

# THE HISTORICAL TIMES

TERMLY PUBLICATION FROM THE NCH HISTORY SOCIETY

## *'History on Stage'*

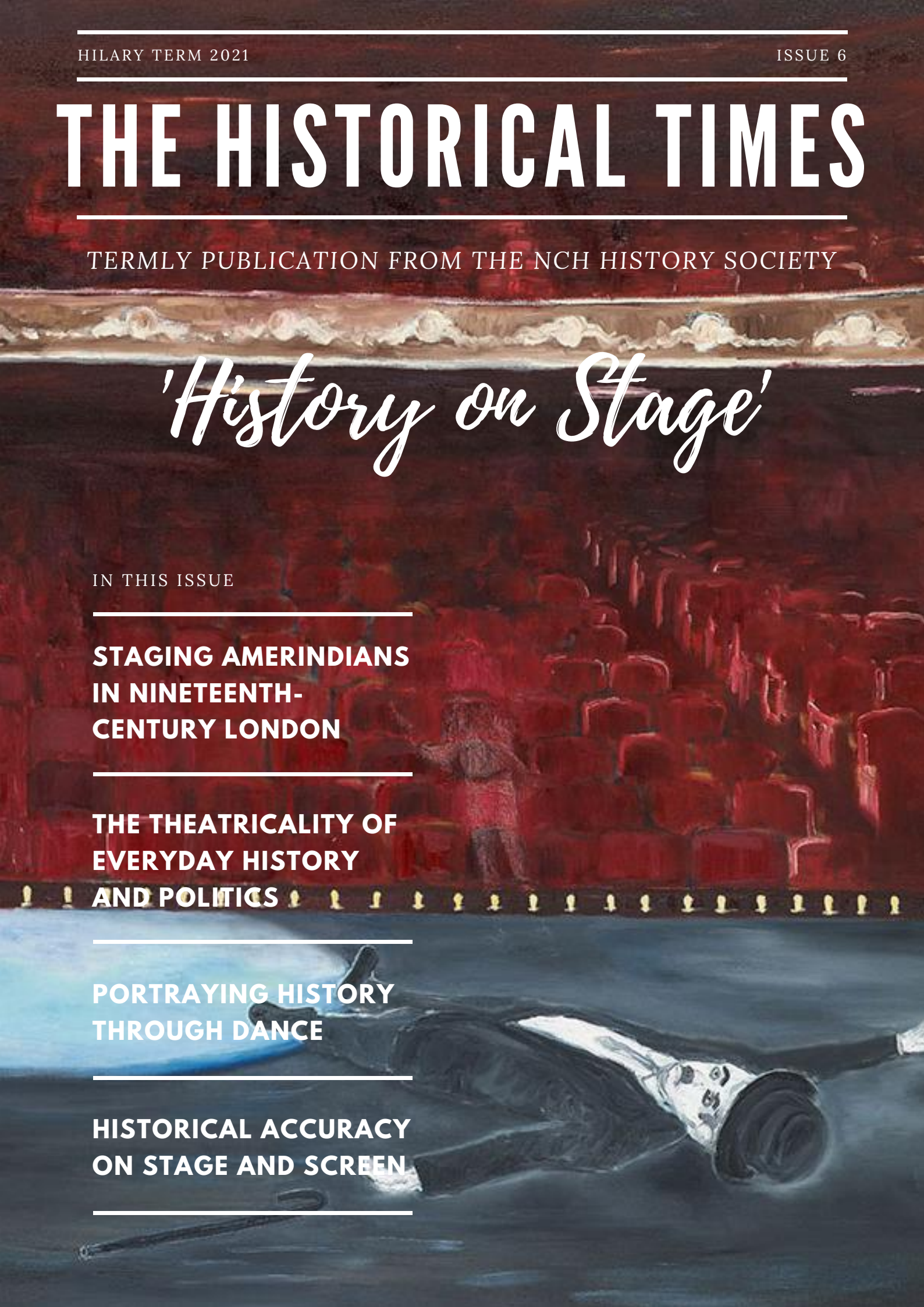
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## History with an audience

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the sixth edition of the History Society's *Historical Times*. The theme 'History on Stage' was suggested by first-year students, and it has yielded a variety of insightful articles.

In this issue, the portrayal of history through dance is considered, as is the historic staging of Amerindians in nineteenth-century London. Historical accuracy is examined through the prism of Marlowe's play *Edward II*, as well as Netflix's recent series of *The Crown*, which lavishly dramatises the period from 1979 to 1990. One article takes an alternative slant on the theme and posits the theatricality of history itself

You will find a series of book recommendations - from political bestsellers to relevant historical tomes - to get you through the present lockdown. There is also a list of things to do, albeit in a digital sense, which I encourage you to peruse.

The theatrical paintings of Japanese-born American painter, Yoichiro Yoda, feature in this edition. His works are inspired by the destruction of historic theatres in New York, particularly 42nd Street. His creative mission is to reclaim the historic value of these old theatres. They serve as fine inspiration.

It has been a privilege to edit and design this edition of the *Historical Times*. I must, of course, express my thanks to each contributor for writing: you have all brought unique insights, and this edition is made so much richer for it. I sincerely hope you enjoy reading every article.

**SAMUEL DOERING**  
Editor



**LIFE IS LIKE A PLAY IN THE THEATRE: IT DOES  
NOT MATTER HOW LONG IT LASTS, BUT HOW  
WELL IT WAS PLAYED.**

**~ SENECA**



# Staging American Indians in Nineteenth-century London: George Catlin at the Egyptian Hall

BY ALISTAIR ROBINSON

On 25 November 1839, George Catlin set sail for England from New York City. He travelled aboard the *Roscius*, one of the first transatlantic steamships, and landed in Liverpool after three weeks at sea. From Liverpool he went to London where he met his friend and promoter, Charles August Murray, the second son of the Earl of Dunmore, who whisked him off to the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly. With a façade encrusted with scarabs and sphinxes, and a main gallery 106 feet long, it was one of the city's largest and most ornate exhibition spaces: it was here that Catlin – an artist, showman and amateur ethnographer – established his 'Indian Gallery'.

Catlin had started his artistic career in the 1820s, painting society portraits in New York and Philadelphia, but before long he turned to other artistic subjects. As he recalled at the beginning of his *Descriptive Catalogue of Catlin's Indian Gallery* (1840):

'I wish to inform the visitors of my Gallery that,

having some years since become fully convinced of the rapid decline and certain extinction of the numerous tribes of the North American Indians; and seeing also the vast importance and value which a full pictorial history of these interesting but dying people might be to future ages – I set out alone, unaided and unadvised, resolved (if my life should be spared), by the aid of my brush and my pen, to rescue from oblivion so much of their primitive looks and customs as the industry and ardent enthusiasm of one lifetime could accomplish, and set them up in a Gallery unique and imperishable, for the use and benefit of future ages.'

