



# THE POOR PRINT



## OXFORD CULTURE SHOCK moving countries and languages

**Anna Wawrzonowska**

Over the course of the week before Freshers', I learnt exactly what it meant to be a Foreigner: the odd one out. I felt alien. I felt not myself.

And I couldn't understand why. Surely I wasn't turning into some kind of a social disaster?

As I felt my confidence wane, I tried to recall all the other situations where I was exposed to a completely new environment, and came out victorious, having made great friends and acquaintances. It wasn't social skills I lacked. It was something else.

Accents, dialects, struggles with pronunciation, or misplacing words are all obstructions to the casual flow of conversation, and there's only a limited number of times you're willing to repeat what you just said if you're still not being understood – whether you're on the native or foreign side. It's easier to just talk to one of your own, isn't it?

For every piece of cultural trivia we learn, there are a thousand others nobody tells you about. So Sainsbury's is this ubiquitous supermarket where you can buy food and flowers? I guess it is funny that I had no idea about it. You know what is also funny? That you also have no idea what a *Biedronka* is, back in Poland.

Everything you do, and everything you are, is going to be coloured by the label of your nationality. The opening gambit is going to be, 'How's Poland/Switzerland/Malaysia these days?', or, 'I went to Hong Kong once! Great noodles!' You're always going to be recognised as 'this foreign person'.

'Polish Anna', I'm called.

It doesn't bother me now, but in the first days? Yeah. It used to bother me a lot. It isn't ill will, or picking on the foreigner, it's just a painfully basic reflex of the memory, to remember the feature of a person that stands out the most.

In this case, nationality. And I couldn't be prouder of being recognised as a Pole. But I also wanted to be recognised as myself, as a person, as a human. As Anna. Not just the Polish in Anna. Me. Myself. The whole of it.

### Retreat

Shell-shocked, self-conscious, and massively confused, I turned to people who could understand me: my countrymen.

On meeting my own Polish folk in England, I was even more confused to discover that it's still there: my social skills, my ease around people, my dry humour, my relaxed attitude. Reaching back to what was known and safe felt like slipping on a pair of comfortable, worn shoes.

I didn't have to struggle, because suddenly – without the added weight of constant internal translation – it felt light-headed, almost exciting, to rediscover the similarities we all shared.

The jokes. The literature. The songs, contexts, common history and collective memory of our generation. We were similar.

And it was just the easiest thing in the world to make friends! I could finally stop thinking about how I was saying things and focus on what I wanted to say. It was the mental equivalent of a deep stretch after an exhausting workout – comfort, safety, and the feeling of being in control again.

I could speak about myself and define myself through something other than just nationality.

### But why? How?

The moment I started speaking to the British, I wasn't myself again.

With every word you learn as a kid, and every word you use, read, or hear in a conversation, you learn the intricacies of its contexts too. You learn to

associate certain emotions and reactions with words as well. We learn through imitation, and repetition; and the patterns we hold in our heads will be repeated in what we speak.

If there is no emotion in the language in your head, woven into the words and entwined with the grammar, there will be no emotion in what you say. And no self-expression. If you've learnt your English in a classroom, you probably can't talk about love.

It takes time to adapt. To understand. To make this emotional connection.

### Endings

I started writing this to tell you – the foreigner, the international, the odd one out – that it will get better. There is a way. You will find your peace and comfort. You will find your way around this bizarre culture that's hitting you now. You are going to be a happy, successful, and confident human being.

I'm still an international student. A year later, I am able to look back at it and say: I am stronger, more open-minded, more benevolent towards foreigners, more appreciative of the sub-conscious emotional connection I share with my kinsmen, my beautiful and rich culture, my education and upbringing. And now I appreciate England a thousand times more.

We, the internationals, can see the complexity of two, or more, cultures: the similarities, the differences, how they interplay, how they influence us and the people all around. It's a grace, having that perspective. A gift of deeper understanding.

Isn't that the reason we decided to live abroad anyway? To experience more, to know more, to live more? After all, we're all humans. And beyond all these differences that are so hard to overcome at the beginning, there is the inherent sense of solidarity in all of us. ■

## A Philosophy of Memory, or, A Treatise on How to Die Well

**Jacob Warn  
EDITOR**

Here is a little philosophy of memory, or, a treatise on how to die well.

When I was two months old, every November day I woke, cried, swallowed, and occasionally perceived this or that. Then I slept. Those verbs just about encompass the entire scope of my quotidian existence. Ah yes: on Sundays, I giggled.

