

# Post 16 Literary Journal

Second Edition

# Editors Letter – Second Edition

Hello, and welcome to the second edition of the Post 16 Literary Journal...

We hoped you enjoyed our first edition and would like to say thank you for all the feedback we have received and a huge thank you to all our contributors of this and the last edition. In this terms piece, we are excited to share with you a creative writing piece taking a dystopian look at the future with no poetry, an analytical insight into black facing in modern media and a critical view of women in the BBC drama Peaky Blinders and our editor, Louise will be looking over some of the international and national headlines telling you the news you need to know. We hope you find this edition as insightful and exciting as we do! We are looking forward to bringing you the next edition soon and as ever if you have anything to submit please let us know!

From your editors,

Chloe, Louise and Carys

# What is in this edition?

In this edition, these topics are discussed...

- **What happened and why should you care? -**  
By Louise F
  - > **Exploring:** discourse in our police and the Sarah Everard assault case, Coronavirus update, protests in India, and the rising anti-Asian crime in America
- **Are they funny or are they just racist? -** By Kaira-Lily
  - > **Exploring:** an analytical insight into black facing in modern media, looking at the issues arisen in comedy and the misrepresentations based on racial stereotypes, all while being played by white actors.
- **Poetry in 2120 -** By Molly L
  - > **Exploring:** a dystopian perspective of the future, where poetry is banned, the speaker explores using poetry to cope with the uprisings and conflict within society.
- **Women of Peaky Blinders- Empowering or sexualised?**  
- By Chloe C
  - > **Exploring:** whether the representation of women in the BBC's popular programme 'Peaky Blinders' is more empowering or sexualized.

# What happened and why should you care?

## Discourse in our police – Sara Everard and assault

Over the past few months there have been cases which bring about doubt in the UK's police force and the power which they hold.

### **Sara Everard**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 33 year old Sara Everard disappeared whilst on her way home.
- Police Officer Wayne Couzens was arrested 9<sup>th</sup> March on suspicion of kidnapping and murder.
- After her death a vigil was held which quickly lead to arrests as police used force to disperse the crowd.

Not only does the fact that a police officer is suspected of committing this crime raise questions about the safety of women in the UK but the incident at the memorial raises questions regarding the amount of power police should have regarding protests. A theme which has been upsettingly common in recent times is protests which appear peaceful and lawful being accused of violence and as a result being forced to disperse by police.

Additionally, police have made further arrests at a protest in Bristol regarded the proposed 'Police and Crime Bill' which could have significant changes to the powers police hold when it comes to protests. The bill would allow police to impose a start and finish time, set noise limits and apply these rules to protests of just one person. Even one person protesting could be met with a fine of up to £2500 or an arrest. It will also become a crime to not follow rules that the protesters "ought" to have known even without a direct order from a police officer.

Is this an infringement of our right to protest? Does this take away the peoples power to make our voices heard? Should the police even be given this power considering the corruption within them?

### **Assault and Rape allegations**

- A police officer is being investigated three years after being accused of assaulting two previous partners who were also police officers
- The officer is being accused of sexual and physical assault in some case on police property
- Although the Met says that it takes "all allegations of domestic abuse extremely seriously", the women involved claim that "There was very little support" and that the person accused "controlled everything. He had friends. He was looked after".

Over the years reported cases of domestic and sexual assault have increased and with this a pattern has appeared of police not taking claims seriously, accusations of inadequate investigations and cases of potential suspects being shielded. Clearly there is an issue with the way assault, domestic, physical or sexual, is handled but with the changes to protests will women's voices be loud enough to have the necessary changes made.

## Why should you care?

- Whether you identify as male, female or both or neither the police system and the government and in fact all the institutions attached are supposed to serve the people
- Recent events have shown that this is not the necessarily the case anymore.
- Its' important to be invested in your own and the people around you safety.
- With the changes to the ways we make our voices heard we can only rely on democracy and voting to make the changes we need.
- I encourage anyone who reads this to not only look into ways they can keep themselves and their friends safe but to look into proposed policy changes and do research into the parties in parliament. You don't have to be an expert nut when the times comes to vote make sure you know what the party you are voting for stands for and whether or not you can trust them to serve and represent the people.

