID-19 pandemic that happened a year later. Kojima is currently collaborating with A24 to make a *Death Stranding* film adaptation, finally fulfilling his childhood dream of making movies. This will not be the first time he has worked with film directors. In 2014 he was collaborating with Guillermo Del Toro on a new *Silent Hill* game, *Silent Hills*, until the project was cancelled, which remains a tremendous loss for both the horror genre and the industry at large.

Kojima's popularity has only skyrocketed in recent years, with many having heard his name, even if they are not familiar with his work. He regularly posts to his social media accounts, either documenting and reviewing the films he's watched, the celebrities he's met, or just pictures of what he is doing on a day-to-day basis. Today he is as well known for his eccentricity and online presence as he is for his groundbreaking fiction.

It is a hugely exciting time for Kojima and fans of his work. Upcoming releases for Kojima Productions include *Death Stranding 2: On the Beach, OD* (a horror game that softens the blow of *Silent Hills* being cancelled) and *PhysInt*, which marks Kojima's first venture into the stealth-action genre since MGS:V and, according to Kojima, will be the "culmination of his work". It seems like the best is yet to come.



Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Gacha Gaming and Microtransactions: The Free-to-Play Facade

by Abby Eastwick

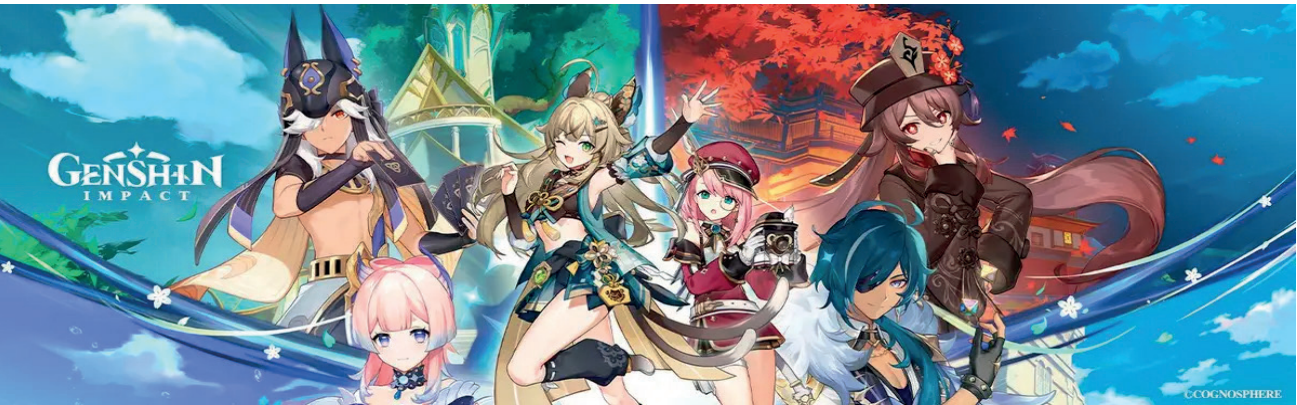
In the modern gaming landscape, few models have been as successful - yet as controversial - as the free-to-play (F2P) gacha system. Once a niche monetisation strategy, it has since dominated the mobile and live-service gaming industry, with titles like *Genshin Impact*, *Jujutsu Kaisen: Phantom Parade*, and *Love and Deepspace* exemplifying its strengths and shortcomings. While these games offer immersive experiences that captivate millions, their monetisation practices expose an exploitative side of game development that raises ethical concerns.

The Gacha Model: What Makes It Work?

The term “gacha” originates from Japanese capsule-toy vending machines, where players spend money for a chance to win a random prize. A similar mechanic has been seamlessly adapted into gaming, where players pull for in-game characters, weapons, or upgrades - often with incredibly low drop rates for the most desirable rewards. Despite its gambling-like structure, the gacha model has proven wildly successful. Games like *Genshin Impact* and *Love and Deepspace* generate billions in revenue, all while staying ostensibly “free-to-play.”

