This place is simply irresistible. Those of you, who have been here for years (voila, Jules, Torsten, et al., les docteurs) would not hesitate to sell their grandmothers to stay a bit longer. Those of you who have just tasted the Michaelmas have perhaps already started to think of a suitable relative. Right on.

Who on earth would leave this Paradise gained? Loquacious grass-snakes from the outer world can hardly tempt us into tasting their rotten fruit after we get our degrees. Their thinly veiled promises of prosperity are fated to fade in the light of the vast orchards of delicious Plenty which we have long desired, tasted and finally fell for. Copycat, you might say, an Oxford student should strive for some originality. It is the apple that has brought us here, and as the first fall was a matter of taste, so is ours: *Imitatio* is not always a bad thing, after all. And falling in here, as you know, is destined to be a rather uplifting experience. What else would one expect from a place that had once introduced a taste-paper to test the students critical and exegetical abilities? And that boasts of trap-doors which lead to so many other worlds?

This place will be here for ever - unlike you. Summon the courage, lubricate the screws in your brain, make it shiver with impatience, let the butterflies of your curiosity take off and touch, taste, lick, and smell all things around you *hic et nunc.* Do not nibble! Savour and devour with barbarious ferocity and fill in the belly of your soul with intangibles worthy of your ignorance. And, when *fama* is after you, run faster than the wind:

„This remark I whispered to a woman I thought very pretty and very discreet. I was mistaken though, for she was a daughter of Eve, and my secret was made known. I ascertained this the next day, by a pleasant letter which I received from the Duke, in which he insisted that he had not the two qualities I had attributed to him.“

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**EDITORIAL**

We are not in the age of Brillat-Savarin, so forget about pleasant letters and fear since *fama* and its subspecies, the *fama collegii,* is an insatiable foul-smelling beast. Beware to feed it or you will risk that your sweet memories of paradise will turn sour. Embrace this place with reckless abandon and taste with taste…. or *thou wille employ thy corage after the taste of their desires.*

Ilona Gottwaldova
Editor

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**Linacre Li(n)es – a Common Room journal.**

Linacre college is held to be interdisciplinary, international, environmental and socially active. The Li(n)es are here to put this pride to a test.

In this issue:
- **Paul Pennington, Matthew Bradley, Caroline Cawthorn and Newman Nahas** on TASTE.
- **Tim Rayden, Christina Orphanidou and Dominique Chaput** on their INTERNATIONAL experiences.
- **Tom Wrobler, Francesc Ferrer and Steve Whitelam** on ACADEMIC issues.
- **Matthew Bradley and Despina Voulgaraki** on BRITISHNESS.
- **Lewis Morgan** on CHARITY AND POVERTY.
- **Gareth Maguire** on SPORTS.
- **MUSTS – Katerina Oikonomopoulou, and Anonymous.**
- **LENNY KERR - Paul D. Pennington.**
- **Technical support - Caroline Cawthorn, Matthew Bradley, Christina Orphanidou.**
- **Section icons and cover-Lucy Helme.**
- **Website-Sonia Medina-Gomez**
If there’s one thing I’m good at droning on about it is food: I could gabble on about it until...well until just about teatime. An appreciation of food depends on the use of each of our senses: sight, smell, hearing, touch and finally, but (only possibly) not least, taste. I should mention that my discussion is on flavour, which is the combination of taste and smell.

Just think of a juicy rare steak sizzling on a plate being brought to us. The first thing we note is the wonderful hissing and spitting of water on oil. Then as the meat is brought to us, we experience the first waft of aromatic compounds that emerge from it – the result of heavenly chemical reactions happening on the meat surface at high temperature. The brown meat presented to us looks delicious, with its brown lightly charred outside, and the glossy pink moist interior on carving. Putting it into our mouth, the moisture is released as we bite through the tissue, which has just a slight resistant. Then, as the constituent molecules dissolve on our tongue, we get our first taste of the meat; a meaty, salty and ever-so slightly sweet symphony explodes on our tongue. The full flavour also depends on the volatile molecules that are liberated from chewing the steak, that travel up to the back of the nose and activate some of the millions of receptors that are located there.

Perhaps because taste and smell aren’t great means of communication in humans, unlike sight, hearing, and touch our understanding of them is considerably less than these other senses. We know how light and colour are perceived to produce sight; we have a good idea about how sound is perceived as hearing and know about its qualities of intensity and pitch; and the concept of pressure and temperature are well understood. Yet, we have only limited understanding of how the taste and smell can be recognized and perceived by humans, there is no device that can assist patients suffering from an inability to smell – the unfortunate condition of anosmia. Yet, to my humble mind at least, it would fallacious to think that an understanding of taste and smell would not be extremely valuable, for both scientific and philosophic reasons.

It needn’t be reiterated how important flavour is for the enjoyment of food: remember how bland food can taste when our power of smell is lost due to a winter’s cold or the summer’s allergy, yet how exquisite the first strawberry of summer can taste. Taste is also important for warning us of dangers: the bitterness of a poison, or the sourness of food turned bad. Smell has powerful associations with memories – who hasn’t experienced a smell which has evoked an incredibly strong memory from our childhood that couldn’t be recalled any other way. The idea of pheromones in mate selection is known to occur in numerous animals and some would suggest it is still acting in humans, even if we are not aware of it; unquestionably, the scent of a lover is a truly warming sensation, even if it has been replaced by the fragrance of her or his favourite cologne.

So what do we know about taste and smell? Well taste is all in the mouth – mostly on the tongue. We perceive saltiness via molecular channels on the tongue that let sodium ions (positively charged sodium atoms formed when salt dissolves in water) pass through them. Sourness is detected by different channels that allow protons from soluble food acids to pass through them. Sourness is detected by different channels that allow protons from soluble food acids to pass through them. Bitterness is perceived by small proteins that are activated by a variety of organic compounds mostly from plant matter. Sweetness is also perceived by the binding of sweet molecules, like sucrose, to a class of protein receptor. The fifth and most recently discovered taste is umami, basically meaty flavours, which is perceived when certain amino acids in food bind receptor molecules in the tongue. But that’s pretty much it - taste is boring, when we talk about the ‘taste’ of something we actually mean the smell of it, since this is where the greatest diversity of flavour comes from. Our noses contain 12 million receptor nerves that respond to 10,000 different odours. The genes that encode the receptors for these...
molecules is the largest class of genes in the human genome, yet curiously a large number of them are non-functional, having been chiselled to non-functionality by the erosive power of mutation.

But little is known about how these receptors are activated by flavour molecules, how their synergy results in the perception of smell, or why they can become exhausted so rapidly in a process called adaptation – the reason chewing gum stops tasting minty after a short while.

The science is certainly interesting, but other things have bothered me in the past. Why is it that some people don’t like the taste of mushrooms, artichokes and sprouts, when I consider them some of the most pleasurable flavours on earth? Conversely, how is it that some people can endure, nay, actively relish the saccharin sweet gloop that is Sunny Delight? Something that used to keep me awake at night as a kid was how we can know that some people don’t taste things differently to me: how do I know that what tastes like a tomato to me does not taste like a banana to someone else? And to what extent are our preferences to different foodstuffs innately or culturally determined? These are deep questions, and I doubt they’ll be answered any time soon; all we can say is that it is simply a matter of taste.