## Coronavirus Update

Due to concerns that the Coronavirus vaccine does not actually prevent transmission many have been avoiding the vaccine but new evidence disproves said concerns:

- A study of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine shows that risk of infection was cut by 70% after one dose and 85% after two doses.

People under 50 will be offered the vaccination in May in the order 40-49, 30-39, 18-29, under 18. This may change depending on the number of people in each category in each area of the UK (e.g. if one area has a small amount of 50-59 year olds 40-49 year olds will be vaccinated earlier than in other areas).

As of the 29<sup>th</sup> March up to 6 people from 2 households can meet up outside

12<sup>th</sup> April (earliest) non-essential retail including hair dressers, outdoor attractions including theme parks and zoos and restaurants and pubs (outside only) can open.

17<sup>th</sup> May (earliest) up to 30 people can meet outside and there will be a review on social distancing between friends and family and a review on the "one metre rule" and face coverings.

21<sup>st</sup> June (earliest) review on all legal limits to social distance – government hopes to remove all.

## Why should you care?

The end of Covid-19 restrictions is in sight

The dates posted above are only estimations however, if restrictions are to be lifted on those dates cases need to continue to go down

Continue to social distance, test and where masks where appropriate and follow the guidelines so that cases can remain low.

## Protests in India

- For a number of month now farmers across India have been protesting.
- Since November, tens of thousands of farmers have been camping out on highways in protest of new laws.
- So far talks between government and farmers have reached stalemates
- The laws in question would change the way farmers are payed for the goods – essentially removing the idea of a minimum wage.
- The changes would leave farmers open to exploitation.
- Although economists argue that Indian agriculture needs reform, the proposed laws have been likened to a “death warrant” for the farmers

## Why should you care?

- This once again links to how people are allowed to use their voices.
- Protesters have faced backlash and it seem that their concerns are mostly being dismissed despite their very lives being on the line.
- How can people protect themselves if governments don't listen to their people?

## Rising anti-Asian crime in America

- Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic hate crime targeting specifically Asians has dramatically increased
- An advocacy group ‘Stop AAPI Hate’ says it has received more than 2,800 reports of hate incidents directed at Asian Americans
- These incidents can range from verbal to physical assault
- Some have attributed the rise in crime to people referring to the Coronavirus as the ‘Chinese virus’ or people blaming Chinese people for the pandemic.
- Others blame the fact that in America the large population of Asian Americans is often ignored or omitted from the news – leaving crimes against them under reported.

## Why should you care?

- This story highlights how the spread of misguided or prejudice information can damage entire communities.
- For example, from Donald Trumps’ perspective referring to the Coronavirus of the ‘Chinese virus’ or ‘Kung Flu’ yields no consequences and probably got a laugh out of his primarily white fan base – but this type of “joke” normalises racist language and is a gateway to larger, more serious crime.
- This story is a reminder to consider how words and “jokes” can perpetuate racism.

# Are they funny or just racist?

- Kaira-Lilly

They say imitation is a form of flattery, but to what extent? How do we know when the line between flattery and mockery and degradation is crossed? Blackface has been a source of 'comedy' for a long time and has also been a source of great pain and prejudice against black people. Seeing comedians now being exposed or 'cancelled' and being held accountable for doing blackface in their past and excusing it really hurts. Black people aren't the butt of your joke. Let alone any race.

This became very relevant around July this year when everyone's favourite great British comedy shows, Little Britain and Come Fly with Me, were cancelled for their continuous use of offensive, racially insensitive content and of course, blackface. Matt Lucas tweeted an apology on behalf of the iconic duo, stating: "David and I have both spoken publically in recent years of our regret that we played characters of other races. Once again we want to make it clear that it is wrong and we are very sorry." Of course, this apology was posted in the midst of the social outcry against racism following the death of George Floyd and so doesn't acknowledge the homophobic and ablest jokes as they were not the focus, but still, just something to think on. Now, if you are white, cis-het and able-bodied, this apology is not for you to either accept or reject and it is not your place to decide whether it was 'actually offensive' or not.

