



Spring 2021. Editor Dill Bing

5 Fingers

// Undervalued, a house for sale with good bones
but bad decor; decaying deco-dreams peel from the walls -
they need a 21st century face lift. /

At first the paint goes on translucent, but with a few coats
and some patience :
he might make a tidy profit of his patron's initial investment. /

"WHERE IS MY CHEQUE!"
shouts Ofili - knowing that a Turner prize exposing itself and him
won't hit the cheque-book 'till his cheque-book
lands in the hands of the next generation. /

"VINDALOO!"
shouts Hirst - he's about to spend his cash prize in one night
at the Groucho Club because he'd pushed his prices since the start,
what he was having for dinner was all that was on his mind. /

"GET OUT MY BED!"
shouts Emin - Tracy had been raped before,
and she wasn't going to let it happen again; last thing she needed
was more old men that fail to recognise her worth. /

Youth of the world I'm talking to you.
Strip the walking dead of any accolades, lay them to rest,
but keep the caskets open;
to let them breath their dying breaths,
but to let you see also this shocking truth. /
They are no different from us.
The ones that collect paisley neck-tie leads.
The ones that hear the name Brahms and think
"Ahhh yes, the good stuff".
The ones that are old enough to own coffee cups older than you.
They are no different from us,
only
most of them have long since lost their passion./

If the artist works not for money,
they will work for passion./

5 fingers has a hand!

With these 5 create, and take the enemy! //

IRONSIDE®

Creative writing

One Last Glass

Dramatis Personae:

Jordan Walker: Father

Claire Walker: Mother

Eric Walker: First son of Jordan and Claire

Oliver Walker: Second son of Jordan and Claire

Scene: A small flat in the upper west side of Manhattan. The flat is made up of two cramped bedrooms, a modest living room with a 60-inch plasma TV and a stereo system on the back walls. Under the stereo is a large leather sofa and to the left of that the door into the narrow main hall. The streets outside can be seen from the windows.

JORDAN is sitting on the sofa, watching TV but with very little interest in what he is watching, it is a show he has seen many times before. CLAIRE is standing outside with a cigarette in her left-hand and a cup of coke mixed with vodka in her right. JORDAN looks at the clock to the side of the room and notices that it is five-thirty in the evening.

JORDAN: [Head and eyes directly facing the TV] Oliver! Your brother will be here soon! Come through now!

[A groan can be heard from backstage and after a few seconds OLIVER enters the living room with headphones on and sits on the opposite end of the sofa.]

We can watch TV while we wait, son.

OLIVER: [Resting his head on his hand] How often have you seen this episode?

JORDAN: [Still staring at the TV] Only a couple of times; it's not like there's anything else on TV these days.

OLIVER: I've seen this episode at least four times so that's a lie.

JORDAN: Take off those damn headphones, will you? Even when you go to sleep you have those things on.

OLIVER: [Slowly turning his headphones off and putting them to the side of the sofa] Yes father.

[The sound of the front door opening can be heard from the living room. The door closes with a heavy thud. CLAIRE enters the living room. She is wearing a puffy black jacket over her favourite David Bowie t-shirt.]

CLAIRE: [Angrily] After spending days trying to convince him to come, he finally agreed, but now he's late! Do you think he was lying?

JORDAN: [Eyes still on the TV] The pizza won't be ready for another twenty minutes, I'm sure he will be there then.

CLAIRE goes to sit next to OLIVER who promptly moves away from her. She concedes and sits in the middle of the sofa.

CLAIRE: It is outrageous that I had to beg him to come for dinner at all! He's only in New York a few times a year, does he not realise how much we miss him?

JORDAN: After what happened at Christmas, I don't blame him.

CLAIRE: [Letting out a mild sigh] I hope he arrives soon.

[The doorbell rings and CLAIRE jumps out of her chair ecstatically. She rushes off stage and returns seconds later with ERIC. His attire consists of a grey hoodie and blue jeans.]

JORDAN: Alright son?

ERIC: Aye, you good dad?

JORDAN: [Finally looking away from the TV] Just the usual, work, eat, sleep.

ERIC: Still working hard I see.

ERIC looks across his father and notices OLIVER.

ERIC: How's it going Oliver?

OLIVER: [Still with head in his hands] I'm good, thanks.

ERIC takes a seat on the middle of the sofa.

[CLAIRE looks at OLIVER with a firm and informing glare, OLIVER moves and pulls out a wooden chair from under the table. CLAIRE immediately takes her son's former seat. A buzzer goes off in the kitchen.]

