

Science,
People
&
politics

BREXIT POSITION OF THIS MAGAZINE

BY THE EDITOR, HELEN GAVAGHAN

I write this commentary with trepidation, because I do not want to loose any of the magazine's editorial advisors. I have not consulted their views in this matter.

To my mind the most intelligent analysis of the Brexit situation was articulated last week by the historian of government, Peter Hennessy. On a British political radio programme Hennessy said that the dilemma we are currently in in the United Kingdom is because on a single issue we turned to the mechanisms of a plebiscite democracy when we held a referendum on 23 June, 2016 asking a single binary question.

Do you wish to remain in, or to leave the European Union?

We chose a plebiscite mechanism despite being a parliamentary democracy. Hennessy's analysis is that our elected representatives are finding it hard to digest a plebiscite outcome.

I doubt parliamentarians would disagree with that analysis. It certainly makes a lot of sense to me. I part company with Professor Hennessy in the matter of what should happen next. I think, and am adopting as this magazine's position, the view that what happens next must be at the Will of the House of Commons. We must now give our elected representatives a free vote, according to their own conscience. We must say to ourselves we will, of course, record how you vote on our behalf, but we will not judge you nor criticise you for following your conscience. That respect and privilege must be extended also to the members for Maidenhead and Islington North.

We are a parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary democracy, not a snap general election, which is not in the gift of parliament, must now exercise its conscience. Unlike many of my fellow citizens I am currently feeling very proud of the House of Commons.

JOURNALISM AND THE LAW

I have now twice seen a deeply disturbing interaction between fellow journalists and a Crown Court judge [Bradford Law Courts]. On the first occasion my colleague stood and said I hope your honour does not consider it an impertinence were I to ask for a copy of your sentencing remarks. I took her to be asking for an advance copy, because sentencing in question was to take place the next day. Perhaps she meant may I have a printed copy of your sentencing remarks after sentence is passed. Either way, even if the judge does not think the question, and time and place of its asking was an impertinence, I do. The dangers of a course of action of handing out advance copies of criminal-court sentencing remarks are so obvious surely they do not need to be enumerated by me? The judge said, "no". If my colleague was asking for a copy after sentence had been passed, then why on Earth did she not simply ask the judge's associate after proceedings were complete – or better still sit in Court and take notes. On the second occasion another journalist when asked gave the same Crown-court judge her legal opinion. In my view she should have refused to do so. **Helen Gavaghan.**

UNDER THE VOLCANO

by Helen Gavaghan

A review of 18 Victoria by Cody Daigle-Orians.

Performed 24th January 2019 at Square Chapel Arts Centre in Halifax UK.

Cast. Stephen: James Nicholas. Catherine: Alex Herod. Ben: Joe Geddes.

Spoiler alert: though I do not reveal the secret, I reveal a fair amount of plot.

If you are going to see this play presented by this or another theatre company be warned!

When the three siblings learn the World will end in three weeks' each is alone. Youngest, Ben, is watching winter sports. Breaking news interrupts. Catherine is taking an introspective half hour. She resents her husband's call to come see the TV. Stephen, the eldest, is leaning against his father's new grave. A nearby kid tells Stephen what is happening.

This is a play in monologues; dialogue by text, and the end of the World is incidental to childhood-driven soliloquies. Occasional voice messages nod to a technological past which provides no medium for carrying the story forward. Only on the last day is there a pas-de-deux, and the last day is when an asteroid slams into India. For film goers who have seen the movie, *Impact*, that final scene is no surprise.

Rather than father and daughter dying together while the mother is alone, in this story it is Stephen and Ben who are side by side. Their sister, excluded by them and abandoned by her husband, dies alone. To the end the brothers tell themselves that by not telling Catherine of a secret which destroyed all their childhoods they are protecting her. To the end Catherine longs to know what her brothers are not telling her.

At the end the brothers drink vodka together, while Catherine consumes a solitary meal of mind-numbing pharmaceuticals, never learning the family truth. Were the brothers cruel and self-absorbed, or were they kind? I certainly wish I had never learned what is at the heart of this tale.

The hidden is sexual abuse, and its aftermath in the adult life and family relationships of the grown children. Past emerges into present consciousness as each sibling processes their father's death. The end of the World slips in and out of the action as an event outside the players' power to influence.

Ben and Catherine wrangle about possession of their father's encyclopaedias. Yet inheritance is no more at the core of this play than is the end of the World, rather it is tangential to the thing which Catherine will never know.

Brother and sister recall independently having been awoken by a teenage Stephen to go on a midnight trek. They had packed their rucksacks and set off into the suburban jungle for a world in which polar bears roamed Antarctica. Ecological reality is not this play's strength, nor is the plotting linear.

Catherine brings the siblings down to Earth. People, she tells her brothers, do not live in Antarctica. That dollop of reality was not well received by Stephen. But then Catherine at the time did not know, and died not knowing, what had driven Stephen to lead his siblings that night on their foredoomed trip to Antarctica.

I think this small Huddersfield-based theatre company did a lovely job. The play reminded me of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, which I saw performed at the Lincoln Centre for the Performing Arts in Manhattan.

Company members last night were not method acting - how could they be when there has never been an announcement of an asteroid hurtling to rip 10 miles from the surface of the Earth, peeling the planet like an orange.

The brothers used a lot of language such as f*** and t***. Not a ploy adopted by Stoppard. Catherine did not swear, but Catherine did not know what the brothers knew. In memory in monologues leaping from rock to rock of the sparse and practical staging the players gave some nice cameos illuminated by Stephen's torch. Joe Geddes face fell with the death of innocence in response to Catherine's pragmatism. Alex Herod used her body to explore her character's inner emotional life. James Nicholas conveyed nicely with an air of ease and slight aloofness his distancing from the world which had done him such a wrong.

After, when I told the actors in the bar of Square Chapel how much I had enjoyed their work I said I had been determined as I watched not to see the asteroid as a metaphor for climate change. I told them I would give my review the headline "Under the Volcano". My personal tribute to Malcolm Lowry. This play, though, contained comedic lightness, something which does not shine bright in Lowry.

Faith - they say - can move mountains, and in this play it did.

Only faith could have allowed the World's powers to evacuate the impact site of India and its surrounding areas such that the people of India would not be the TV focus for two hours as Earth slowly died. For the sake of two hours humanity, in the imagination of Daigle-Orians, evacuated a global region in a matter of weeks. Now that is something to think about!

Author Cody Daigle-Orians is based in Connecticut, USA. Presented by Root and Branch Productions. Review published 21.20 25th January 2019. Final minor corrections 22.20 25th January 2019.

**OUR NEXT ISSUE WILL RETURN TO A LARGER SIZE,
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