I hear people say it was a 'different time' and things were different back then; and that somehow excuses it? Blackface has existed for a long time and one thing that hasn't changed over time is that it was made to degrade, antagonise and humiliate black people and create harmful stereotypes that have caused the prejudice and ingrained racism that we see today. It also seems cruel and unfair that at the end of their skit or performance they can wipe off that paint, erase that pigment from their skin, leaving the people they have impersonated with the colour they wore as a costume along with the stereotype and prejudice they have created or reinforced. Black people cannot simply wipe off their skin. They cannot change their skin when it suits them for a laugh and once things get serious they can retreat back into their shield of privilege.

These cruel caricatures may have been funny to watch and laugh at but at the end of the day, I must ask you this: If a comedian relies on racist jokes and mockery of minorities, are they actually funny? Because in my opinion, they are bigots who have used the pre-existing stereotypes to carry their jokes for them. It's just lazy comedy. If you think black characters in a skit are so funny, watch actual black comedians. If you find Indian, Asian, Hispanic or Latino characters hilarious, watch actual Indian, Asian, Hispanic or Latino comedians. They do exist, you just love to view them through a white man's lens.

Some comedians I recommend:

- Alex English
- Eman El-Husseini
- Jes Tom
- Josh Johnson
- Mindy Kahling
- Maya Rudolf
- Ayo Edebiri
- Josh Blue

# Poetry in 2120

- Molly L

*"Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand" – Plato*

*"Poetry is language at its most distilled and most powerful" – Rita Dove*

The once-great power of poetry that many poets held are now gone entirely. It is 2120. The year where the beauty of one's words in a lyrical form have been abolished by the government. Poets' great and wise thoughts in their magnificent minds like an everlasting light have been extinguished entirely.

But how did it all happen?

Between the years 2100 to 2120, there were continuous uprisings against the government due to the political clashes between the people and the all-ruling government – the revolutionaries believed that an idealistic world without the government could happen successfully.

I remember the first uprising I witnessed which was in Piccadilly Circus in 2106. There was a never-ending stream of people of all ages who were crowded at the popular tourist attraction. Being pushed back and forth further into the bustling crowd, a line of police officers with riot shields approached the protesters, shouted at them to stand down or they would risk being arrested.

At that time, the uprisings were in full swing which had already caused the deaths of thousands – including police officers, revolutionaries and innocents – hence the heavy protection armour. The threat of arrest was empty as none of the angered revolutionaries cared if they got arrested because, if anything, it helped show their cause for change.

That was the first time I had a panic attack. The feeling of your chest tightening as though your lungs were caving inwards, leaving you breathless. My head was spinning uncontrollably as my battered white converse were frozen firmly to the ground.

What would be seen as ironic if I knew what I now know, I started reciting poetry as something for my panicked mind to focus on. Great words of poetry from classics like Plato and Romantics like William Blake flowed from my mouth seamlessly as my hands gradually stopped shaking.

If it was not for poetry, the chance of me getting out of that hostile situation with the imminent threat of arrest would have been little to none – and I would have been arrested simply for freezing up and being unable to move – seeming guilty of defying our nation. But that comfort is now gone.

In a time of détente after several years of gruelling turmoil with the uprisings, the government were desperate to maintain peace within society. The uprisings did not end successfully for the revolutionaries and the 20 years of continuous fights against the government resulted in no positive change.

It made everything worse as the government began to launch full-scale home invasions and arrests of those suspected to be anti-government (even with little evidence). In their eyes, this was a reasonable safety net to help maintain their control and, therefore, societal stability. However, and rightly so, the people were enraged by their actions but they were soon silenced.

Those who were imprisoned never came back.

They just disappeared.

After a series of repetitive news bulletins showing multiple arrests and anti-government home invasions, the bulletins stopped.

Not because the home invasions and arrests with no evidence stopped.

But because the news agencies were banned.

It was soon after the banning of news agencies that all poetry and poets were forbidden as well. This was due to the vibrant graffiti of key poems on government property that suggested another revolution would occur with the great, wise and provoking words of poets as their inspiration.

Now, if I was caught writing this account, especially with specific references to poets, I would be for sure damned and outcasted from British society with the giant label of 'TRAITOR'. But everything that these poets have said is true.