JORDAN: [Rising from the sofa] Ah that's dinner, I'll go and dish it up.

ERIC: What we having?

JORDAN: Pepperoni pizza.

JORDAN exits the room.

CLAIRE: [Looking at ERIC intently] How is the relationship with Camelia going?

ERIC: [Laughing uneasily] Not great.

CLAIRE: [With a look of disappointment] Aw, how come? When we had dinner with her back in September, she seemed like such a sweet girl.

JORDAN re-enters the room with two plates of pepperoni pizza and potato wedges. He hands a plate to ERIC and holds one out to CLAIRE.

CLAIRE: [Signalling the plate away] I'll have mine later.

ERIC: [Smirks] Somethings never change.

JORDAN sits back down on his side of the sofa. He looks up at OLIVER.

JORDAN: [Looking back up at the TV] Your plate is on the bunker son.

After letting out a mild sigh OLIVER gets up and exits to the kitchen.

CLAIRE: So, what's happened between you and Camelia

OLIVER enters again with his plate and sits down. He eats slowly and deliberately.

ERIC: She has become so demanding lately. I'm practically drowning in uni work and now she's started giving me hassle because I won't go to Spain with her next month. I went with her three times last year but oh no that is not enough for her!

JORDAN: [Chewing on some wedges] And who was it that paid for those holidays, if she wants to go then she can pay for her own bloody ticket this time! I'm telling you son, that girl is no good. If I could describe her with a song it would be ABBA's Money Money and let me tell you son, this isn't a rich man's house!

CLAIRE: [With a confrontational tone] Don't spout such crap Jordan. I could tell from the moment I met her that she is a good girl. Just talk it out with her, she is just testing your loyalty. Don't throw away such a beautiful relationship son!

JORDAN: [Turning to directly look at CLAIRE] The only one talking crap here is you!

CLAIRE: [Sarcastically] Yeah, I forgot, everything you say is right Jordan!

ERIC: [Close to shouting] Just forget it! Why does everything turn into an argument with you two?

[CLAIRE gets up from the sofa and exits the stage, the sound of the front door opening and closing can be heard. JORDAN lets out a sigh and exits the stage too, but he enters the kitchen rather than exiting the house. Roughly a minute passes before ERIC decides to talk to OLIVER.]

ERIC: So, how's school going?

OLIVER: Fine.

ERIC: That's good.

OLIVER: How is university?

ERIC: Stressful, I have a thesis to write by the end of April on top of a whole mountain of other assignments. I can't wait for it all to be over. You're going to university in a few months, aren't you?

OLIVER: [With little enthusiasm in his voice] I suppose so.

ERIC: So, what uni are you thinking of going to?

OLIVER: Not sure yet.

ERIC: Take my advice Oliver and make sure you move out of here as soon as possible. I cannot tell you just how much better I've felt these past few years now that I don't have to put up with mum and dad's pointless bickering.

OLIVER: It's not like it affects me much, I'm in my room most of the time anyway.

ERIC: And you think that is healthy?

[OLIVER looks to the side with a face that shows his acknowledgement that his brother is right. Before he can respond JORDAN enters the room. He sits back down and changes the channel on the TV. ERIC looks out of the window and notices that his mother is still outside.]

ERIC: [With a tone of disgust] She's drowning herself in booze again.

JORDAN: Like she always has, well for as long as I've known her.

ERIC: Why do you never say anything to her? At this rate she is going to drink herself into the grave.

JORDAN: [Turning the TV off] Believe me I tried at first. But your mother cannot face her problems, whenever anything goes bad for her, she turns to the drink to hide from her issues. For the first few years after I met her, I tried to convince her to get help, but she would never listen. Remember when you screamed at her on Christmas, all you achieved by doing that was making her even more miserable and since then not a night has gone by where she isn't drunk out of her mind.

ERIC: [Angrily] Well sitting watching TV all the time will do nothing to help!

JORDAN: [Calmly] The only person who can help your mum is herself.

The front door can be heard opening and closing.

JORDAN: Not a word about this, I don't want your mum getting into an even worse state than she is now.

ERIC begrudgingly nods to his father, OLIVER is still sitting on his wooden chair, keeping himself detached from the situation. CLAIRE enters the room, her face a beetroot red. As she walks towards the sofa she stumbles slightly and laughs it off.

CLAIRE: [Looking at JORDAN] Can you stick the TV back on, I want to listen to my music.

JORDAN lets out a sigh as he turns on the TV.

CLAIRE: What's that for?

JORDAN: Nothing.