This 'unique and imperishable' gallery was formed of 200 landscape paintings featuring villages, rituals and picturesque scenery, and over 300 portraits, mostly of tribal chiefs and warriors. Accompanying this vast collection of canvases were numerous artefacts that Catlin had gathered on his travels. These included traditional weapons, ceremonial costumes and 'a Crow Lodge, or Wigwam': standing twenty-five feet high, and large enough to hold

L: Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly c.1900 © Museum of London. R: George Catlin, 1849. © By William Fisk. NPG, U.S.





eighty people, this was the centrepiece of the exhibition.

As he states in his catalogue, Catlin's aim was to 'inform' the public about the manners and customs of indigenous Americans. He was not just an artist, he was also an educator, and after his gallery opened in January 1840, he gave regular lectures on the origin and significance of the items in his collection. However, Catlin was also interested in making money, and once the crowds began to thin, he searched for new ways of enticing his audience back to the exhibition. His solution was a series of tableaux vivants that dramatized various aspects of American Indian life. These scenes were originally played by Catlin and his white English and American friends, but later he hired twenty Londoners who had 'some striking Indian character in their faces or figures' to act them out.

This scheme was a success. Visitors rushed back to the Egyptian Hall to witness their fellow Londoners dramatizing rituals under the watchful eye of Catlin, and many were satisfied with the result. In an article entitled 'North American Indians' (1840), the Literary Gazette praised the addition of 'representations on the stage', observing: 'The spectator beholds the representatives of the Indians, dressed in their very costume, and instructed by one well-acquainted with the practices of the characters they enact [i.e. Catlin], go through the ceremonies of the several dances with all the gesture, action, shouts, and yells, incident to the real scene.'



The Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly.  
© Engraving by A. McClatchy, 1828. Wellcome Images.



The Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly.  
© Engraving by A. McClatchy, 1828. Wellcome Images.

In 'Objects, Performance and Ethnographic Spectacle: George Catlin in Europe' (2013), Stephanie Pratt argues that these dramatic scenes were 'designed to combine edification and instruction', and that they presented 'illustrations of contemporary Indian life'. However, to some degree, these scenes were also historical representations. Catlin makes this clear in his Descriptive Catalogue: the paintings and artifacts (and presumably the tableaux vivants as well) were designed to 'rescue from oblivion' the cultural remains of an 'interesting but dying people'. In other words, even if the rituals that Catlin captured on canvas and on the stage were still performed by indigenous Americans, as Pratt suggests, then they were also already historic because their practitioners were bound for 'certain extinction'. This is how Victorians would have understood Catlin's Indian Gallery – as a way of trying to preserve that which had either vanished or was about to. In the collective imagination of Victorian Britain, American Indian culture had already been consigned to the grave.

In the nineteenth century, the notion that indigenous Americans would soon become extinct was commonplace on both sides of the Atlantic. In large part this rested on how white Britons and Americans interpreted them as historical subjects. Although they were acutely aware of their own technological, political and scientific development, they perceived American Indian societies as static, so much so that they often treated them as the subjects of natural rather than human history. As

Steven Conn observes in *History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (2004), 'natural historical representations of America tended to depict the country as existing outside the flow of historical time'. Because they were imagined in these ahistorical terms, American Indians, it was thought, could not adapt to new ways of life. Their societies existed as they had always existed and could not develop as circumstances changed.

This blinkered historical perspective masked the brutality of imperial expansion into American Indian homelands by framing its effects – displacement, death, destruction – as the result of 'natural' laws. It was inevitable, it was argued, that indigenous societies would collapse when they came into contact with 'more advanced' European civilizations. Moreover, it also alienated American Indians from modernity: if they could not adapt to new ways of life then they could not reap the benefits of technological and scientific change. Ironically, the history of Catlin's Indian Gallery exposes just how false this assumption was.

In 1842 Catlin packed up his exhibition, left the Egyptian Hall, and embarked on a tour of Britain with his twenty actors in tow. The following year, he replaced them with nine Ojibwe, who had crossed the Atlantic to make money by exhibiting themselves in Europe. The incorporation of actual American Indians relit the peoples' passion for Catlin's show, and he returned to the Egyptian Hall for another London season. Even Queen Victoria saw them perform. Their presence in England, and their performance of rituals that were undoubtedly choreographed by Catlin, was a sign and symptom of imperial violence and subjugation. However, in addition, it was also clear evidence of agency and adaptation in the face of change. Although the characters that they played were of 'interesting but dying people', the Ojibwe themselves very much alive, and active participants in the Victorian entertainment industry.

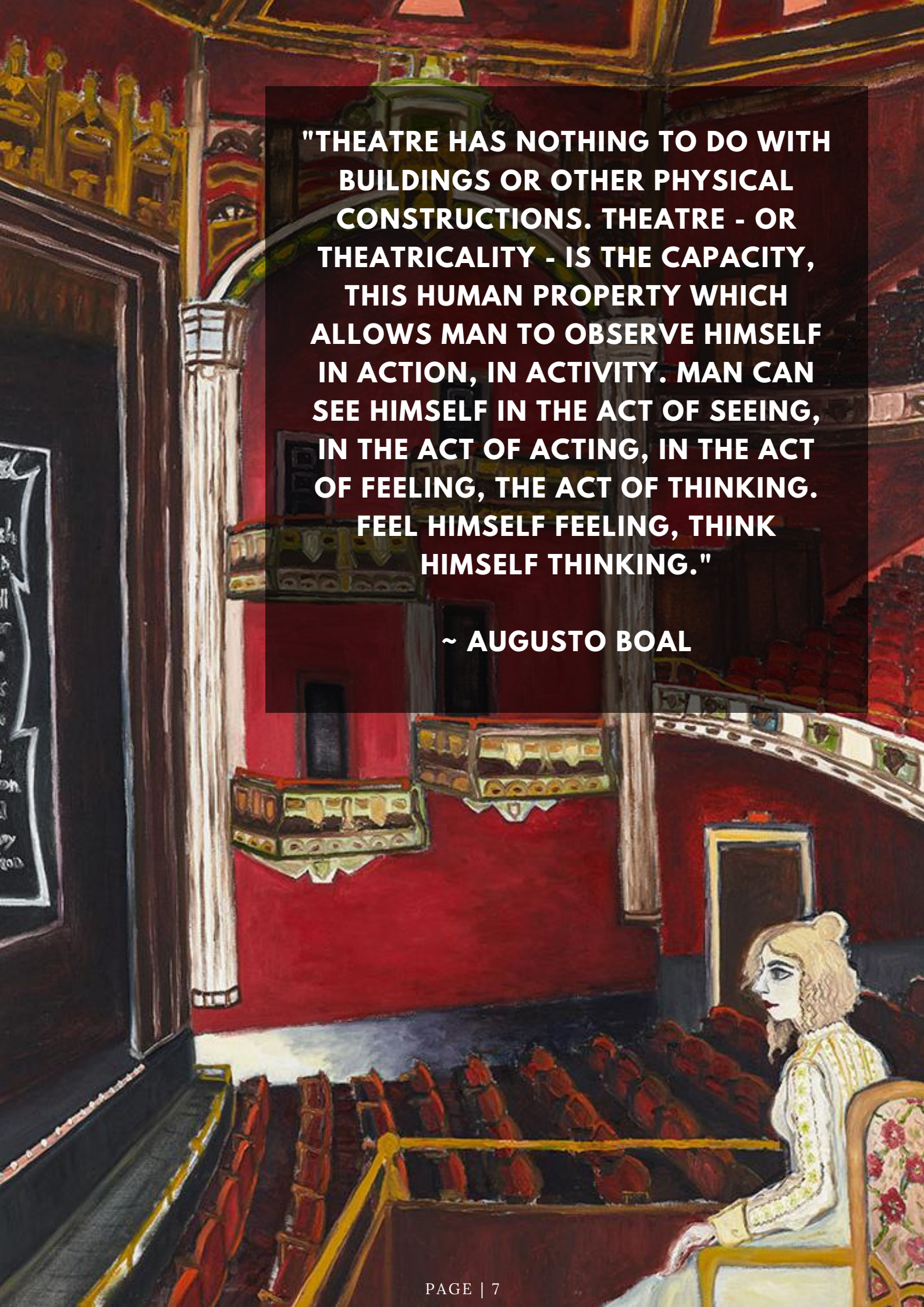
**Dr ALISTAIR ROBINSON is a lecturer in English at the New College of the Humanities.**