Paul Pennington

To begin musing on taste by quoting the French gourmand and physician Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin is such a cliché that it feels like a minor lapse of taste in itself, but, persevering:

...any man who has enjoyed a sumptuous meal, in a room decorated with mirrors and paintings, sculptures and flowers, a room drenched with perfumes, enriched with lovely women, filled with the strains of soft music... that man, we say, will not need to make too great an effort to convince himself that every science has taken part in the scheme to heighten and enhance properly for him the pleasures of taste.

The egotism (not to mention the sexism) of this image is, I think, confirmed best by the fact that this fantasy room is decorated not only with beautiful paintings and sculptures, but with mirrors - presumably for the author to get a better view of himself luxuriating in his own splendid refinement! For most of us, happily, the concern for how our tastes reflect upon us is a thing not so brazenly admitted, but neither is it a thing that we should dismiss lightly as the exclusive province of the parvenu or the inadequate. However relaxed about the whole taste thing you might be, we’ve probably all been guilty of the ‘Oxford nod’ at some time: that vague movement of the head that confirms beyond doubt our familiarity with the Lithuanian author or Swedish filmmaker to which our tutor or colleague has just referred so airily, but, thank goodness, also indicates that our supreme wisdom on the subject transcends the vulgar details of mere discussion. The anxiety has the power to sell books and films too, and in numbers: recently a journalist (I forget who it was) coined the term fauxbrow for works in popular culture that sell themselves as high art by association; they appeal to the middlebrow middle-class because they artificially import icons of a more ‘sophisticated’ culture without doing anything particularly sophisticated with them. She cited the film of The Hours as an example, but a better one is Thomas Harris’ novel Hannibal, in which the eponymous serial killer’s aesthetic taste in Florentine art and baroque music (by a curious coincidence, the same as the author’s) go hand in hand with his well-known habit of physically devouring the people who oppose him. A middle-class fantasy of dominance whose medium is ‘taste’, the novel was a huge marketing success amongst the chattering classes despite being a pompous, ludicrous, camp and generally idiotic work of fiction. Can you tell I didn’t like it?
The Oxford classics don Walter Pater saw artistic taste as being nothing less than the end of life, and proclaimed more than once the supremacy of searching, with the fervour akin to a religion, for ever more exquisite and refined sensations. As definitions of taste go, it is not at all bad. However, Pater was promptly accused of hedonism, and here’s another problem with cultivating taste, one that is obstructed rather than revealed by our predominantly bourgeois idea of what the term actually means. Taste is, or should be, an essentially liberal idea, as it presumes our ability and fitness to ‘taste’ experiences in and for themselves. The man or woman of taste should, in theory, be acquainted with ever more unusual and refined experiences, whether in art or in life, and should thus move outside that peculiar form of safety which we call received wisdom. Taste may lead us away into danger, perversity, loss of conventional morality, religion or madness, but surely it shouldn’t lead us into respectability? After all, a good job or genial demeanour will probably guide us to that point just as surely. This is precisely why many modern ideas of ‘good taste’, so bound up with the approval of precedent and history (not to mention that of our Swedish film-loving tutor) can come to seem so stale and mindless, and why the middle-class fantasy of Hannibal Lecter is such a telling one. Although hopefully I’m not suggesting that true ‘taste’ can only be achieved by cannibalistic serial-killers, it’s worth remembering that taste should always be an effort, and an effort that we are making to ourselves. It should be an effort indifferent to the opinions of others, not furtively concealed from them. Reversing the old slogan, ask not what you can do for taste, but what can taste do for you. And next time you’re about to do that nod, or hurriedly conceal that your knowledge of chaos theory comes entirely from Jurassic Park, perhaps pause to think in what bad taste it might be.

Matthew Bradley

The return of bad taste

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the excesses of Victorian design seemed to mark the nadir of taste. The philosopher David Store even coined a phrase, horror victorianum, to describe the revulsion any right-minded modernist feels when beholding the grotesque excesses of the mid nineteenth century. But whilst stuffed pets, dead insects worn as jewellery, and bracelets made of a loved one’s hair are still regarded with distaste in some circles, such morbidly fascinating masterpieces are arguably experiencing a quiet renaissance. We might think that the craze for taxidermy, for example, is something that has been safely relegated to the past as a tasteless example of Victoriana. Indeed, taxidermy is an art the Victorians made very much their own, not only stuffing dead animals, but developing the peculiar and repellent notion of arranging them in anthropomorphic poses. Thus, the beholder can enjoy scenes of dead kittens playing croquet, dead rats behaving rakishly in a gambling den, even (and this is my favourite), “athletic toads” playing on mechanical swings. Taxidermy was regarded by many as an art, with practitioners such as Herman Ploucquet and Walter Potter being praised for their skill. Ploucquet, whose works include ‘Kitten
Serenading a Pig’ and ‘Comic Hedgehogs Skating’ achieved acclaim at the 1851 Great Exhibition, where Queen Victoria (no less) described his dioramas as ‘really marvellous’.

Anthropomorphic taxidermy could be approached as a fine art (Ploucquet intended some of his dioramas to illustrate a poem by Goethe), sentimental (as in Walter Potter’s famous ‘Who Killed Cock Robin’, in which the birds are given glass tears), or comic. Whilst the response of the modern observer is usually limited to a ghoulish fascination, contemporary fans appreciated the humour and skill involved in creating the work. In his autobiography, Mr Thomas, a visitor to the Great Exhibition, recalls discussing Ploucquet’s display with a fellow admirer, who remarks that ‘that the man who arranged them must have spent years over it, and what a humorous man he must have been to arrange the little stuffed things in such laughable situations.’ Yet the intention of the taxidermists was not always merely to entertain. In using animals to imitate the actions of ‘rational creatures’, the displays were intended to underline the folly of much human behaviour.

Whilst taxidermists like Ploucquet and Potter stuffed their animals in the name of art, others were keen to make more practical use of dead creatures. Stuffed birds were often used to adorn the fashionable hat, whilst a pair of earrings could be made from a couple of mounted hummingbirds. An elephant’s foot could be hollowed out to provide a convenient umbrella stand, and chairs could be made from a man-eating tiger or baby giraffe. Below, you can see an example of a monkey candelabra, made from a lady’s pet monkey. ‘Although her grief was great’ we are told by a contemporary review of animal furniture, ‘she resolved to have her dead darling turned into something useful a well as ornamental.’ As a candle-holder, the monkey not only serves a practical purpose but even maintains something of its living character, ‘grasping in its little fists the polished brass sconces…with quite an eager, officious air.’

What was once considered whimsical and charming is now regarded as monstrous, even barbaric by many observers. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, there is a considerable market for such curios, with taxidermy experts predicting a revival in the number of people buying stuffed animals. At a sale of Walter Potter’s work this September, the collection from his ‘Museum of Curiosities’ raised more than £500,000, with individual pieces like ‘The Death and Burial of Cock Robin’ going for £25,000. The sale total doubled the pre-sale estimate and 99% of the stock was sold, with bidders such as David Bailey and Peter Blake showing interest. Damien Hirst (of course), offered a million pounds for the entire collection, intending to reopen the museum and add some of his own work, but sadly he was too late to save it.

Much Victoriana is lurid, excessive, even disgusting. Declaring a love for nineteenth century taste is a dangerous business, as the recent critical mauling of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Victorian art collection (now on show at the Royal Academy) demonstrates. But the scenes of rollicking rats, amorous toads and cricketing guinea pigs created by Potter continue to fascinate, and may finally be attaining the respect so long denied.