CLAIRE: Aw, so listening to my music is such a problem for you?

JORDAN: Claire, drop it!

CLAIRE: No! I can never have anything I want, can I? It's all about you Jordan, you always-

ERIC: [Shouting] Mum, shut up!

CLAIRE: [Choking up] Don't you dare tell me to shut up. Ever since you started doing the dope you've become a monster.

ERIC: Well, I wouldn't have become like this if it wasn't for you and your drinking!

CLAIRE: What are you talking about?

ERIC: Again! You are denying it again! Do you think we're stupid, we can see you drinking from the window.

CLAIRE is speechless and shakes her head in disbelief.

ERIC: You need to get some help mum; you clearly have an addiction.

CLAIRE: No, you're the one who needs help. [Enraged and before thinking, ERIC raises his hand and slaps his mother to the ground.

JORDAN immediately rises from the sofa and pulls ERIC away from CLAIRE who is sitting on the floor in tears. OLIVER has a look of shock on his face but otherwise his posture has not changed.]

JORDAN: [Firmly but not shouting] That's it, Eric I'm taking you back to your aunt's.

ERIC: [Looking at CLAIRE] I've given you so many chances and all you do is spit on my face. I'm never coming back here again, if I want to see dad or Oliver then I will see them somewhere else. Goodbye, Claire.

[CLAIRE continues to cry on the floor as JORDAN and ERIC leave the house. OLIVER finally gets up from his seat and goes to retrieve his headphones and puts them on. He takes a brief look at his mother but refrains from interacting with her. He walks out of the living room back into his own room.]

Curtain

Poetry

Disconnection – Bill Ding

Dressing gown, worn to belt in my anguish.
Black, hood up, hands clenched in pockets
deep.
Bedroom walls my sacred sanctuary;
sheltered and shut in.
Darkened bloodshot narcissus eyes -
fixed on my own image in endless zoom
meetings.
Sleep now the departed lover whom
I crave.

No white flag as the cannons fire.
Equilibrium shattered,
solace smashed, lockdown shudder,
sinful indulgence: Netflix binge a fleeting
distraction on graceless days.
Loneliness, a cold companion.
Stabbing guilt and unaimed anger
contributing nothing. My disordered racing
mind
Disconnected. Disinterested. Broken.

Podcast, Spotify skips and repeats.
Handwashing, mask-wearing when
venturing out.
Death counts and restrictions.
New rituals, routines.
Fearing the future, yet desperate for change
-
tinny through my laptop speakers;
New Year's a Lone Piper's lament.
'Celebrating' just another day of drudgery.
Page flipped on the calendar, yet numbers
are arbitrary.

Continual rain, an assault on the senses.
I hide, buried
deeper
in brushed cotton.
Clutching white clouds of down
- a life buoy in the storm.

Pixie's Sonnet – Magnus Regina

Those sleek whiskers protruding from her
face,
Her velvet body writhing like a snake,
Ensnared mouse grasped in grace,
It's will unwavering, unable to break
I beg her to "let it go for God's sake!"
Her slender body atop my bedspread
Blood festers, a puddle first then a lake
She pesters further, until it's near dead

My pillow now covered in luscious red,
The poor unfortunate paint of her prey
There she sits, undeniably well fed
My bed is nothing but a place to play,
She does purr smugly, the mouse cannot flee
It's deceased and displayed for all to see.

Clouds – Magnus Regina

I look up to ambivalent clouds,
lunar light feebly fighting them,
the rain pitter pattering on our faces;
I look at your smile, your creased cheeks.
We laugh,
we reminisce.

There was a time far from this light
Where I looked at you
And said to myself,
silently and subconsciously,
the words I'm about to say
to you, for the first time.

Struck by your Cupid's Bow
Your smile presses against mine.
I look down to you,
and stutter,
I love you

Repose – Vince Lammergeir

It descends when you least expect it, from up
high.
From when we are created, only a
few falling drops
But years pass and nefarious clouds will blot
out the sky
And a stream grows which later shifts small
rocks.

Ever so quietly it slithers down to reach
the land
And will meander around what it cannot carve
It always finds a way through, for we are
all damned
To be eaten by this growing glutton. It will not
starve.

Consuming rocks, boulders, even
the earth it molds,
Down, down, down it goes, further from
the incline
Until it reaches the bottom, to the point where
we are old:
The flow which brings us death to reminds us
of time.

So, when the moment comes do not fear your
last gasp
Relax, sleep soundly and let it drown you in its
grasp.

Monthly HorrorScopes.