Ojibwa dancing for Queen Victoria.

© Catlin's *Notes of Eight Years' Travels and Residence in Europe, with His North American Indian Collection*, 1848.





**"THEATRE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH BUILDINGS OR OTHER PHYSICAL CONSTRUCTIONS. THEATRE - OR THEATRICALITY - IS THE CAPACITY, THIS HUMAN PROPERTY WHICH ALLOWS MAN TO OBSERVE HIMSELF IN ACTION, IN ACTIVITY. MAN CAN SEE HIMSELF IN THE ACT OF SEEING, IN THE ACT OF ACTING, IN THE ACT OF FEELING, THE ACT OF THINKING. FEEL HIMSELF FEELING, THINK HIMSELF THINKING."**

**~ AUGUSTO BOAL**





*Elizabeth*. Katie Deacon, Zenaida Yanowsky and Yury Yanowsky. © ROH, 2018. Photographed by Tristram Kenton.

## Portraying History through Dance: 'Elizabeth' and 'Mayerling'

BY CHLOE ROGERS

I've been involved with dance and musical theatre since I was nine, and I now assist backstage at the two youth performing arts organisations I was a member of. When I did my GCSEs, I studied history, dance, and art (amongst other things) and I frequently used my love and interest of history within my art and dance coursework pieces, including a dance based on the Vietnam War and a canvas painting of the Berlin Wall. I carried on studying dance and history at A-Level, and dance was a lot more critical and in-depth than I thought it would be. We studied various works, such as Akram Khan's *Giselle* and Christopher Bruce's *Ghost Dances*, and their historical, social, geographic and economic influences. This article focuses on two historical works I have seen in person and how I feel they have communicated different areas of history.

In Spring 2018, I went to see *Elizabeth* at the Barbican Theatre. I was studying Queen Elizabeth I

for GCSE History so in a way I was using that as an excuse to go and see another dance show. *Elizabeth* portrays the life of Elizabeth I through ballet and spoken word, performed by dancers Zenaida Yanowsky as Elizabeth and her brother Yury Yanowsky as Elizabeth's suitors (legendary dancer Carlos Acosta has also played this role) and actresses Samantha Bond, Sonya Cullingford and Katie Deacon as narrators, with accompaniment from baritone Julien Van Mellaerts and cellist Raphael Wallfisch. The show was originally performed at the Old Royal Naval College's Painted Hall in Greenwich 2013 and was then reworked for the Linbury Studio at the Royal Opera House and afterwards the Barbican. The script is structured mainly by Elizabeth's own words, or what her contemporaries wrote, as well as three plays which were also used to structure the script: *The Whore of Babylon* by Thomas Dekker, produced shortly after Elizabeth's death, *If You Know not Me, You Know Nobody* or *The Troubles of Queen Elizabeth*, a





*Elizabeth.* Katie Deacon and Zenaida Yanowsky.  
© ROH, 2018. Photographed by Tristram Kenton.

to make history more accessible.

In October 2018 I went to see *Mayerling* at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. *Mayerling* is a ballet based on the Mayerling incident of 1889 where Rudolf, Crown Prince of Austria committed suicide in his hunting lodge with his mistress, Baroness Mary Freiin von Vetsera. Choreographed by Kenneth MacMillan, it premiered in 1978 at the Royal Opera House with David Wall as Prince Rudolf. At the end of the premiere, MacMillan was given a standing ovation, and critics gave the next performances great reviews. There is much speculation surrounding the Mayerling incident, which means analysing the historical accuracy of the production is difficult. The show is full of morbid drama, and Macmillan will have had to create parts of the story, such as how Rudolf and Mary died in the hunting lodge. However, with the help of Nicholas Georgiadis' set designs and Franz List's score, the atmosphere portrayed feels accurate, particularly the candlelit palace and royal dances taking place at the beginning. As with

play by Thomas Heywood from 1606, and *The Unhappy Favourite* or *The Earl of Essex* by John Banks from 1682. As with any dance show, or performance using much older language, it can be difficult to keep up with the storyline and characters. The DanceTabs review summed this up well: 'The spoken language is a disconcerting mix of actorly declaiming and reciting, along with modern bits of exposition to keep the audience informed of who's who.' The choreographer Will Tuckett has not aimed to give a detailed account of Elizabeth's reign but has focused on Elizabeth as a woman based on contemporary interpretations of her character. The relationships between Elizabeth and her suitors are shown through a *pas de deux* between Elizabeth and each suitor. However, having only one dancer play each man and the similarity of choreography for each suitor, it is difficult to understand who is who which arguably limits the show's storytelling. Overall, *Elizabeth* is an atmospheric and historical show which helps to give a basic teaching of Elizabeth I's life through a creative medium, and with tickets at £10, it helps to