Shortly after the British made poetry illegal and punishable, the rest of the world followed its lead. Children in schools across the world were no longer exposed to the beauty of poetry, its craft and the fabulous minds before it.

Unfortunately, my generation is the last generation that learnt about poems of war, love, peace and tragedy. Even more unfortunate is the fact that most of my generation decided to forget that they were ever introduced to the beauty of poetry. But not me.

***“A world without poetry and art would be too much like one without birds of flowers: bearable but a lot less enjoyable” – Aberjhani***

Life and society practically continued as usual after the government banned poetry. However, there were some elements of society that seemed a little duller and a lot less enjoyable.

Shortly after the ban, the school curriculum had to change for English. Instead of studying and analysing the meanings behind some of the greatest poems and poetry, students now learnt about novels that praised the government and their ways. Education now basically teaches pupils how to be 'perfect little government supporters' so they could be the future generation of traditional politicians.

What is a 'perfect little government supporter' you may ask?

Well they are the future generation who are incredibly pro-government. They are non-aggressive, their minds are empty of creativity like an artist's blank canvas and they are completely oblivious to poetry. To the government, they are perfect because they understand the true importance of government rule and are not 'clouded' by the supposedly wrong words of poets. To me, they are like Mutes with no beautiful minds, with no freedom to speak.

*Aberjhani was right. The world now without poetry is dark, dull and devastating. There is no beauty. There is little to no freedom of speech. There is nothing.*

*Just like in the 1920s in the Prohibition era, illicit underground businesses, similar to speakeasies were established where you could read banned poetry. Everyday afterschool, I would visit one of my local ones, which was located at the back of a music store that, from the outside, appeared to be a storeroom. But in the inside, it was much different.*

*Old shelves lined each burgundy wall with anti-government books and poetry anthologies neatly organised in alphabetical order and in genres. I was a kid in a candy shop every time I went as I used to compile 10 anthologies onto one of the rickety desks that I would sit and read on for hours and hours.*

*The man who ran this poetry speakeasy was Albert Forest – a 50 year old musician and poet – fortunately for him, as he did not publish any of his poems before the ban, he was not recognised as an enemy of the state. He was quite simply my idol, he would sit with me for long periods of time and discuss the fantastic techniques of the Romantics like Shelley, Blake and Wordsworth – always with a butter mint in his mouth.*

*Mr Forest's place was a place of safety for me. I was a regular and he was somewhat like a wise grandfather to me.*

*That is why it hit me so hard like a punch to the gut when the town gossip spread that he was imprisoned and the poetry speakeasy was ruthlessly ransacked in the middle of the night, just a few hours after I had left. In that moment, my hatred for the government grew even more as they took away the one person and the one place that made me feel as though I was truly home.*

*The same day, after school, I found my heavy eyes staring emptily at the mess of the ransacked poetry speakeasy – my home. Pages of the anthologies were ripped and strewn across the floor with the shelves that once stood tall broken. I still remember how heavy my heart felt that day as nothing whole remained, except from Mr Forest's golden spectacles that sat delicately on the floor. The only bright and glimmering object in the destroyed dark room.*

*The only remnant I took of Mr Forest that I still keep to this day were his golden spectacles that used to sit on the tip of his crooked nose when he read poetry to me whilst sucking on his signature butter mint. A part from that, I could not have anything else in my possession as it would have been used against me to send me to prison where I would never return – just like Mr Forest.*

To this day, poetry is still banned. The younger generations are clueless about the beauty of poetry that I am aware of.

For me, 2120 will always be the year beauty left the world.

The year that took my safety away.

The year that took away the one person I could relate to.

The year that everyone was silenced.

Although I am still fuelled with rage and anger after what happened to Mr Forest, I am still silenced like the rest of my generation.

Perhaps then, without me even realising, I am a 'perfect little government supporter'.