Caroline Cawthorn

The concept of taste

I propose to contribute a few comments on the concept of taste. The first thing that must be noted is that the concept of taste is ambiguous, at least as between two different
ideas, though probably more. First, there is the idea of taste as a capacity or ability to take pleasure in certain natural objects. And second, there is the idea of taste as an ability not so much to take pleasure in objects but to notice or discern special aspects or properties. Of course, often what we mean by taste is both of these things.

On the first understanding of taste, taste refers to an affective ability, that is, an ability to have certain reactions when presented with objects possessing certain qualities. Now, the question here is whether there are right sorts of reactions and wrong sorts of reactions to have. Do objects have certain (aesthetic) qualities which simply merit certain affective reactions? Is there a normativity about our concept of taste as there is about our concept of rationality, which assumes that certain propositions have certain features in virtue of which they deserve to be believed and not disbelieved? (The proposition that the Holocaust did indeed take place would be a good example of such a belief.)

Anyway, moving on to the second notion of taste: here, what it means to say that someone has good taste is that someone can discern special qualities or properties that an object possesses. What are these objects? Are they ordinary qualities, size, shape, texture, etc. or are they sui generis, irreducible qualities that the object has and which require the specific faculties of aesthetic taste in order to be picked out? This debate, here, is similar in some ways to discussions in moral philosophy. Is wrongness if one assumes that there is such a thing (as surely one must; though, alas, I cannot argue for this claim here) an irreducible fact about an act, which simply inheres in it or attaches to it? Or is wrongness reducible to other physical facts or properties, such as painfulness? Anyway, here isn’t the place to deal with these questions, delightfully enticing though they may be. And I must apologize for dealing with these matters with a cursoriness that is unbefitting to their magnitude. Taste, in this second sense also has a lot in common with gustatory taste. Someone whose palate is not very discriminating, we might say, simply fails to notice many qualities which food possess. Similarly, someone who has poor taste fails to notice aesthetic features that an object has.

At any rate, a really interesting question about taste, I think, is whether there is such a thing as good taste and bad taste (in either of these two senses): that is, can we plausibly speak about taste in normative terms? Are there certain works of art, certain pieces of music, certain meals, certain wines, certain Lebanese women, who possess certain qualities in virtue of which they deserve a certain positive reaction, the failure of having which is errant?

Newman Nahas

Oh horror, horror...

“One last thing.” Said Terry as I was leaving. “In the forest you never run from a gorilla. You run and they’ll chase you down and rip your arms off. If you stand still and pretend everything is fine they won’t touch you. But Elephants are different. If you come across an Elephant, run. Run like the wind.”

I was on my way to spend a year working as an assistant at Mondika, a remote research camp in the extreme north of the Republic of Congo, near the border with the Central African Republic, to study the behavioural ecology of Western Lowland Gorillas. A plane to Douala, Cameroon, then a connecting flight the following morning to Bangui, the capital of the C.A.R. I remember the thick coils of the equatorial heat wrapping themselves around me. I remember the dust and poverty of Bangui. The twelve hours of bone shaking dirt roads to get out to the back country; to Bayanga the last logging outpost on the Sangha river. I remember a lamp-lit meal of eggs and sardines in a plank-built guesthouse. Then the boat, with the river winding us still further south, away from such civilisation, until even the fishermen paddling their dugout canoes in and out of the overhanging trees were all behind us. Just before evening we
pulled up at Ndakan, the last place in the world (or so it felt) and where we would camp the night before setting out into the forest, to hike the last 20km to Mondika.

The camp, I found, maintains a high level of civilisation despite the limitations of its remoteness. There is a cook who brews fresh coffee each morning over the fire, and heats water for washing. He bakes bread every few days in an oven hollowed out of a termite mound, and washes clothes in the stream. Evening meals are eaten by candle light amidst the cacophony of forest insect life with the stars glinting through the trees overhead.

The project employs teams of local BaAka pygmies to work as gorilla trackers. Without the BaAka, and their uncanny knowledge of this most demanding of environments, nothing would be possible at Mondika. Without the loan of their eyes and ears, their local knowledge and their incredible sense of direction, anyone of us could be hopelessly and dangerously lost within minutes. Tracking in the forest can be physically demanding, but the BaAka seem able to glide silently through the undergrowth with a minimum of effort. They make so little noise (communicating to each other with barely perceptible gestures and soft clicks of the tongue) that they remain aware of everything in the forest around them.

Since 2000 the project has worked almost exclusively on the habituation of a single group of gorillas (‘Kingo’ and his females) whose home range is easily reachable from the camp. Habituation is the process by which the animals learn to accept the presence of human observers without significant changes to their natural behaviour. In the last three years, researches at Mondika have chronicled the movements and activities of the group from day to day, slowly being able to spend more time in close visual contact.

On my first day in the forest I was trying to remember what it was that Terry had told me. If I see an Elephant, do I run or stand still? Was there something about sticking your thumbs in its eyes? Or was that Ray Mears on crocodiles? Did Terry say anything about crocodiles? I felt hopelessly out of my depth; disorientated in an alien environment, and I was thoroughly unprepared for my first sight of the gorillas. We came upon them, resting in a fallen tree. Kingo was lying down with one leg in the air, idly picking some dirt from under a toe nail. He sat up, his great silver back towards us, then lazily rolled his head in our direction. When he rose I caught my breath at his immense size. He seemed as big as three men. His forearm, I noticed were as thick as my thigh, and his shoulders about as wide as a barn door. Yet despite his bulk, his rippling muscle and shimmering black fur he moved with effortless grace, perfectly balanced and totally at ease. His confidence was obvious, and when he stood facing us, staring from deep set black eyes, I found my legs were shaking violently. The adrenaline of fear was pounding round my body. I was almost overcome with the desire to run, but I realised to do so would be futile. I would cover no more than a few yards in any direction before the chase reached its inevitable conclusion. I had had no idea that research could be this terrifying.

I’m pleased to say that I did become more accustomed to spending time in close proximity to the gorillas, and even to enjoy it! I realised why tourists in Rwanda pay up to $200 a day for the same privilege. In the course of time I learnt some of the basics of tracking, and to identify a large number of forest animals from their sounds and smells. I learnt to speak Sango, the language of the river people, which is used as a common tongue in Central Africa. (Very few of the indigenous people speak any French.) I learnt about primates and about social biology, and there was plenty of time to become familiar with the personality traits of different gorillas, and to follow the soap opera of their squabbles and shifting allegiances. I also spoke a lot to the trackers about the traditional lives and beliefs of the BaAka. What became clear was the width of the cultural divide that separates us westerners from the lives of these forest
people, and I began to appreciate for the first time the wealth of human, as well as plant and animal diversity that still exists on this tiny and overcrowded planet.

Tim Rayden

A taste of America

Recipe

Ingredients:
1 Cypriot woman (laptop, handbag and 45kg bag attached on various body parts).
Approximately 350 frustrated New Yorkers.
The New York subway A-line (Express).
A bit of good luck potion.

Procedure:
Place the Cypriot woman (laptop, handbag and 45kg luggage attached on various body parts) in a hot subway car (approximately 40 degrees) and mix with 350 frustrated New Yorkers for about 45 minutes. Re-mix ingredients every 5 minutes. Shake and stir. Sprinkle with some good luck potion. Abruptly stop the shaking and leave to stand for about 2.5 hours. Ready!