When I was four years old, I struggled to tie knots. Every day, I lined up with the other nursery children, wrapping a chequered apron around my little body, and every day failed to secure it. Every day, after lunch, we napped.

When I was thirteen, my back erupted and out spread two glorious feathered wings. I shied from country schools and tried the city ones; I took buses, and took out library books; I acquired the onerous title of *Head Boy*, and simultaneously lost my head for girls. She and I dived into love that summer, heedless and headless. Each day, South Gloucestershire's summer fetes welcomed us: Elberton, Titherington, Olveston, Aust. Then Autumn drew in and we parted ways.

When I was nineteen, I began to philosophise. I was imbued with a new sense of temporal perspective, and looked to my past with furrowed gaze as I tried to distil all I could from those early years. It was at this point that I began to lose friends, to take up yoga, to accept the canonical prestige of Wordsworth, and to cultivate my own sourdough starter. I realised that memory could be bought and sold with a very particular sort of currency, and it was no sweet coincidence that these augmented cerebral skills increased in

proportion to my freedom from institutional routine. At nineteen I revelled in extended vacations, the plethora of university societies, and a vastly larger pool of acquaintances.

My philosophy of memory, or, this treatise on how to die well, is easily imitable by you too. It preferences *difference* as the primary currency of life, capping the capitalist or social currencies that too often take pride of place at the banquet of life. Only with *change* does memory manifest itself in its most vivid garments. Ask me to name a detail from my first Friday lunch at Oriel, and I could only tentatively suggest Macaroni Cheese. Ask me about my family dinner as a Freshener in 0th week, and I can virtuously specify place, person and pizza topping.

It is in moments of novelty when we take in information, when we are at our most sentient, when we are able *s'échapper de la vie mécanique*.

The mind has a remarkable ability to retain separate memories. What it isn't so good at is separating those that become habitualized. Yet we persist in activities that dissolve into our vapid minds, since it is easy, since it is social, and since it's a part of a capitalist *via vitae*.

Camus' *vie mécanique* is the nemesis of memory. And childhood is one long Fall. But salvation is not unattainable, but we must be quick: we are on the *limen* of adulthood.

How to live well? Die with the wealth of a thousand memories stored; of a thousand thousand accumulated experience; of a million felt, tasted, heard, digested realities. ■

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## THE INVENTION OF THE GEEK The World's First Programmer

**Sam Wilkinson  
TECH EDITOR**

Ada Lovelace, the brilliant mathematician widely regarded as the first computer programmer, has proved to be one of the most powerful symbols for women in technology. Earlier this month, global celebrations marked the seventh Ada Lovelace Day, dedicated to inspirational female figureheads in the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

Born in 1815 as the only legitimate child of the 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know' poet Lord Byron, Ada grew up under the influence of her mother, who had fled Lord Byron just one month after Ada's birth.

As she grew up, her mother was anxious for Ada not to follow in Lord Byron's footsteps, telling young Ada's nurse, 'Be most careful always to speak the truth to her ... take care not to tell her any nonsen-

sical stories that will put fancies in her head.'

To this end, Ada was taught mathematics, science and logic by a menagerie of tutors from a young age. During her youth, she developed a tremendous desire to continually expand her knowledge of science and mathematics:

'Nothing but a very close and intense application to subjects of a scientific nature now seems at all to keep my imagination from running wild... or to stop the void which seems to be left in my head,' Ada wrote in 1834 to her tutor Dr. William King. Not long after this letter, her progress was such that King conceded, 'You will soon puzzle me with your queries.'

As she began to outgrow the more conservative tutors her mother had provided, Ada began to look for her own. This led her to Mary Somerville (after whom Somerville

College is named), one of the great mathematicians of the time.

Ada and Mary became close friends and it was through this friendship that Ada would be introduced to the ideas upon which she would build her most profound contributions to mathematics and computer science.

Although well known in society as the daughter of Lord Byron, Ada's intellect soon became her defining feature. Mary secured Ada an invitation to one of the famous parties hosted by the eminent polymath Charles Babbage, where Ada first saw a model of Babbage's Difference Engine, one of the first computers.

'I well remember accompanying her to see Mr. Babbage's wonderful analytical engine', recalled her friend, Sophia De Morgan. 'Miss Byron, young as she was, understood its working, and saw the great beauty of the invention. ■

Babbage was forty-two and Lovelace eighteen. They developed a close, lifelong friendship, and Ada became deeply fascinated in Babbage's plans for the Analytical Engine, a more advanced evolution of the Difference Engine, which was programmable using punch cards.