Want to see what is in store for your zodiac sign this month? Look no further! We have accurately predicted, through hardcore research and rigorous data analysis, how this month will follow for you, including important advice. With a totally unbiased answer! (Please ensure you check your sun, moon and rising sign as some may fail to resonate.)



Aries- Lately you have been struggling creatively. You have been searching for a sign and this is it. Aries, it is time for some well deserved rest in order to regenerate your creativity. You have permission to put yourself first, though prioritising yourself may seem selfish it is vital to do throughout this dull patch you are going through. I recommend eating a slice of pizza in a candle lit bathtub with some spicy music in the background (despacito is always a safe choice)

Taurus - It is time to take some responsibility for your actions. Taurus, though you may label yourself as a people pleaser, this is just a mask to cover up the fact that you cannot make decisions for yourself. Quit acknowledging other people's opinions and begin asking yourself, what is it you really want? Continually doing things based off how you fear other people may respond, means you can never truly grasp how you feel in these situations. Become in tune with your emotions and you may begin to realise things will still work out this way.

Gemini- Make your health your number one priority this month. Take time out of your day

for some rest to help reset your body.

Reconsider ways to balance work and time for yourself. Taking off time to reset will mean that you can continue to produce your work to the high standards you set for yourself.

However, Gemini men, do not take this advice as you do not deserve good that comes your way in this month and in the future to come.

Cancer- Cancer, realising that you are

disgustingly selfish is the first step to self improvement. You may label it 'putting yourself first' however from an outside perspective you are seen as careless and reckless. This does not aid well as it will continue to destroy your relationships with people until you have none left and will be lonely for the rest of your life.

Leo- Seeing the people around you progressing in their lives whilst you feel you instead doing the opposite and instead going backwards can feel extremely overwhelming. Understand, Leo that what people choose to show does not necessarily reflect what is going on in their daily life. Remember that to some people, your current life path may be the one they aspire to follow, so do not beat yourself up over it (somebody always has it worse).

Virgo- Trust your intuition. Virgo, you have a negative tendency to loathe in self doubt, however your intuition or your 'gut feeling' will save you from a lot of sticky situations in the near future. You know deep down what you should choose and how to respond, so be confident with your final decision.

Libra- Libra, you like to believe you have it difficult and nobody would understand the

position that you are currently. Try opening up to people as oppose to pushing them away when they offer to help. You are not as hard done by as you have so perfectly convinced yourself you are. Accept that everybody goes through things and some people may have the ability to solve your problems if you actually gave them a chance. This month open yourself up to help, you'll notice a difference.

Scorpio- Wow, Scorpio where do I even begin. As you are the most flawless zodiac sign in every aspect, this month, as usual will plan out perfectly for you, almost as perfect as you are. Keep in mind that when something does not go the way you planned, it may actually benefit you in the long run.

Sagittarius- This month, focus less on how you portray yourself on social media and instead redirect your energy into perfecting how you actually are in real life. You need to stop taking social media so seriously and understand that people like you for the person you have created and not your social media persona.

Capricorn- Capricorn, during this month I advise you to work on being more emotionally available. It is okay to show emotions and working on this will strengthen your relationships. Also, let go of your want to be in power of your finances. Not everything in life has to be a power struggle, learn to be alright with sharing this responsibility as being tight with money gives you a bad reputation.

Aquarius- Good things are coming soon Aquarius and you know it. You are currently looking forward to planned future events, as you should. However, this does not mean you should go about each day with the attitude "I'm one day closer to..." as you will fly through the month without actually acknowledging anything that has happened. Take time to appreciate what you have now because it will only get better from here.

Pisces- Pisces, the universe is currently preparing you for big shifts in work and relationships. Things will slowly begin to click in place and your hard work will pay off. You

are currently seeing the benefits of the work you've produced and this is just the beginning.

Opinion

In order to curb inequality, the rich should be taxed more - Anita Knapp

Brexit, unemployment, inequality. Almost all of our country's headaches seem to be focused around one thing – money. With the old 'money tree' metaphor being thrown around to accuse opposition parties of ridiculous and unachievable plans, is there a viable way to begin bridging the enormous wealth gap between the elite and the homeless? My answer would be taxes, specifically, higher taxes on the richest in our society. While it's an obvious and ancient idea, reorganizing our tax system could be the key to elevating our country, and helping those who need it most. Nobody needs a billion pounds, and while having ultra-rich people benefits the economy in some ways, redistributing a larger chunk of big corporations' wealth would help the working class far more than these companies claim they do. I will argue the case for why targeting not only the absurd sums being raked in by the wealthiest, but also their luxurious assets, is what we need to begin to solve the archaic issues which our modern nation suffers from.