It was the last day of my American trip, the 14th of August. After spending almost three weeks savoring the sweet American pie and sampling its extreme flavours in many different ways I was looking forward to returning to the good old Shepherd’s pie and then continue my trip towards a more familiar moussaka experience. Little did I know that the last piece of my American pie would turn sour....

I was on my way to the JFK on the A-line express and we had just left Manhattan and entered Brooklyn. It was hot and sticky and people were not happy. A Cruella de’Ville-looking woman passed through the car selling “good luck potions” in small glass jars for $2. As I was trying to hide my skeptical smile I realized most people were actually buying it (!) and getting advice on how to use it: “You can put it on your child’s forehead or place a few drops on your bed...”. As I was drifting away in my memories from this trip and thinking of how I would spend my last $30 in the Duty Free the train stopped. Having lived in London for 4 years and having used the subway extensively I did not panic. “Another train is probably passing next to us” I thought, and continued to calculate whether I had enough money for mascara and the new Estee Lauder rainbow lip-gloss. Fifteen minutes later I started to feel uneasy. There was no light, some women were starting to complain (why is it always the women?) and no announcement was made. I started to worry whether the delay meant I couldn’t get to the duty free! And then came the announcement: “We are experiencing a power cut, please remain calm”. Calm we did not remain! Children started to cry, women to complain even more and some adventurous men tried to open the doors and jump on the tracks! Then came the second announcement: “You will need to evacuate the train. Please form a queue and move to the front of the train. Firemen are waiting to assist you until you are safely on the platform”. The notion of queue is, I realized, a British concept. British people love queuing, they consider it half the fun of whatever they are queuing for. The Americans would not agree. Everyone started fighting, swearing, pushing, “fainting”, getting asthma attacks even though they didn’t have asthma. “Let the children go out first!” shouted someone and 18-year olds started moving forward followed by their entire families! A young woman who was uniquely feeling “really hot” moved forward while an old woman was screaming “She ain’t sick! She ain’t sick”. I, on the other hand, was patiently waiting to wake up! It was obviously just a bad dream because this kind of adventure never happens to a Cypriot village girl like myself! After 2.5 hours I reached the front car, jumped on the train track and started running like a woman possessed while the firemen were carrying my 45kg bag and shouting “Calm down!” and “What the **** do you have in this bag?”. A couple of minutes later I was out in the light! After being ignored by taxi drivers for half an hour I finally got in a cab. 45 minutes later, I was in JFK along with 17 000 other people who were waiting for flights that would never leave! In
the 22 hours I spent lying on the airport floor stealing pistachios from an Israeli woman who was sleeping next to me, and contemplating the fact that I was a part of the biggest blackout in American history it became obvious that the last piece of my American pie was nothing else but.....pistachio.

Christina Orphanidou

A high Arctic Midsummer

Just as the sun was beginning to dissipate the cold dampness that had engulfed Oxford through a long and dark winter, I packed my bags and headed to the High Arctic for what would become two memorable months of fieldwork. What brought me to Longyearbyen, a small town on the Svalbard archipelago, was not its unusual geology or the fossil-rich mountains surrounding it. I was there to study tundra plants, and more precisely, to measure how well they can recover from the increasing grazing pressure exerted by exploding populations of Arctic-breeding geese (in short, I measured grass and, armed with a pair of scissors, pretended to be a goose).

Situated at 78°N, halfway between mainland Norway and the North Pole, Longyearbyen claims (and rightly so) to be the northernmost town in the world. As one would expect, the harsh climate, drastic variation in day length (from months of 24h daylight to months of perpetual darkness), and ever-present danger of polar bear encounters have led to unique adaptations and customs, such as the Midsummer celebration described below, which were at first both puzzling and delightful to an outsider like me.

21 June 2003, Longyearbyen (78°N)

Celebrating the longest day of the year seems a bizarre tradition in a town with four months of continuous daylight; nevertheless, in Longyearbyen it is certainly a sufficient excuse to throw the biggest party of the summer.

Come late evening, I begin the forty-minute descent from the old miners’ barrack in which I am living to the shoreline, which looks deceptively close. I pass the new rainbow-coloured school that mirrors the rainbow-coloured rows of identical houses nearby. Weeks earlier children played on the school’s gravel football pitch under the watchful eye of their teacher, who carried a rifle in case an unfortunate polar bear wandered into town and took a culinary interest in these small humans. Some forgotten skis are stacked in the ski rack outside the entrance, to be used again when snowfall renders cycling or walking to school impossible.

More walking, and I pass the general store, whose lobby is lined with rifle cabinets for customers to lock their weapons before entering. Well stocked in chocolate and biscuits, dried pasta and beans, outdoor gear and stationery, the Svalbardbutikken also has an extensive collection of overpriced polar bear t-shirts, key rings, soft toys, calendars and engraved shot glasses. Milk and fresh produce, however, are often scarce, especially when planes carry additional tourists at the expense of cargo space, and when these items are first sent to the big hotel, with the remainder (small to nonexistent) arriving at the store.

I walk past the research station, over the river that spontaneously swells to a rushing torrent or shrinks to a mere trickle as temperatures in the mountains hover around freezing, and finally between storage hangars lining the shore. A strange mix of townspeople has gathered; miners, students, researchers and tourists huddle around plastic tables, which huskies, tied to their owners’ waists, are proceeding to tangle together with their ropes, occasionally flipping over an unsuspecting person. Nearby, some brave souls stomp on a makeshift stage in their winter boots to the same three pop tunes played on an old scratchy stereo system.

The first hour is devoted to shivering under bulky layers of clothing, clutching a plastic water bottle filled for the occasion with
inexpensive wine from a carton. The magical warming properties of alcohol eventually take effect, and the makeshift dance floor shakes more violently as streams of children, adults and huskies join in a massive, unending rendition of the Macarena (to the same three pop songs, none of which remotely resembles the Macarena). As the night progresses and the alcohol supply decreases, layers of clothing are shed. For one older pot-bellied gentleman, no layers are left to remove, and swimming in the near-freezing waters of the fjord suddenly seems like a logical course of action. A few others join in this midsummer tradition.

Dancing and drinking continues well into the morning. Without the onset of darkness, the usual cues to feel tired are absent. Eventually, people stumble home or to another suitable passing-out location (such as the gravel patch under the town’s water pipeline), and some are bound to repeat the mistake of the poor fellow who, late one afternoon, upon hearing that it was four o’clock, was upset that the general store (which opens at 10 am) could not sell him headache medication for another six hours.

Dominique Chaput

Footprints

Write to entertain? To hell with that. I write to send readers into a peaceful doze, lulling them with endless circumlocutions and wordy metaphors so they’ll pass right over the dodgy references in a haze. Pithy, zesty stuff would be the end of me. So let’s try something else:

"Herrenia, the slave of Antonius, signed this with her feet".

On a roof tile, a slab of fired clay a metre square, we find this inscription. In the centre of the tile are two small footprints, and you can still see the hobnails in the sandals Herrenia wore. What’s more surprising is that there are two versions of the inscription on the tile, one in Latin, one in Oscan - the language of the Samnite peoples of central and Southern Italy. Is this a bilingual, literate, female slave working in a tile factory? Or is this the work of some unknown tiler, flirting with a girl on a slow day in the hot sun?

We’ll never know. But we know something about Antonius - member of an important family - and about the tile, which was destined for a great Greek-style temple at Pietrabbondante, the Samnite religious centre. This tile is evidence for fifty topics - the economy, literacy, the spread of Latin, bilingualism, architecture, Hellenism - but it’ll never tell us any more about the person who wrote on it, or about the girl who stepped lightly onto a wet piece of clay drying in the sun, over two thousand years ago.