In 1842, when Ada was working to translate a short article describing the Analytical Engine written by Italian mathematician Luigi Menabrea, Babbage asked her to include her own notes in the article, given that she 'understood the machine so well.'

This method was, at the time, the only way for women to publish their scientific findings.

The result was an article three times the length of Menabrea's original, and contained several of the earliest computer programs (written for the Analytical Engine). What makes these programs all the more remarkable was that the Analytical Engine was never built in Ada's lifetime, so she was writing programs for a computer that she never saw.

She also included several predictions for what such devices could be

used for in the future, one of which was the creation of music. Since the computer programs included in Ada's notes for the translated article were the first to be published, she is widely considered to be the first computer programmer. Unfortunately, just a few years after her translation was published, Ada died of cancer aged 36.

She never lived so see her programs put to use, but neither did Babbage. It wasn't until 1991 that the London Science Museum finished a replica of Babbage's Difference Engine. The replica was produced to standards achievable in the 19th century, proving that Babbage's designs were sound.

Nevertheless, their contributions to mathematics and computer science were not in vain. Alan Turing drew heavily upon the work of Ada and Babbage, notably Ada's translated article, when developing the first modern computers in the 1940s. Few doubt that the computer is the most defining technology of the modern age. Fewer still doubt that the work of Ada Lovelace was instrumental in its inception. ■

# A SLOW WALK

Tobias Thornes

Forgive me if I start at the beginning. You might prefer to know the ending first, and judge from the conclusion whether setting out was worth my while at all. Or perhaps you'd rather have a taste first of the adventure that lies between the outset and the end, that you might survey the prospect from the highest peak of this range of humble hills that is my tale, and know whether it will be worth your while to follow me there and back again. But the end can't be judged rightly, nor will the view be clear from the top, unless the purpose of my travels is first unfolded to your mind. So you must forego for now these promised pleasures, trusting they'll be worthy of the effort spent obtaining them, and I shall begin at the beginning of my journey, and tell you why I first set out at all.

I began in the city. It was a cold spring morning; the light was soft, and probably, beneath wider skies, the countryside was thickly daubed in frost. Not here. Here, dirty puffs of steamy smoke leaked from the exhaust-pipes of at least a hundred humming cars. They grumbled, like impatient dogs eager to be let loose but, for now, constrained to crawl as a snaking stench dribble through the over-congested, stagnant cityscape. I passed them briskly by, trying not to breathe the foul fumes or meet the eyes of the bored inhabitants – most of them alone in their little mobile spaces – sitting, picking noses, doing makeup, or simply frowning straight ahead at the long lines of angry red eyes peppering the road. Wasting time. Was it always this way, I wondered. Since when had the city become the habitat of these glugging, jugging man-made beasts of burden? Was it really comfortable, locked within those private little shuttles of steel for minutes or hours on end? Wouldn't it be better to get up from those stymying seats and walk or ride together, in the open, to feel the wind and weather and to breathe the fresh air? At least, I reflected, coughing, they didn't have to breathe each other's fumes. Who knew what unnatural substances I harboured in my lungs, even now, collected over countless city walks?

I don't know when it happened—the place as it was then was all I had always known it to be—but I realised that that part of the city, for all its light and noise and people, had been dead for a long time.

I wouldn't dwell there in its putrid corpse for much longer. I crossed a grey and lifeless concrete bridge, and made my way up to the station. At least there was life here, amidst the bustle and hurry outside the main station entrance. A heartfelt burst of laughter peeled from a café. A litter-picking street-cleaner whistled as he passed, picking up another twenty-first century gem with his tweezers. So carelessly discarded, it would be destined, no doubt, for some hole in the countryside, where it could rest and rot as the centuries passed: a record in perpetuity of what we were today. But most people were locked up in their own little worlds, dreaming perhaps of people, places and ideas far away from that man-made desert of concrete and grime. Only a Big Issue vendor, alone in having nowhere else to hurry to, implored them all to come back down to this little patch of Earth. Ignored. They carried on in silence, or talking in their own small companies. They didn't see the world around them; they didn't see it changing, slowly slipping away. They were all too busy, without the time to stop and think of where that cigarette stub they'd tossed upon the floor would end up, or whence came that plastic bottle bought and drained and flung upon the pile growing by the minute atop the litter-bin.