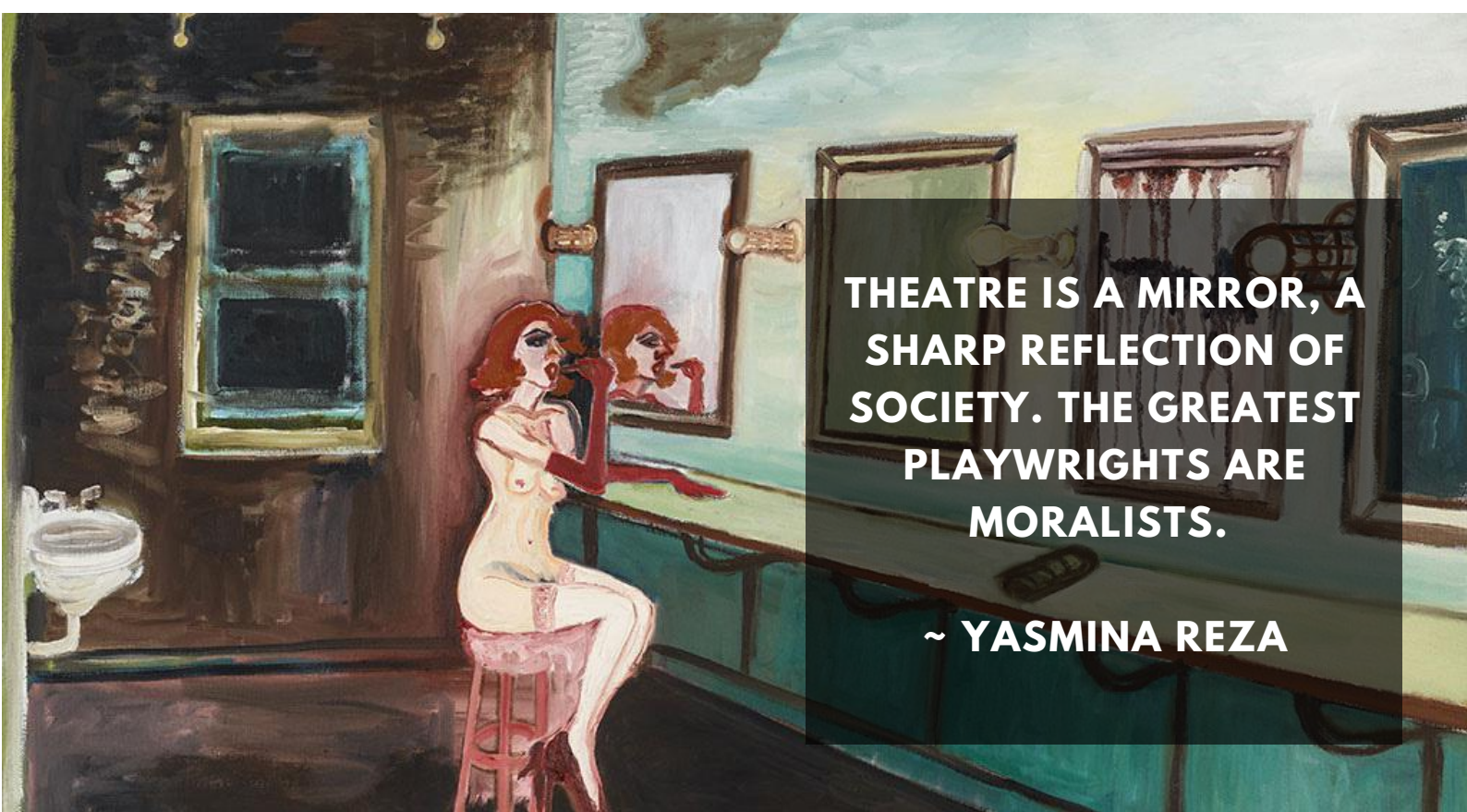
*Mayerling.* Ryoichi Hirano and Sarah Lamb.  
© ROH, 2018.

As with many dance shows, and ballets in particular, the programme book is extremely helpful in understanding the plot of the show by providing a synopsis for each act, and a description of each character. More recent reviews have described the characters as difficult to follow, which I completely understand as the lack of words or description can easily make it difficult to know who each character is and how they relate to the story. *Mayerling* shines a light on an interesting part of history, and while much of it is dramatised due to artistic licence and the lack of knowledge of what really happened in that hunting lodge in 1889, it was a dark but enjoyable show.

I believe history on stage is a valuable tool, especially in educating young people. It can be great for children who may struggle in a classroom or academic setting and need a different environment to ignite their love of history. Productions do have to be careful with the kind of image they present, especially of characters who may have a much darker history than is portrayed, but I feel that productions should make their audience interested in doing their own research

and would not be able to give enough in-depth information without it becoming more of a lecture than entertainment. While I have only focused on two shows in this article, other notable works with interesting historical influences include Lin Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton*, Christopher Bruce's *Ghost Dances*, Akram Khan's *Giselle*, and *Six the Musical*. I also highly recommend the Royal Ballet's other productions, as they have a magical way of interpreting both history and literature. Their productions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Don Quixote* and *Frankenstein* to name just a few, are incredible shows and do a great job of interpreting the original literature. I personally think the development of more theatre/dance based historical content is important as creative mediums can be extremely beneficial for many people and could generate greater interest in history.

**CHLOE ROGERS is a first-year student at the New College of the Humanities, majoring in History with Politics and International Relations as minor.**



**THEATRE IS A MIRROR, A  
SHARP REFLECTION OF  
SOCIETY. THE GREATEST  
PLAYWRIGHTS ARE  
MORALISTS.**

**~ YASMINA REZA**



# Theatre and Academia: Make the Villains Sing

BY LARS KJAER

What can we learn as historians from plays and musicals? I'm not talking about what we can learn as *public* historians, mind, but whether there is anything we can take from them for our dreariest, most academic works? I would argue that there is one centrally important thing we need to learn: to make the villains sing.

Many historians would argue that there are no villains in their work. We do, after all, strive for objectivity. That's true but nevertheless we are always writing from a certain perspective. Something, whether a person, a country, a class or even an idea or a place (say, the Mediterranean) forms the subject of the piece around whom the whole story congregates. That also means that there are, by necessity, some opposite forces, persons, places with whom our subject compete and interact. But all too often, these remain relatively silent, denied their own agency, glory and fascination.



Detail: *Henry the Lion on horseback visiting the Wends, whom he besieged*, drawn in 1781, Christian Rode. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

A concrete example: I'm currently writing a book on the political history of medieval Denmark. This often involves writing about Danish interactions with the emperors and princes of Germany, or as it were, the Holy Roman Empire, but mostly they remain walk-on parts: even a fascinating character like Henry the Lion, duke of Saxony, is in my work only interesting because of the ways in which he interacts with the contemporary Danish king Valdemar I 'the Great'.

I was struck by this when watching, and obsessively re-listening to the soundtrack of, Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton*. Here our main character, the American founding-father Alexander *Hamilton* is certainly the dominating character. But he is not the only who gets to set out his story and attract the audience's sympathy: his rival Aaron Burr and their main opponent, King George III, get some of the best, and most memorable, lines.



Detail: *David Garrick as Richard III*, 1745, William Hogarth. © Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool.

It is a tradition with roots as far back as Shakespeare's use of the soliloquy: Richard III breaking the Fourth Wall to speak directly to the audience and seduce us, just as he seduces the kingdom. But if we go back further, we find that the ancients of our discipline were much better at this than we are today: the ancient Greek historian Thucydides would compose riveting speeches for both Spartans and Athenians. Karl Marx in this as in so many ways is perhaps the best model, the proletariat is his hero, but my word, does he allow the bourgeoisie to sing!

It ought to be our ambition to follow this example and to make the rivals and opponents just as fascinating as our subjects. To understand and sympathise with them, and give expression to this, would not just make our work more textured and complex but also more fun, for us as much as for our readers.

**Dr LARS KJAER is Senior Lecturer in Medieval History and Head of the History Faculty at the New College of the Humanities.**

# Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*: historical accuracy on stage

BY MEGAN SEIORSE

I saw a production of Marlowe's *Edward II* last year, in easier times. A concession must be made before I go any further - I refused to pay more than £5 for a ticket and so was tucked in the top right-hand corner of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. If you've been you'll know it's a poky spot, and the band was right in my ear which muffled the speech at times. There's room for three people in each section, and I was next to a couple on a first date, so you can imagine the dynamic of the whole night was intense. Yet my review ensues.