History is often like this. One artefact, or one line, can support a thousand different arguments, and plays and philosophy, pots, pictures and paint are all marshalled together to illuminate some small dark corner of the past. It’s a rare day when your source can speak to you directly, when your topic and that of an ancient writer coincide. Most of history is filled up with people like Herrenia; who gave us answers to other questions but left nothing of herself, except her shoe size.

But that’s what I love: that what I study isn’t dead ink that it was a living, breathing world, full of as much passion and boredom as today - real things done by real people. Herrenia’s footprints are one more piece of a disparate puzzle, and her story, short as it is, can be added to the other fragments of other lives that have survived to piece together her world - following in her footsteps, you might say.

Tom Wrobel

Physics and fashion

Scientists doing basic research face, in the early stages of their career, the periodic need to fill in zillions of application forms with the hope that somebody will consider offering them some funding for a few
more years. A typical conversation during
the coffee breaks in a conference among
young researchers often includes bitter
complaints about the lack of social
recognition, preferably in the form of
substantial fellowships, of their work
compared to others’. All that, of course, with
the mouth full of biscuits ...

In the daily papers we find pages devoted to
the achievements of, for example, David
Beckham in his new pale and boring white
shirt, playing with a sphere. However, the
same papers rarely follow the latest events
in the science arena. Well, why would they,
with mathematics and physics usually
remembered as being boring and difficult
subjects at school, which one should try to
avoid.

Yet, it is not true that some parts of (astro-
)physics could not seem to be fashionable.
Shortly after being introduced to a stranger,
astrophysicists are usually confronted with
pressing questions such as: What is a black
hole? Is it possible to travel back in time?
How big was the big bang? The answers to
none of these questions seems to be useful
for everyday life (except, of course, for
craveling back in time which could be useful
when one needs a little bit more sleep in the
morning), but it seems as if most people are
waiting to come across a physicist to ask
them. Could it be that physics is more
fashionable that one would expect?

The answer to this question depends on
how we define fashionable. If we choose the
number of pages in a newspaper or the
number of TV programs about a subject,
then we will sadly conclude that it is not by
accident Mr. Beckham’s salary is higher
than that of all the physicists together.
However, what happens if we go to Google
and type Einstein? We will discover that
more than eight million pages talk about one
of the icons of physics, more than twice the
number of those that contain Beckham. With
the internet being the media of the future,
maybe our prospects for a glamorous life will
soon become reality... but what made
Einstein one of the most famous physicist of
all times?

One of the first things that, upon reading his
biography, make him sympathetic to us is
the fact that he did not have a brilliant record
at high school. (He was advised by a
teacher to leave school, since his very
presence destroyed the other students’
respect for the teacher). And if there is an
image of him that comes to one’s mind, it
will probably be the portrait of him showing
his tongue, with his disordered grey hair...
This image of an unconventional, and
perhaps even slightly lunatic (but usually not
dangerous) person is what everybody would
associate with a physicist.

A more recent popular example is Richard
Feynman, the scientist, raconteur and
musician. He assisted on the development
of the atomic bomb, translated Mayan
eroglyphics and cut to the heart of the
Challenger disaster with a famous
appearance on TV where he performed a
live experiment disproving a number of high-
ranking officials that had claimed that the
explosion would never be solved. But it was
one of his hobbies, his talent for playing the
bongo drums, which made him attract
sympathy from outside the scientific
community.

So, it seems that the most popular scientists
share a more human side that is usually
more well known than their concrete
scientific achievements (frequently
outstanding). Feynman’s opinion about this
fact was quoted as:

_The fact that I beat a drum has nothing to do
with the fact that I do theoretical physics.
This perpetual desire to prove that physicists
are human by showing that they do other
things that a few other humans do (like
playing bongo drums) is irritating to me._

The point is that Einstein did things that few
humans could ever do and sometimes it
seems that he couldn’t have been like one of
us, whereas Beckham does something that
quite a few humans can do (admittedly
better than most of us) and he has to prove
that he is not one of
us.

Francesc Ferrer
The science graduate’s life is fraught with danger. Around every corner lurk sceptical referees, dubious thesis examiners, hostile scientists. If your science isn’t up to scratch, you’ll know in short order. Frequently, the graduate’s best line of defence is to learn the art of defensive scientific writing. This is a set of principles designed to protect your scientific reputation: let your writing, not your science, take the strain.

Having worked hard to understand the principles of defensive writing, I found myself wishing I’d had a guide to follow from the outset. So I decided to write one. I make no claim to originality. I’ve simply collected a few of the gems in common use which have made my life easier.

The guiding principle of defensive scientific writing is this: There’s no such thing as a free lunch. You had to work bloody hard to understand the science, and so should the reader. The reader may be determined. Most likely a referee or thesis examiner, they will spend long nights bent intently over your manuscript, red pen in hand. If they reach the end of your account with energy left and critical faculties intact, you’re in trouble. They will weigh up the scientific content of your paper or thesis, draw on years of experience, and deliver an assessment of your work, usually damning. But if they’ve had to divert energy from deciphering your writing, you might be okay. When the thought of wading once more through your craftily chosen jargon and cunningly convoluted sentences fills the exhausted reader with dread, their response will be ‘sod this’. The result is often an improved chance of submission or a shorter viva. At the very least your scientific reputation will survive another day.

Rule 1: Never use a short word where a long and intimidating one will do.

This rule is elementary, and always useful. Scientists, knowing several fields’ worth of jargon, are best placed to exploit the principle underlying this rule: If it sounds impressive, it probably is. Don’t undersell what you did. Your ‘method’ should become your ‘methodologies’, or, better, your ‘methodological approach’. That these mean different things is a bonus. While the referee is trying to work out if you’re talking about a method, a set of methods, or are making an oblique reference to the branch of logic dealing with the general principles of the formation of knowledge, the admission that you tried to solve your integrals by typing them into Google will have passed them by. Indeed, any word ending in –ology sounds convincing. Other good words are calumniate, equipoise, panegyric, sententious and deracinated. I don’t know what they mean, and with luck neither will the referee. Latin words are life-savers. Who will ponder the details of your calculation when it is sandwiched by in situ, mutatis mutandis, and deus ex machina? The best exponents of this principle use words to befuddle the reader like a plane uses chaff to confuse a missile.

Rule 2: Never use the active where you could use the passive.

Sorry - Rule 2: The passive is always to be preferred over the active.

The passive voice gives the impression that your work has been sanctioned by a higher authority, or at least some of your peers. Saying ‘We think that glass formation is a purely dynamical effect’ will fool nobody. It is clear. It is direct. And just who are you? thinks the referee, red pen jotting impolite notes in the margin. ‘It has recently become almost universally accepted that glass formation is a purely dynamical phenomenon’ may be incorrect, but with luck the referee will spend their energies trying to
work out how this upheaval in their field has come about. It is then less likely that the content of your statement will arouse their ire.

The above rules work better when incorporated into a larger strategy for protecting (obscuring is such an ugly word) your science. This means carefully tailoring the structure of your article.

Rule 3: Information is more likely to escape undue attention if it is placed where readers least expect to find it.