But I had time. I'd left nearly an hour to catch my train. I bought a magazine, buoyed up by the friendly smile of one so pleased to sell it. Then I stood and watched on platform three while the trains came and went, and a thousand lives crossed mine just for a moment, waiting for the slow train to London and on to Paris. Yes, I had time. I was, as I call it, 'travelling slow'.

The world—that is, both our human world, and the nature that surrounds us—wasn't well. So I had been told. Not that I myself had ever known it significantly different, had known it to be 'well', so to speak. Nor had I witnessed personally the frightening changes reported to be taking place across the entire globe. But I did know by instinct—in common, I think, with all empathetic beings—what was most beautiful, most wonderful, most meaningful about our world. I knew, too, what was most alien and unpleasant but, for a time at least, to be endured within it. And the reports I was hearing certainly worried me. They suggested that the wonderful was losing out to the alien like never before. I hadn't known a planet covered in forests, which is what I was told had existed millennia before. But I did know trees as beautiful beings to live alongside, I loved them for the peace, reassurance and life-giving air they exuded, and I knew that the net loss of billions per year could not be good. I loved the wonderful diversity of life on Earth,

and I felt that the extinction of so many plants and animals that thrived in these forests as their paradise degraded into wasteland was a sorrow quite unbearable. For the climate in which all this fantastic life had flourished and adapted—not just in forests but right across our beautiful world—to change seemed a travesty; for once life-full, verdant lands and oceans to be littered with lifeless synthetic creatures seemed a disgrace.

Soon, the reports implied, humanity would be doomed to breathe an alien atmosphere with alien weather, walking on alien ground amidst alien seas, and the garden that had sustained us in lives of love and joy was to be uprooted. I could not take these tales for granted. I had to see and know for myself what was occurring to believe that such an apocalypse could really soon be unleashed. And there you have it, the purpose of my travels. But the tale of my beginnings is not yet quite complete.

Had I but wished to see the destruction of our planet at first hand, I had it within my means to soar from place to place by plane with the greatest speed. I could witness in a week the burning of the forests, the lives blighted by pasture become desert and slowly-rising seas beyond my control. But the greatest tragedy, of all that I had heard, was that the sickness in the world around me was not out of my control at all. I had caused it—we had caused it. It was bred of a sickness within my own society that had taken hold long before my birth and was driving us to destroy our very selves. The fact hardest to bear was that the lungs of the world were being shredded, the lands and oceans wasted, the air poisoned and the people made miserable not by natural accident but by active human hands, gripped by a fever of envy and greed. And the desire for instant, worldwide travel was, I realised, one of the most destructive symptoms of this foul disease. So I did not set out only to see the changing world; I set out to change it myself, if only in my own tiny, perhaps insignificant capacity, hoping that—like the flap of a butterfly's wings that seeds an entire storm—my little choices might grow somehow in influence to have a large effect. So I wasn't going to dash with greedy haste from place to place by air. I was going to travel slowly, reverently, over land and sea, and see for myself what the world is and was and could become from the point of view of the slow journeyman, who alone can live and breathes and truly know each landscape. This was my beginning down a slowly-trammelled path. ■



# THE BEGINNINGS OF RELIGION

Peter Gent  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

I've sometimes wondered, if I were hit by lightning, would I too get super-human powers? Every time it rains or thunders, I find safe cover—most would say wisely—not hiding under a tree or standing in the middle of an open field, so I am not likely to know. I did once get stuck in the mountains of China with a group of students I was semi-responsible for as an unexpected lightning storm crashed around us. We found shelter and waited out the storm. Nothing happened.

But I imagine it differently. What if a meta-event had occurred in which said superpower were unlocked.

I imagine myself there. Reborn. Eyes glowing and hair on edge. With new vision, suddenly seeing every fork and twist of the future, and lightning bolts emanating from my hands on command. There I would stand, Oxford gown streaming in the wind, ready to go forth as a night angel, sent by God to cleanse the world.

Or maybe, more likely, drooling. Unable to remember my name.

I do actually want to make a point, though, for this is putatively a story about religion.

What if in addition to seeing forks in the future, one were to self-fashion a steak knife and carve up bits of that futuristic vision, package it neatly and distribute it to those seeking religious comfort? What if one were to monetise this endeavour. Or even if not so crass, what happens when one eventually gives in to the adoration of those who follow your every word, seeing you as speaking on behalf of the deity. I think it would go to your head. It would go to mine.