In terms of the play itself, you can definitely recognise it as loosely following the course of Edward's haphazard reign. Much nuance is lost, and the decisive defeat at the 1314 Battle of Bannockburn is omitted completely, with a focus instead upon his relationships with Piers Gaveston and Queen Isabella. Now, there has been much speculation as to the nature of Gaveston and Edward's relationship, but a sexual aspect is certainly alluded to in the manner of Edward's murder - the red-hot poker. Kathryn Warner argues that this theory began "in about the mid-1330s", and therefore is "overwhelmingly unlikely to be true". The use of this rhetoric is arguably more historically interesting than whether Edward and Gaveston were lovers. . Homosexuality as we



*Edward II*, Richard Bremmer as Archbishop of Canterbury. © Shakespeare's Globe, 2019.

conceive it simply was understood differently in different eras, a point argued famously by Foucault. I.F.Moulton's argument that sexual deviance was in many ways considered a symptom or a symbol of the more serious threats of treason or heresy" is more importantly historically, as sodomy comprised of many more acts than the modern understanding allows for. I certainly was not aware of this before I studied it at university, and the background knowledge is certainly imperative to understanding the representation in the play itself. The actor portraying Edward is overtly camp and effeminate to the point of comedy; the former is certainly a more modern mode of homosexuality than was conceived in either the 14th or 16th centuries. Thus, there is a fair argument to say that this is a poor way of learning about history due to the historical inaccuracies and deliberate selection of events for dramatic purposes.



*Edward II*, Beru Tessema as Gaveston, and Tom Stuart as Edward II. © Marc Brenner, *The Telegraph*, 2019.



But, this is a drama. These plays, much like Netflix's *The Crown*, are not pretending to be completely comprehensive and factually accurate accounts. It is impossible to entirely reconstruct a historical episode whether you are an academic historian or a script-writer because of the simple fact that history is not a concrete study of the past. It is a study of what has been left to us, an abstraction warped through countless lenses. No account of any history will ever be completely accurate. Of course, if you want to learn to study history in a critical and directed way, you need to train through the university system. But if you want to

be entertained, watch the historical drama. I do not watch historical dramas or attend dimly-lit plays because I want to learn about history in an academic sense. But it does allow me to get a feel for things I would not otherwise study, and it is also enjoyable, which is a perfectly reasonable outcome to desire from artistic content.

**MEGAN SEIORSE is a second-year History student at the New College of the Humanities and incoming History Society President.**

*Edward II.* L-R: Polly Frame as Earl of Kent, Tom Stuart as Edward II, and Jonathon Livingstone as Mortimer Jr.  
© Shakespeare's Globe, 2019.



## The Crown: does historical drama have a responsibility to be historically accurate?

BY ELIZA BRANDRETH

Historical dramatisation and artistic license are not new, take Shakespeare's brutal representation of Richard the Third. However recently, after the release of the fourth series of *The Crown* was released onto Netflix, there has been a lot of debate over whether the makers of the series had a duty to represent history accurately.

The series covers the lives of the royals during Margaret Thatcher's premiership from 1979 to 1990. Major events given air time on the series include the death of Lord Mountbatten by the Irish

Republican Army (IRA), the courtship and wedding of Charles and Diana as well as their subsequent Commonwealth tour and the tense 1985 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). There were notable inaccuracies, for instance the conflation of the disappearance of Margaret Thatcher's son, Mark, during the Paris-Dakar Rally, and the invasion of the Falkland Islands. In reality, these events happened months apart from each other, however the series portrays these two storylines occurring simultaneously for dramatic effect. This storyline perhaps implies that

Thatcher's judgement was clouded when it came to her decision to invade the Falklands. However, does that matter? Even if people believe the show's portrayal to be accurate, three decades have passed, as has Thatcher. She's unlikely to be offended.

The same can't be said for *The Iron Lady*, starring Meryl Streep, which came out two years before Thatcher died. There was criticism at the time as the film in part displayed Thatcher's later years and her decline into dementia. I believe it would have been kinder to wait to release the film posthumously. When it comes to accuracy, the film has far fewer inaccuracies than *The Crown*. I watched *The Iron Lady* when it was released as an 11-year-old, and I took it as fact. I found it engaging and I learnt from it. In my understanding, that's what historical dramas should do: lay the foundation for conversation about history and spark curiosity in the past.

So, what's the problem if we learn about history from television dramas even though it is entertaining at the same time? And why did Season Four of *The Crown* get so much stick? I think the



Gillian Anderson as Margaret Thatcher in *The Crown*.  
© Netflix / Des Willie



Seeing double: Emma Corrin and Josh O'Connor as Princess Diana and Prince Charles.

© Tim Graham/Getty Images and Netflix/Des Willie

important difference is whether opinions of the past will affect people in the present. Is history not continually revised and re-revised?

In the recent series, Diana is portrayed as the damsel in distress, whereas Charles and Camilla are shown unfavourably with their affair. Similarly, in the series' portrayal of the Falklands War, there is another time jump between events: in this case between the breakdown of Charles and Diana's marriage in 1984 to Charles' affair in 1988. It's subtle, but does add to the critical portrayal of Camilla. The show might think carefully in its future portrayal of this relationship: Diana continues to spark intense debate decades after her death.

So, did *The Crown* take artistic license too far? Perhaps. Camilla and Charles did have the affair, but *The Crown* was the catalyst for online abuse. Now married to Prince Charles, the Duchess of Cornwall received so much trolling by those who had watched *The Crown* that @ClarenceHouse disabled their Twitter comments. In an era of social media, and when the protagonists are still alive, I posit that the creators have an increased duty to make it clear that the show is fiction, in order to protect those who inspire it.

**ELIZA BRANDRETH is a third-year Economics student at the New College of the Humanities.**



**WE ARE NEVER COMPLETELY  
CONTEMPORANEOUS WITH OUR  
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THE PLAY.**

**~ REGIS DEBRAY**





# The Pageant of History: The Theatricality of Power and Politics

BY SAMUEL DOERING

History is a stage, and humans are the actors in the great play. The actors are dominated by politicians, monarchs, creatives and change-makers. The acts are divided by historical era, by costume, by a change in backdrop and attitudes. Yet there is no single stage, but a multitude of stages, that bears witness to the scenes acted out.

Humans are drawn to acting, to inflating their sense of importance, and putting on a façade. We may only be cosmic dust being flung across the vast expanse of the universe, yet we are obsessed with concocting a magnificent display of our power and the brilliance of our politics. Our history has been moulded by theatricality, by the desire of world leaders past to out-manoeuvre and outshine.

History is theatrical in its retelling through plays, televisual adaptations, or novels, and yet it is also formed in a whirl of drama, both intentional and unintentional. Louis XIV fully intended to display his wealth and majesty when the Siamese embassy visited the Galerie des Glaces at Versailles in 1686. Whereas unintentional theatricality, to use another French example, may include the Tennis Court Oath of 1789, as it was a spur-of-the-moment event that voiced a strong desire for change at the heart of the state. Other revolutionary acts, that inherit their own life and character, may also prove to be examples of unintentional theatricality.