The usefulness of this rule cannot be overstated, and there are many ways of putting it into practice. Yawning chasms between subject and verb are often best. Consider

‘The simplest of the kinetically constrained models, the $d=\ell=1$ Fredrickson-Andersen model, a 1-spin-dynamically facilitated system on a simply-connected dual isotropic Euclidean lattice with nothing whatsoever to do with the NIH2terminal portion of the adenosinetriphosphatase (ATPase) subunit 6 gene nor in actual fact any other gene has been identified as the only nontrivial classical system amenable to a frustrated renormalization group analysis.’

One hopes that like a drowning swimmer the reader’s attention will disappear below the murky waters separating subject and verb. This is more likely if the previous ten sentences are of equally awkward construction. With luck, the reader will fail to realise that your statement is meaningless. More experienced writers can experiment by transposing the subject and verb in similar sentences, to throw the hound further off the scent. Try starting the sentence with ‘That the...’, and wend your way from there. Be careful, though: the aim is to convince the reader that re-reading your work to extract its physical content will be too painful, not that you’re illiterate.

Rule 3 can be implemented in other ways. According to those who study these things (ideally, citations like this should be vague, but in the interest of fairness I point to the first reference below), ‘the information that begins a sentence establishes for the reader a perspective for viewing the sentence as a unit.’ It is therefore very important to change this information as often as possible, lest the determined reader identify a coherent train of thought. Your grant proposal is comprehensible and can be summarised in two lines? Forget it. They’ll give the money to the guy at the desk next to yours who seems to be planning to study all of theoretical physics.

There are many other techniques one can use to make life easier. Writing with a healthy degree of pretension lets the reader know you’re not to be trifled with. Liberal use of words like ‘obvious’ and ‘evident’ tell the reader how smart you are, that you too can do twenty lines of calculation in your head. And like a secret sign for the initiated, the phrase ‘highly nontrivial’ should appear at least once.

Just as defensive driving saves lives, so defensive writing helps protect the career of the aspiring graduate student. Protect your science. Make the reader work. Give nothing for free. Remember, every reader of your work is potentially hostile, be they referee, external examiner, or vastly more intelligent colleague looking to crush (or possibly generalize) your argument. And always remember the final rule,

Rule 4: Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you.

You have been warned.

Alternative approaches to writing can be found in

Politics and the English Language, George Orwell, (1946).

These approaches are not recommended for the science graduate student.

Steve Whitelam
Alone in Ireland, English laureate of gloom Philip Larkin pondered with something almost like good humour his sense of alienation, and those foreign doings like the smell of docklands or the herring hawker’s cry that ‘prove me separate, not unworkable’. However, (as always) Larkin’s cheerier melancholy sinks into, well, melancholy melancholy as he ponders his return to Blighty:

Living in England has no such excuse: These are my customs and establishments It would be much more serious to refuse. Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.

And here is my problem: an Englishman writing about the English. The Scots may be mean, the Irish stupid, the Italians lazy, but the English are just the English. We’re so reviled we don’t even need a cheap comedic quirk. We are unemotional; (‘Englishmen have an extraordinary ability for flying into a great calm’, as one writer put it); sex-starved (‘Continental people have sex: English people have hot water bottles’), modest in that way that only the truly smug can be (‘The Englishman instinctively admires a man with no talent who is modest about it’): in short a nation of superior, melancholy, sexually repressed conformists (‘Englishmen never shall be slaves. They are free to do whatever the government and public opinion allow them.’). Although I wouldn’t necessarily put all this together and say ‘England: This is Your Life’, it can’t be denied there’s a bit of truth there, not least because the perception of any national character is a self-fulfilling prophecy, no matter how unsexy that perception might be. You don’t think all those people to be spotted at various places around the University just happen to all like tweed and cucumber sandwiches, do you?

My problem is that I’m not particularly proud to be English. In fact, I’m entirely indifferent. But (and here’s the thing) that’s a rather English attitude isn’t it? We’re not really a nation of proud bad rabbits anymore. Most commentators date this from the war, and England’s declining global position, which might be a fair comment but carries the whiff of desperation. Oscar Wilde once told the story that when he went to America, everyone was so obsessed with the bad fortune brought by the Civil War that when one night he remarked on the beauty of the moon, one old man replied ‘You should have seen it before the war’, and the English view World War Two in a similar way. Pre-war England, such a cynical distillation of strawberries and cricket, halcyon summers and fresh-faced charm seems a rather disingenuous place. One in particular to watch is the inadvertently hilarious film of Erskine Childers’ Riddle of the Sands, a gritty novel written in the 1900s to alert the government to the military threat from Germany. However, the pages of the screenplay seem to have got mixed up with some from Three Men in a Boat, and Childers’ political thriller becomes instead a tale of some jolly chaps who go out to sea with nothing but courage and ginger beer (Montmorency the dog presumably captured by the German army). These fine fellows’ idea of ‘roughing it’ is to only take the one hostess tea trolley.

However, that part of the English psyche that is a feature of all these sort of films contains, as the saying goes, a germ of truth. The importance of trivia, of attaching all-consuming importance to unimportant things is a very English attitude (remember Tea and Tiffin in Carry on Up the Khyber?). Now this probably is a political inheritance, a product of the fact that there has been no serious political unrest in England since the seventeenth century. Comfortable in the security of our nation-state that exists without a written constitution, we English have never really had to fight for our national ideals as ideals, only against people who threatened them from outside (and they, of course, were all foreigners), so we’ve never taken the trouble to define them. We can afford not to take seriously things we suspect to be serious, but we hedge our bets...
anyway, which accounts for the healthy Philistinism that prospers in England. We hope that art and culture are important, but to be seen to be treating it seriously? Forget it. Likewise, we hope that hard work is important: but whereas in most other countries hard work is rightly smiled upon, only the English treat it with a contemptuous frown. When people do well in exams, most nations say ‘Congratulations’, the English say ‘Ah yes, but they did work very hard’, as if this is a qualification! To end up pleading a good sense of humour is the traditional cry of the desperate man in a lonely hearts ad, but somehow this feels an entirely appropriate summation. There is something ugly and lonely about the English, but our hard-won national ignorance of life’s realities might be pleaded in our defence. Or is that just the typical smugness of an Englishman at work again…Tea anyone?

Matthew Bradley

Would you like a soggy biscuit with your tea dear?

(Or the Essential Britishness-from a foreigner’s point of view)

Now, I don’t know if I qualify very well to report on the Brits, after all I’ve lived in England for 7 years, almost all of my adult life, I’m practically a quasi-Brit myself. Now don’t get me wrong here, but that thought horrified me at first. You see there’s a set of preconceptions that come hand in hand with being British. Let’s see, where do I start now, ah, yes:

Rain, rain, rain (obvious really), loutish drunken or slutty behaviour (goes hand in hand with knotted handkerchief hats and boiling-red flesh at Faliraki), stiff upper lip, military invasions (no comment here, or I’ll be very un-politically correct, and this will never get printed), empire and colonies (ditto), rain, cricket (they invented it but they’re so dreadful at it!), horrible fashion sense; tea, tea, and more tea (with milk please), sense of humour (Brits think they’ve got the greatest sense of humour ever known to man, the rest of the world doesn’t),

cold, reserved and suspicious, eccentric, rain, rain, hooligans (there goes the beautiful game), the Royal family and scandals (don’t mind that). Did I mention the rain?

What else, oh, Marmite (yuck, yuck, yuck!), pints of lager and pubs (that close at 11 - WHY??!), English breakfast and fish and chips (oh, the heights of British culinary tradition!), chicken Tikka Masala (the British national dish apparently-draw your own conclusions), elitism (that’s Oxford for you), funny money and driving on the WRONG side of the road (sigh), as well as foreign policy seemingly being decided by another country’s president (sorry, couldn’t help myself!). Oh, I think I forgot to mention the rain!