The thing is, many people report having religious experiences. I do not believe that the persistence of religion is simply because we are wired to believe.

We lack adequate tools, ways of knowing, and hermeneutical concepts to make sense of religious phenomena. We don't know who is lying, who is confused, who is retelling hearsay, and

who saw what, or if anyone saw anything.

Power relations, self-interest, leaky and unstable memories, poor transmission rates. These sorts of things make making sense of religion a near impossible task.

Thomas Kuhn's work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, seems helpful here. Religion, like science, is ultimately about making sense of – and finding our place in – the universe. Contemporary work on religion is in what Kuhn called a pre-paradigmatic state, where lack of a working model or theory creates crisis for those trying to interpret observations.

The 'pre-paradigm period', wrote Kuhn, 'is regularly marked by frequent and deep debates over legitimate methods, problems, and standards of solution, though these serve rather to define schools than to produce agreement.'<sup>[1]</sup>

Sounds like theology and religious studies. But I have hope. If there is human experience, there is a human mechanism behind it. Mechanisms can be studied and understood. This is not to argue for a reductionist approach to the humanities, but rather that if there is experience there is an explanation.

And it may indeed be that all religious experience has a purely natural mechanistic origin. Advances in neuroscience, physics, or whatever may one day make sense of what people have felt or known or maybe only thought they knew.

Or maybe not; perhaps God, if God exists, is simply non-observable. To observe the God would be to make the universe become undone and collapse in on itself along with all we love. But even if this non-observability of God were true, we could still one day have a new paradigm, a new way to observe, or at least to understand why we cannot observe.

Until then it's all wide open. ■

<sup>[1]</sup> Thomas Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, fourth edition, University of Chicago Press (2012), p. 48.

## CONTRIBUTE TO THE POOR PRINT

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Issue #2 - DIGITALITY - 1 NOVEMBER  
Issue #3 - TRANSLATION - 15 NOVEMBER  
Issue #4 - FOURTH/FORCE - 29 NOVEMBER

## 'BEGINNINGS'

Rory Turnbull

How to begin? How do we make a start?  
With all those expectations driving me  
To take my turn and try to play my part  
In writing something, somehow, easily,  
I do not know; I know not what to write,  
Since I'm ungifted, and in rhyme untaught.  
'Fain would I, but I dare not.' Walter's right:  
I dare not try, for fear of falling short.  
And yet, although I won't expect your praise,  
It still is fun to have a go and think.  
Indulge me then, and let me say the phrase:  
'Behold, some unimportant thoughts in ink'.  
For, then, a celebration you will see  
Of that great gift of thought, of poetry.

# VICARIOUS LIVING

## News From Abroad

Ianthe Greenwood  
CULTURE EDITOR

*Abroad is a foreign country: they do things differently there. As another year starts, a dozen fourth-year linguists readjust to Oriel life after the mythical Year Abroad™, swapping lids for libraries, finding half the clubs we know have gone and getting mistaken for freshers (ok, just me then). But for the next generation of Oriel linguists, the adventure has only just begun.*

**Charlotte Evans, Arnsberg, Germany**  
A year ago, the monotony of traipsing down to Wahoo on Friday nights was mitigated only by the thought that before long I would be spending Friday nights soaking up the local colour of Kreuzberg, Berlin. Now, three months into my year abroad, I find myself living 263 miles away from Berlin in a small town in a valley that is effectively Germany's answer to North Wales.

My new town is beautiful, the people

are lovely and I really enjoy my job teaching English – in fact I've suffered from zero homesickness. After all, I am still in the valleys. And the fact that most people here don't speak much English is only going to help me in my quest to absorb as much of the Oxford German-English Dictionary as possible. I keep noticing just how many times I have met someone here whom I immediately identify with someone back home. Every day I am surrounded by people who seem to have

peculiarly familiar mannerisms or appearances. In the mix there are family members and long-lost childhood friends, as well as school teachers, neighbours, and a bunch of faces from Oriel.

It turns out this is a completely typical experience for people who've recently moved to a new country. I'm beginning to see that after arriving in a foreign country, where you don't know a single person and have to communicate in your second language, it's a natural reaction for your brain to crave normality.

People often talk about a year abroad 'culture shock' when you find yourself immersed in a foreign culture, but instead, I find myself in something of a microcosm of my life in the UK. It is, I imagine, only a matter of time before I discover Germany's answer to Wahoo. ■

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