Clio, the mythological Greek muse of history, presents an early example of the ideas of history translating into theatre. She is often represented with laurels upon her hair, an open book or unrolled parchment in one hand, and a trumpet or



*Clio*. Painted by Pierre Mignard in 1689. © Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest / Google Arts and Culture.

horn held in the other. She is blasting the tales of history, proclaiming them audibly across the world in a celebration of the passing of time. She is both a narrator proclaiming history, and a script-writer recording the words and characters.

Consider a quality of Greek tragedy. Whenever a character was killed on stage, it was conducted behind a screen, a *skênê*, to shield the audience from the killing. The drama of death was off-stage, deemed inappropriate. In our modern world, much of the drama of history happens off-stage. Of course, the scandals and fights gain attention, yet phone calls discussing future plans, conversations between two characters, and unofficial meetings, all escape our attention. They are veiled by a curtain of secrecy.

Sometimes history reads like a drama. A best-selling history contains an exposition, or explanation of context and setting; followed by a narrative that peaks at a crescendo of complication, drama, scandal; concluding with a





L: Precise military parade at Red Square, Moscow. © Reuters, via BBC.

R: Australian PM, Scott Morrison, making an impassioned political speech. © Mick Tsikas/AAP Image via AP.

with a resolution and denouement. Robert Laurence Binyon, in his poem *History*, alluded to telling the tales of yesteryear:

*What is man, if this only has told his tale,  
For whom ruin and blunder mark the years,  
Whom continent--shadowing conquerors regale  
To surfeiting, with glory of blood and tears?*

He is suggesting history is marked by revolutions and conquests, stained by death and suffering. He is, of course, right.

Even in the twenty-first century, theatricality plays a role in politics. Consider the widely televised marches of the Russian Armed Forces in Moscow's Red Square, or the unveiling of a ballistic missile by North Korea's dictatorial regime. Every man, woman and child must play his part in a precise display of political authority; every face must be turned, every footstep synchronised, every rifle angled just so. They are actors propping up the façade of their national leader.

Even in a less radical sense, there are examples found in liberal democracies. At rallies and conferences, political speakers confidently stride on stage and deliver their lines, pandering to the audience throughout. Musical pieces are blasted across the auditorium to convey a message or present a political leader in a certain light. The backdrop often consists of flags, organisational

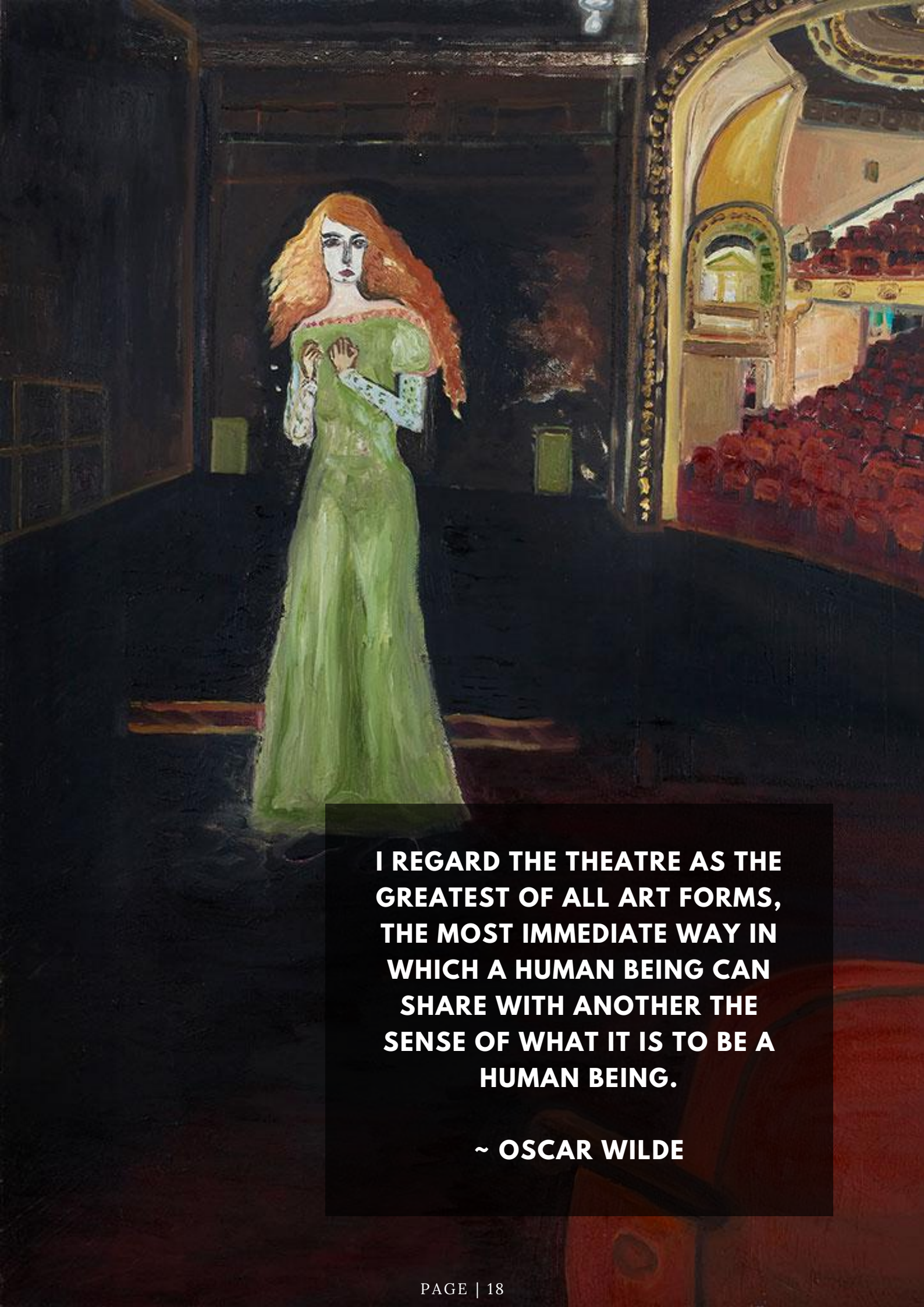
logos, or political slogans, providing a visual setting to the character. With actor, music and backdrop, the theatrical scene is rendered complete. History, in this sense, is staged: continually injected with a dose of thespian spectacle.

Discussion on this topic is not exhaustive. Take any leader from world history, and examples of creating a performance out of power, or injecting thespianism into politics will be found; we constantly read and talk about 'political theatre', 'political arenas', 'political spin' or 'political stunts'. More could be said about press secretaries and media organisations being on the stage too, acting as narrators delivering powerful monologues. Pageantry displayed at swearing-in events and military parades could also be discussed, as they are innately theatrical, concerned with appearance, procedure and perfection.