And of course, let’s not forget their love for their European counterparts, based on mutual respect, no, really! The Brits remind the Germans at every opportunity that they lost the war, and the French that they surrendered. (The Germans and the French answer back by beating the hell out of the Brits at football. Oh, and by making Tony Blair look like a fool).

I’m sure I’m forgetting to mention lots of other wonderful British eccentricities such as queues, for example. But the truth of the matter is, that Brits, in all their clumsy and wet glory are adorable, once you get to know them. Of course patience is required (it took me 7 years, and I’m still working on it, believe me), another characteristically British trait. I learned for starters that the English are different from the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish, (Northern Irish to be p.c.) Scots are my favourite so far, hands down (they know how to partyyyy!). And once they overcome their natural reservations, I found they open up and can be very loyal friends (ok, pints of lager do help to reach that stage). And then I developed a taste for G&Ts and Pimm’s and lemonade (yum, yum!) and love to tuck in my fry-up along with the Sunday Times, nursing a hangover. I even relish the rain. Ok, this is going a bit far, I know, but anyone who has been in Britain this summer
knows that they don’t do hot weather well. Better stick to what they do best then. And then I can’t wait for London fashion week, and when I saw the Rolling Stones live, I was converted for life.

Brits as far as generalisations go, are like Marmite: you either love them or hate them. I came from Greece to study immunology at Linacre College, and after 7 years, I think I kind of, slowly and reluctantly have learned to love them.

Despina Voulgaraki

Charity and Poverty

These are both topics that are close to my heart. Coming from a working to middle class background money was always tight at home, but we always had what we needed, not necessarily what we wanted. Two very different things.

Ghandi once said ‘there is enough in this world for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed’. Poverty exists in every country, admittedly to different extents, but the cause is the same the world over. Greed.

Greed in my opinion comes in two forms. First, there is selfish greed. People, as individuals or groups ‘want’ what their neighbours have, for no other reason than they don’t have it and they don’t want others to have it. This can be extended to the mentality of keeping up with the Jones’, i.e. getting a newer and better car than your neighbour. This selfish greed has started neighbour disputes on the individual level and wars on the group and country level, all because somebody has what you don’t. This truly is selfish.

Then there is a form of greed which is a little more complicated and harder for individuals to admit. Stupid uneducated greed. This is where charity comes into it. There is a section of this world’s population that thinks the only time they can give to charity is when they have made lots of money, and are at the top of their profession. Only then can they set up a scholarship, similar to that of Rhodes. These people only give when the act of giving will not impoverish them. They believe that they can change the world and bring entire communities out of poverty. However, only a few people in a century have the ability, luck, money, and leadership skills to do. I think that the western world has proved with the massive fund raising events of Live Aid (80’s), that throwing money at poverty does not solve the problem. On the other hand events such as Comic Relief where the money is used to help people work themselves out of poverty, is much more effective. This is the key, money does not solve the problem alone, one needs leaders in order to motivate the people, and help them to change their lives. One needs people with the right leadership skills to lead people out of poverty. Those who give to charity only when they get their name associated with it also do it for selfish reasons.

The most valuable thing that we have as individuals is our time. This we can share with others and by doing so we can really help to educate and improve people and society in general. The act of giving blood can save lives, and it is so easy to do. Turn up, fill in a form, lie back, some attractive nurse sticks a very small needle in your arm, and half an hour later it’s all over. You get a cup of tea and a biscuit. You may feel a bit light headed, but that person who is having major surgery due to a car crash or heart transplant, will live all because of that pint of blood, or as Tony Hancock once said ‘nearly an arm full’.

Above is two ways you can help people without giving money, because you might not make it to the top of your profession. And you can start just now.

To give of yourself is much more meaningful than to give of your chequebook. My only hope is that this brief article provokes thought and discussion.

Lewis Morgan
Recent acquisitions

Heart rate monitors

Linacre Common Room has purchased twelve heart rate monitors for the use of its members. The heart rate monitors are of very high specification featuring a back light, adjustable heart rate zones and date/time/alarm functions. In addition the heart rate monitors are compatible with the cardiovascular equipment in the Linacre gym. They are distributed on a long term loan basis. The booking system is online. For instructions as to how to obtain a heart rate monitor visit www.linacre.ox.ac.uk. This purchase was made in response to the popular request of Linacre sports people. The Common Room sports secretary welcomes further suggestions concerning sports equipment.

Bicycle maintenance

A set of professional grade cycling tools and consumables is now available for use by Linacre students and staff. The kit is located in the bike shed beneath the stairs leading up to the main college entrance and the keys can be signed out from the porters’ lodge. The kit contains: a foot pump, a selection of greases and oils, a bicycle repair manual, a range of screwdrivers, spanners and allen keys, wire clippers, an adjustable torque wrench, bike cleaning accessories, break and gear cables, fluorescent vests and puncture repair packs. During the last two weeks, the bike kit has been signed out over forty times, making this purchase one of the most popular to date. We think you will agree that the set up is impressive. In addition a bike work station has been ordered and will arrive shortly. Please, make sure that you return all tools back to the kit immediately after use. Also inform the sports secretary when the

Conversation at a Tasting

Such an assortment of taste, anything you can put your finger on? Don’t be shy, have some, there’s more where that came from.

Mmm, I believe there’s a taste of burning desert sand.
The origin, where it ages for many years, you understand.

I detect the ocean; something fishy is what I taste
A very slight hint of Galician and Karachi waste

There is more, something I can’t quite explain; a powerful, rapid, sleek dimension
Hummers zipping in the streets, in the country side, knot to sixty obsession

This one’s a tad sour, a very rusty refrain
Ah yes we added just a dash of toxic rain
One last ingredient; a bottle for free if you tell

Alas, my taste buds fail me, but please do tell
A dash of blood, just to add to the flavour
Spilled from millions cut down, for you to savour

Asif Memon
level of consumables is running low. It will be greatly appreciated. The CR exec would like to thank Edwin Shillington for his help in assembling the kit.

Group recreation activities

**New! CARDIOFIGHTING**

We are excited to announce that from the start of Michaelmas term Linacre will be hosting cardiofighting sessions twice a week run by a pro instructor, Heidi. Cardiofighting is an exciting and motivating workout set to great music. The legs are strengthened and toned through kicks and shuffles and the upper body is trained through a variety of punches, hand and elbow strikes and defensive moves.

Cardiofighting boosts core stability and aerobic fitness and improves coordination and balance.

The skills developed are transferable to sports such as rowing, running, cycling and volleyball – the popular Linacre sports. It is open to both men and women. The sign-up sheet can be found on the notice board outside the Common Room. Alternatively, you can email the sports secretary gareth.maguire@linacre.ox.ac.uk.

As always, the sports secretary welcomes and values your feedback.

Gareth Maguire

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**Fruit**

‘Bananas, the best source of natural potassium you can get’ said the managing director… these are good, too,’ he added, scoffing a Danish pastry (‘People like us’, BBC). So, mix it in with veg up to five portions a day and we’ll all live until we’re a hundred (assuming one would want to; something the author cannot confess). Yet, we are left with the dilemma of how we decide what is good and bad taste, what are good and bad fruits? Is there some absolute we can appeal to, or is it just a case of personalized relativism: ‘you eat your fruit, I’ll eat mine’?