One key reason for the success of this model is the psychological engagement it fosters. The thrill of pulling a rare five-star character or obtaining a limited-time item taps into the human brain’s reward system, encouraging repeated spending. In games like *Genshin Impact*, where powerful characters and weapons are locked behind gacha banners, the temptation to spend “just one more pull” is ever-present.

Beyond psychological triggers, these games also excel in world-building and presentation. *Genshin Impact*, for instance, offers a vast open world, high-quality animation, and engaging storylines that rival premium RPGs. Meanwhile, *Love and Deepspace* - a romance-based gacha game - uses emotional storytelling and immer-



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sive experiences to create an even stronger attachment between the player and the game’s characters. It’s this combination of quality content and predatory monetisation that makes gacha games so successful.

The Exploitation Problem

Despite their popularity, gacha games have come under fire for their exploitative practices. One of the biggest issues is the deceptive nature of microtransactions. These games often use complex in-game currencies that obscure the real-world cost of purchases. Players often spend money without fully grasping how much they’ve invested, leading to overspending and, in extreme cases, gambling-like addiction.

Games like *Jujutsu Kaisen: Phantom Parade* exemplify how F2P games encourage spending through artificially scarce resources. Limited-time banners create a sense of urgency, making players feel as though they must spend at once or risk losing the opportunity forever. The odds of pulling a desirable character are usually abysmally low, further encouraging players to keep spending in hopes of getting lucky.

Additionally, some gacha games suffer from a form of “lazy development,” where the monetisation model takes precedence over gameplay innovation. Rather than prioritising engaging mechanics or diverse content, some developers focus on drip-feeding new gacha banners to support player spending. While *Genshin Impact* largely avoids this by consistently delivering high-quality content updates, other games, particularly mobile-based titles, often rely on reskinned events and repetitive mechanics.

When It’s Done Too Well: Love and Deepspace

Some games, like *Love and Deepspace*, go even further in their monetisation strategies by leveraging emotional immersion. Unlike traditional gacha RPGs, *Love and Deepspace* is a romance simulation game that knows exactly how to appeal to its audience. It crafts a deeply emotional experience, making players feel personally connected to the characters. Through interactive dialogue, voice acting, and stunning 3D visuals, the game builds a sense of intimacy that encourages spending - not out of necessity, but out of emotional attachment.

This level of psychological engagement is, in many ways, more insidious than standard gacha mechanics. While a player of *Genshin Impact* might feel compelled to spend for a strong character, *Love and Deepspace*

players often spend to deepen their connection with in-game love interests. It taps into human emotions in a way that is as impressive as it is ethically concerning.

The Other Side of the Coin: Why These Games Are So Popular

Despite their flaws, it’s impossible to ignore why these games are as successful as they are. Beyond just monetisation, they offer genuinely engaging experiences that rival traditional paid games. *Genshin Impact*’s exploration mechanics, *Jujutsu Kaisen: Phantom Parade*’s stunning animations, and *Love and Deepspace*’s emotionally charged storytelling all contribute to their success.

Moreover, gacha games thrive on their social elements. Online communities dedicated to discussing strategies, character builds, and upcoming updates help keep player interest. The excitement of a new banner or a highly anticipated event fosters a sense of shared enthusiasm among players, keeping them engaged even when they aren’t actively spending.

Is There a Future Beyond Gacha?

As criticisms of gacha gaming mount, some developers are exploring alternative monetisation methods. Battle passes and paid expansions offer a more transparent approach, but they have yet to completely replace the gacha model. The challenge is finding a balance between profitability and ethical design.

For now, the gacha model stays dominant, with developers constantly refining their tactics to maximise player spending. Whether future regulations or shifts in consumer expectations will change the industry remains to be seen. Until then, players must navigate these games with awareness, understanding that “free-to-play” often comes at a much higher cost than it first appears.



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