If anything, this brief discussion of theatricality in history and politics says something about us as humans: that we are intrinsically obsessed with acting, with putting on an elaborate show whether that be through pageant, fashion or taste, and with inflating our own image. We are theatrical beings and our history and politics is formed as such.

**SAMUEL DOERING is a third-year History and English student at the New College of the Humanities.**

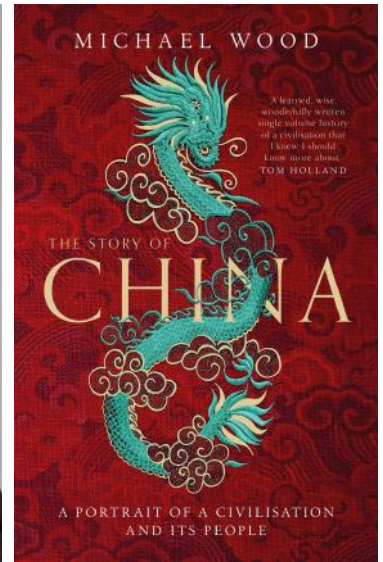
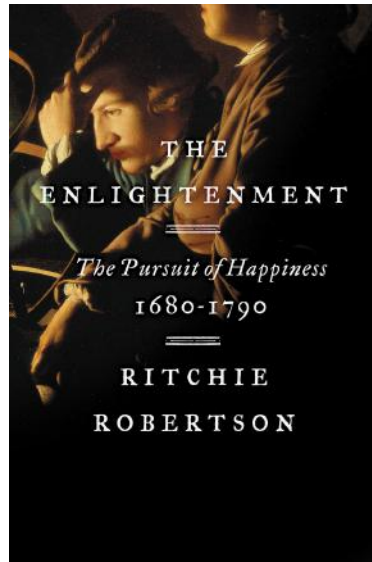
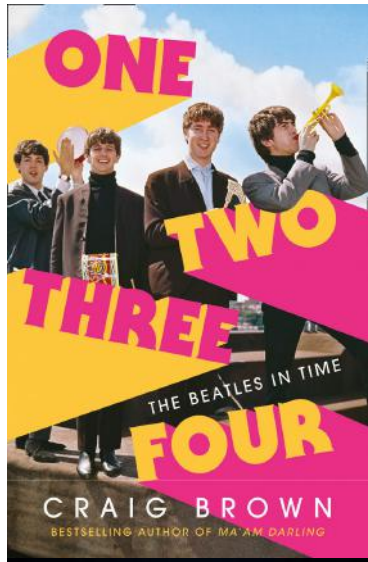




**I REGARD THE THEATRE AS THE  
GREATEST OF ALL ART FORMS,  
THE MOST IMMEDIATE WAY IN  
WHICH A HUMAN BEING CAN  
SHARE WITH ANOTHER THE  
SENSE OF WHAT IT IS TO BE A  
HUMAN BEING.**

**~ OSCAR WILDE**





# Reading History: Making sense of our modern world

BY SAMUEL DOERING

*Here comes the sun do, do, do, do; Here comes the sun; and I say it's alright.* ~ The Beatles

Cheer up, Summer is coming. To distract yourself from watering the dozen plants you bought at the beginning of lockdown, or arguing about what to order for dinner, settle down into a cozy spot and start reading Craig Brown's groovy history **One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time**; it's sure to put a spring in your step.

If you still need a bit of perking up, Ritchie Robertson has written a tome on pursuing happiness. **The Enlightenment** will not only give you an insight into the yeasty petri-dish of our modern values, but also the quest to finally understand what homo sapiens are and what makes them human.

If this knowledge is too dangerous for you, dip into Richard Ovenden's **Burning the Books**, which charts 3,000 years of literary vandalism, from tearing up memoirs of acclaimed authors, to systematically burning books in bonfires the size of buildings. *Scientia ipsa potentia est*.

Talking of enemies to mankind, Dorothy H. Crawford has penned a history of viruses called **The Invisible Enemy**. Written two decades ago, it is a timely reminder that humanity will prevail over Coronavirus. Some governments may have benefited from reading such material months ago.

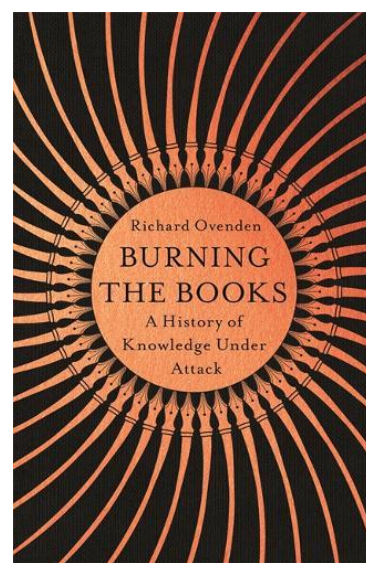
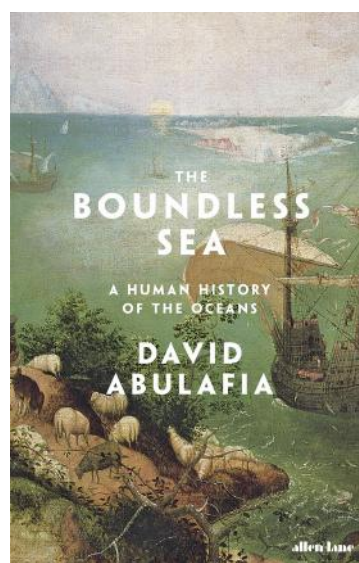
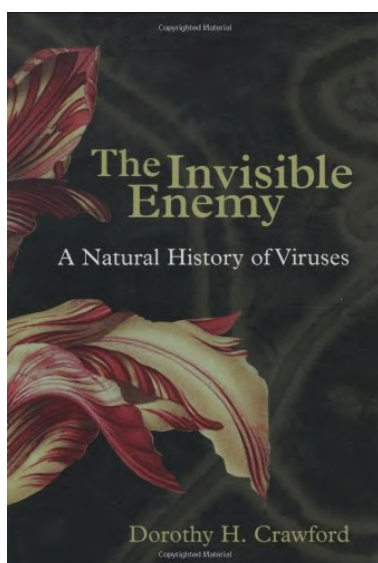
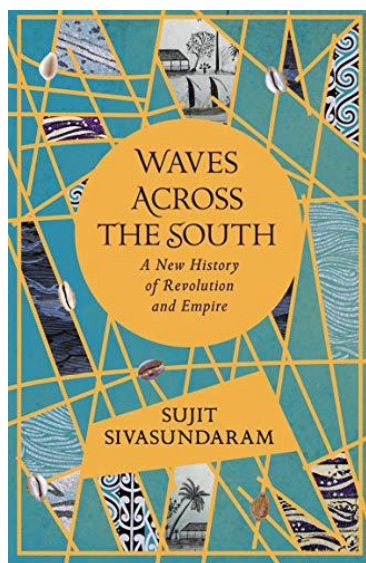
Fancy dreaming of a president who didn't incite an insurrection? Pick up a copy of Barack Obama's first memoir **A Promised Land**; it'll take you on a journey of a man going from an up-and-coming Illinois senator, to the country's first African-American president and beyond.