One would have thought the issue of marmite would have dismissed the former conjecture outright, but, of late, someone, or rather something, has come to permeate aspects of our lives which causes me to think again. I hereby shudder at the thought of Linda Barker. Our quest here is to find her fruit equivalent and avoid it at all costs. Banana? No. Whilst lacking in elegance and sophistication, it is somehow too useful and satisfying to even glimpse at the extraordinary levels of bad taste set your beloved Curry’s and DFS saleswoman. Tomato (and yes it is a fruit)? No again. In many ways lacking in flavour (and therefore taste?) and served as an accompaniment to otherwise tasty and fulfilling dishes, but still not reaching the dizzy heights of vulgar pointlessness set by our lofty Goddess. Oranges? Somewhat messy, but their plump and satisfying size clashes with Ms Barkers gaunt visage. Kumquats? Lychees? Grapes? Kiwi-fruit? Staranese? Dragonfruit? No. All have their place. What your author finds almost as unbearable as our Nemesis the home-wrecker is the devastatingly shy approach people seem to have to fruit and its multiple uses.

Let us not fall into the trap of a narrow fruitish mentality. Who is to say all fruit is destined for our palettes and, ergo, gullets? While would never deny the enjoyment of chomping into a good Granny Smith’s from the Covered Market, have I (and, I am convinced, others) not also put fruit to other means of gainful employment? Witness the large tear in a portrait in Hertford Hall. On many a Christmas ‘feast’ did we throw sprouts and other vegetables. When faced with the draconian threats of ejection from the occasion, or, worse still, its omission from the social calendar, what had I to do? Denied the chance to plot the trajectory of over-cooked sprouts, and when the water-soaked napkins had run dry (so to speak) I was left with no option but to lob a tangerine over the middle table towards the melee on the far side, only to be forced into a more zealous (and less well-aimed) retaliation at a later stage. And I remember a memorable moment when the Junior Dean...
of St Annes was hit by a large lump of Christmas Pudding. A fine use of fruit (albeit in altered form) if ever I saw one. So where does this lead us in terms of taste? Strawberries and cream at Wimbledon? Be my guest, and please feel free to make fruit as gooey and sweet as possible in lovely crumbles and pies. The lesson here stems directly from the Barker experience. As she (our Queen of Distaste) is anathema to using things for appropriate purposes, we should be open to new opportunities as and when they present themselves. Ammunition when attacked by rogues whilst on a quiet punting trip? That chance to put your supervisor in his place? Or just a healthy alternative to crisps or a Mars bar? The choice is yours (though my recommendation is to stow a small plate under the table just in case you need a place to store several rounds come the third course). 

Anonymous

Facts about Greek food (and a few misconceptions)

Greek food consists of more than the trio of feta* cheese, Greek style yoghurt and Greek salad. And feta added to everything certainly doesn’t make the food Greek! Some people in England, Linacre chefs included, seem to think that the equation is: lamb + feta = Greek lamb; any kind of pasta + tomato sauce + feta = Greek style pasta (often loads of black pitted olives complement the equation). Feta is a really yummy thing – but it is far from being the prevalent ingredient in Greek cuisine!

Needless to say she wasn’t impressed at all. ‘That tasted almost like our food!’ she exclaimed in disappointment. Almost is the key word here: compared to Lebanese cuisine, Greek cuisine uses less chilli, far less mint, normal bread instead of pita bread. AND NO HOUMOUS WHATSOEVER!! Ask anybody in Greece what houmous is, and they will look at you with absolute bewilderment at the strange word!

On the other hand, ask anyone from England or Western Europe and the States about their impression of Greek and Lebanese cuisine. They’ll all say the same thing: ‘It’s good, but most meat dishes are too dry’. Dry refers to the fact that the meat is normally roasted with the essential herbs (salt, pepper, and oregano or mint/rosemary), and then served as it is, without any sauce or other accompaniment. So all these people who are used to the intricate flavours of Indian and French cuisine become surprised at the plainness of Greek meat dishes. Plain, however, could be a valid characterisation for the whole of Greek (and Lebanese) cuisine: surprisingly, it is not particularly intricate. It does not involve many sauces (tomato sauce is used almost exclusively), and it does not usually require any seasoning more complex than the trio of salt-pepper-oregano. The ingredients used for most meat or vegetable dishes are the basic: olive oil, garlic and onion.

What then brings Greek and Lebanese cuisine together? It is the Ottoman influence – the Ottomans, the forefathers of modern Turks, created a vast Empire that ruled in the Eastern Mediterranean for almost half a millennium: from the 14th to the 18th - 19th centuries. The Ottomans left a deep mark on the cooking habits of the nations they ruled, the Greeks among them. Baklava*, Turkish coffee, and Turkish delights are served.

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* Glossary

Feta cheese = medium-hard white cheese made of goat’s milk. It is quite ‘juicy’, as it is best preserved in salted water.

Baklava = a dessert made of filo pastry stuffed with crushed nuts (pistachios, almonds, or walnuts) and then soaked in syrup. It is served in small-sized square pieces.

Moussaka = dish made with layers of fried potatoes, aubergines, and minced meat, topped with white béchamel sauce.
as local delicacies both in Turkey and in Greece. Even *moussaka*, the quintessential Greek dish, is, to the shame of Greeks, a Turkish dish. The influence extends from all uses of *filo* pastry (stuffed with cheese, spinach, minced meat, etc.), to the way Greeks cook the aubergines: they fry them first and then boil them in tomato sauce with a lot of garlic (the same thing can be done with meatballs). Last but not least, it is found in the *gyros/kebab* – the Greek and Turkish version of fast food. By the way, it has nothing to do, in appearance and taste, with what the *kebab* vans serve as *kebab* here in Oxford. Real *kebab* is made of chunks of pork – it is not like the meat mash of indefinable origin and quality that they serve as *kebab* here (sorry if I made you feel disgusted).

The Turkish influence is even more strongly present in the cuisine of certain areas in Greece: these are the areas in the North, where Greek refugees from communities in Turkey settled after the Greco-Turkish war of 1920-1922. In Thessaloniki, the second biggest Greek city and home for many of those 1922 refugees are found the most representative dishes of this type of cuisine. Even the most modest *taverna* in Thessaloniki will serve delicacies that one is unlikely to find anywhere else in Greece! My absolute favourite: cubes of veal in tomato sauce with all the essential spices (salt, pepper, oregano), topped with flakes of cheese (NOT *feta* cheese) and baked in a clay pot in the oven – absolutely delicious!

*Katerina Oikonomopoulou*
The Final

Lenny K
... before he
resigns

Lenny is using his portering slot to catch up on a spot of reading, and listen to some of his favourite tunes.

Lenny has a customer!
Hey there, big L!
That's a crop book you're reading?

Another customer arrives
Hello, Lenny, what is that goddam dreadful music you're listening to?

But it's my favourite!

And...
Hey, Lenny, that's a frickin' awful jumper you're wearing!

But I thought I looked good!

Hey, readers, sometimes, it seems our personal tastes are against the grain and different to everyone else's. But just remember to stand your ground. Diversity is the driving force of humanity and taste is one of the most important expressions of this diversity.

Back at home
Mmm! My housemate is cooking his favourite dish: toast with tuna, kidney beans with a layer of microwave tomatoes and bananas. It must taste simply great to him.

That's it!!

Lenny
October 2018