# Women of Peaky Blinders, Empowering or sexualised?

- Chloe C

1920's period drama of Birmingham's much-loved gang, the Peaky Blinders, has been the BBC most popular period drama for years largely because of its traditional blood, guts and gore, iconic street shoot outs comparable to James Bond and no doubt Cillian Murphy ocean eyes. The drama is as popular amongst women as it is men, unlike Bond which has a considerable male persuasion, many argue this is because of the women who ultimately drive the plot. Notably, formidable Aunt Polly, (the female powerhouse of the Peaky Blinders) Ada Thorne (the sister of the brothers) Grace Shelby, (who stole Tommy's heart) fearless Esme Shelby, Linda, hated but somewhat admired amongst the more cynical audience and Lizzie- the prostitute turned heiress of the Shelby mansion. But these women, although undoubtedly they all have their moments of dominance and power, are they there simply to appease a modern audience and the male characters in the show?

Women traditionally have always been the wives, the mistresses or the nannies unimportant to the plot, shoved to the side with as little as 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the screen time the men have. This surely highlights a much wider issue in Hollywood and TV- women are STILL sexualised, STILL objectified, STILL underpaid. Peaky Blinders seems to be an optimistic subversion of this, but is it? Take Grace for example, the pretty blonde who Tommy falls for- she acts as a double agent of sorts working secretly for corrupt copper Campbell to get in on the Peaky Blinders plans through seducing Tommy. The point being she was asked to use her feminine sexual prowess and seduce Tommy for the advantage of another man. To cut a very long and complex story short both Campbell and Tommy end up falling for her, she chooses Tommy (somewhat obviously) as yet another trope of the sexist fairy-tale ending- the prince always gets his princess. Yet Grace has power- her actions dictate the plot of the final two episodes of season one, she tugs at Tommy's heartstrings and (spoiler) her death changes the Peaky Blinders forever. Despite this power she's heavily sexualised- she woos Tommy with her beauty, is used as a ploy by Tommy in a sexual way as part of a "business transaction" and Annabelle Wallis (who played Grace Shelby) goes naked in a sex scene. So, not only is the character sexualised but so is the actress. This situation is no-doubt a product of the male dominated entertainment industry- how can shows even begin to desexualise women if the only input is through the Male Gaze? How can women be seen to use other means than their sexual prowess of getting one over on a man if there aren't any stories of this happening? And most importantly how can young girls become interested in history when all they see is men having the power over women and women being side-lined to every period drama plot?

And yet, the women of the Peaky Blinders are admired. They, like their male counterparts, are passionate, ruthless and deceptive. Take Polly, her powers are far more than that of a psychic she is the only member of the family who can control the Shelby's and particularly Tommy. It has to be said that the Peaky Blinders is an outright display of women supporting women, whether that be in marriage, abortion or death. Ada and Polly are particularly strong women who rely on each other and seem indestructible- a major move away from the 1920's ideal of a weak, submissive, dependent woman. No, the Shelby women compete with the Shelby men in their own right and most of the time they win.

It is after all Polly who takes down Inspector Campbell not Tommy, and her who can undermine Tommy if she needs to. The creators themselves recognise the feminine powers at play in the show with Cillian Murphy (playing Tommy Shelby) saying “women were incredibly powerful in working class families after the first world war” and that this needs to be reflected in the show, he also says that “Tommy doesn’t care if it a man or a woman doing what needs to be done; he sees it’s the natural order of things for smart people to make decisions and for the less smart people to carry them out. It’s no surprise that in a family like the Shelby’s strong, intelligent women should rise to the top”. Admittedly, this creates a genderless hierarchy of intelligence which women can rise and can assume a place of power but do they really possess significant power? Tommy remains at the top, Lizzie is only of interest to the family (initially) because of her position as a prostitute, and Polly can only bring down Campbell by luring him to her in a sexual manner, not through her intelligence or power.

It has to be said these were views of the time and despite things that ultimately undermine feminine powers in the show, the Shelby’s is evenly split between females and males and when taking a “vote” on family matters the women have the same power, something that didn’t happen nationwide in England until 1928. The success of the Peaky Blinders is because of the women as much as the men. Their power perhaps shows a flip side of history that women had an unconventional type of power but nevertheless had it and used it to their advantage whilst working alongside men for a shared goal. Ultimately, they are a formidable force who keep the family and company together and keep a modern audience entertained and in awe.