Staying topical, take a moment to read-up on China with Michael Wood's newest release **The Story of China** which paints a picture of the world's most populous nation, from the Qin Dynasty to General Secretary Xi. This timely chronicle will make accessible China's story - replete with its host of short-syllabled leaders.

Going below the Equator, Sujit Sivasundaram has produced a dizzying new history of revolutions called **Waves Across the South**. Challenging the Euro-centric history of knowledge, selfhood and politics, the story of indigenous peoples subdued under the British, from the Parsis of Persia to the Polynesians of the Pacific is presented in a fresh, warm and tropical light.

Before you go booking that well-deserved Summer holiday on the Greek Islands, Maldives or New Zealand, consider reading David Abulafia's award-winning book **The Boundless Seas**. Once the prohibitor of humanity, the world's oceans have shaped who we are - even though they have grown smaller in our minds and been given names like 'pond' and 'ditch'.

Happy Reading!



## Things to do: keeping sane during lockdown...

BY REBECCA HARRIS



The National Archives have many FREE and online talks on a variety of historical subjects. The talks range from female protests and the British role in the liberation of Bergen Belsen to the experience of serving Churchill, from his cook's perspective!

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/whatson/events/online-talks/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/whatson/events/online-talks/)

Once again, the Royal History Society offer some pretty groovy talks! And, once again, these are free (gotta love free stuff!). The page features recorded talks and lectures, from constitutional history, imperialism, and materialism. All are available to students for free!

[royalhistsoc.org/events/](http://royalhistsoc.org/events/)







Sadly, these online talks are not free! However, they are more personalised and specific! The next talk is by an ex SAS officer, who will be talking candidly about his experience - there are also many others to explore. Sounds well worth the ticket price to me!

[www.list.co.uk/events/talks-and-lectures/history/](http://www.list.co.uk/events/talks-and-lectures/history/)

For the artsier among us, Art Fund offers a free sign up, in order to access podcasts, digital museum experiences and much more! Art Fund is not just about art though, they collaborate with other museums and public sites, bringing you virtual tours of exhibits- mostly for free!

[www.artfund.org/whats-on](http://www.artfund.org/whats-on)



This one needs a desktop computer, folks! This fun link allows you to virtually snoop around the British Museum. It's perfect for feeding your intense curiosity for all things history or, in my case, just nosiness!

[britishmuseum.withgoogle.com/](http://britishmuseum.withgoogle.com/)

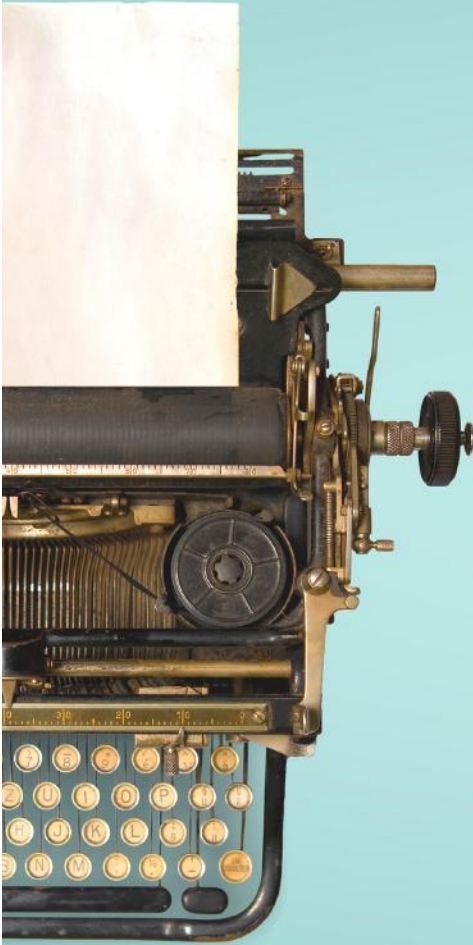
Google Arts and Culture is a great app, which lets you virtually tour and walk around museums! The two links below are of the Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Musée d'Orsay on the banks of the Seine in Paris. Definitely check these out if your bored and craving some history!

[Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation, New York](http://Solomon.R.Guggenheim.Museum.and.Foundation.New.York)

[Musée d'Orsay, Paris](http://Musée.d.Orsay.Paris)



**#WELOVEHISTORY**  
**#WELOVEHERSTORY**



# NEXT EDITION

Keep an eye out for the upcoming announcement of the next edition of the *Historical Times*, the full edition of which will be released in early Trinity Term.

We can't wait to hear your historical musings!

The word count, as always, will be between 500 and 1500 words. No bibliography needed. Pictures very welcome.

If you have any queries, or would like to pitch an article or idea to the *Historical Times*, you can contact the President, Megan Seiorse, at [historysoc@nchsuo.org](mailto:historysoc@nchsuo.org).

## Picture Credits

**Front Page:** Yoichiro Yoda, 2007, 'Charlie.' Oil on canvas, 60" x 72".

**Page 2:** Anon, 18th cent., Representation of the Imaginary Malade by Moliere at Versailles, July 19, 1674.

**Page 3:** Yoichiro Yoda, 2005, 'It All Came True.' Oil on canvas, 60" x 72".

**Page 7:** Yoichiro Yoda, 1998, 'Liberty Theatre.' Oil on canvas, 60" x 72".

**Page 10:** Yoichiro Yoda, 1996, 'The Dressing Room.' Oil on canvas, 40" x 50".

**Page 15:** Yoichiro Yoda, 1998, 'Times Square Theatre.' Oil on canvas, 60" x 72".

**Page 18:** Yoichiro Yoda, 1996, 'Lillian.' Oil on canvas, 50" x 40".

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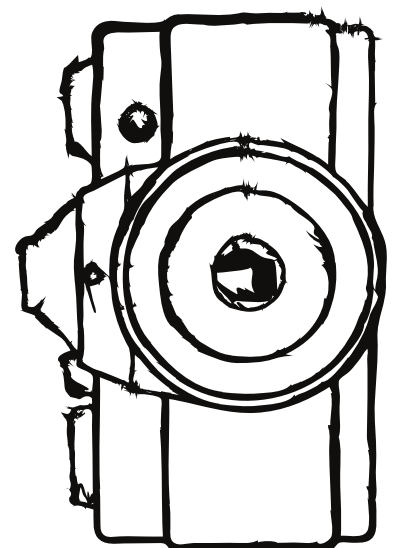
**Things to do on Page 19 and 20:** (in descending order)

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/whats-on/events/>;

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal\\_Historical\\_Society#/media/File:Royal\\_Historical\\_Society\\_logo.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Historical_Society#/media/File:Royal_Historical_Society_logo.svg); Canva stock photo;

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laughing\\_Cavalier#/media/File:Cavalier\\_soldier\\_Hals-1624x.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laughing_Cavalier#/media/File:Cavalier_soldier_Hals-1624x.jpg); <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/british-museum-repatriation-debate-13512/>; and <https://www.tripsavvy.com/tips-for-enjoying-musee-d-orsay-4015186>.

**Back Page:** Yoichiro Yoda, 1997, 'Exit.' Oil on canvas, 50" x 40".



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