It's not out of spite or jealousy that I argue why the richest should pay more tax, but out of simple humanity. The top 1% earn 20% of global income, with the UK disproportionately contributing to this sickening stat compared to other developed countries like Sweden and Australia. The highest earners are often entrepreneurs, whose income is mainly made up of their dividends, for which the highest tax bracket is set significantly lower than that of income in the UK, allowing shareholders of the biggest corporations to take unspendable amounts of cash back to their several mansions. And this leads us onto my next point, that as unfair as the distribution of income is, it is unfortunately not even where the British elite's fortune truly lies. The disparity is more pronounced when it comes to assets and net worth, with the most recent report on wealth from the Office of National

Statistics shows that the richest 10% of UK households carry 44% of all wealth, while the poorest 50% - half of our nation – hold less than a tenth. Another damning stat, widespread in 2019, was that the UK's six richest people controlled the same amount of wealth as the bottom 13 million. The Equality Trust, who conducted the research for this report stated that “the UK's extreme inequality is the story of Ferraris and food banks”, with those who don't know what to do with all their money, as well as those who can't afford basic housing or food, living side-by-side under the same government. How can it be that the sixth richest country in the world, home to 3.6 million households with a net worth of over £1million, still have such a huge poverty problem? Government after government will complain about a lack of cash, but these stats surely show that there is cash-a-plenty, it's just in the wrong place, and this is something which the current system of taxation is to blame for.

The issue with assets and ‘true wealth’ is that they aren't taxed nearly as much as income, with a council tax system allowing certain property owners to get away with paying “ludicrously low” annual bills according to Guardian journalist Patrick Collinson. An example he quotes is the seventeen-million-pound mansion, whose location in Westminster means it requires a mere £1,376 of council tax, a sum less than a pensioner would have to pay living in a bungalow in somewhere like Nottingham. This is largely due to the fact that the council tax system hasn't been evaluated since 1992, almost three decades ago, leaving it out-of-date, broken, and in many cases, downright ridiculous. Due to the fact that local councils can set their own property taxes, wealthier areas are able to bypass higher tariffs by simply voting for whoever promises the smallest amounts. This, on top of the fact that councils with richer inhabitants will require less social services, allows the rich to get richer, and the poor to get poorer, a saying invented in the 1800s, but one that continues to be worryingly relevant today, with French Economist Thomas Piketty arguing that we are now moving towards Victorian levels of inequality. Houses are not the only, or even principal vessel in which the wealthiest carry their fortune, instead, it is in

shares in both public and private businesses, which are even harder to tax under the current system. All this surely shows that the UK's current approach to taxation is neither fair nor effective, and that a different method, one that takes true wealth into consideration, is in order.

My proposed system would be focused on the various aspects of wealth. One such policy would be raising inheritance tax, so that the capital gains from estates could be properly regulated, compared to the present, where they can accumulate cash over generations, with little engagement from the taxman. A policy to go hand-in-hand with this one would be fairer property tax, where council tax was dependent on income, as well as having national minimum rates for each band of property. A final aspect would be a greater focus on taxing capital gains and shares of companies, as this is a method often used by corporations to avoid tax, due to the far lower tariffs currently placed on them compared to income. This would help not only in closing the wealth gap, but also in cutting down on tax avoidance. So, these are my main ideas, lets analyse some potential problems.

Those who argue taxing the rich doesn't work present a few counterarguments. The first, is that it would hurt the economy, as investments from corporations are vital to grow a country financially. However, this over-used claim misses the fact that, obviously, the super-rich benefit from their investments, and so would continue to pump money into the economy if taxes were higher; they'd just have to get one less yacht each summer, or only buy a six-bedroom house. A second argument is that it would reduce the incentive for entrepreneurs to find success, and thus slow both economic and technological development. The example of the US during the 1950s and 60s can be taken here, a time which laid the groundwork for the “Golden Age of American Capitalism”, and a time in which the highest tax bracket was a whopping 91%. Wealth inequality was low, and everyone, from the CEO to the manufacturer received a fair share of gains, showing that high taxes and economic growth can coincide perfectly well. Additionally, making it harder to become a billionaire would possibly increase ambition, as young businesspeople could strive to work harder, while an increase on

inheritance tax would perhaps motivate the often slothful children of the rich. Another point that skeptics make is that the rich would simply work harder to avoid paying tax, potentially resulting in even less tax being paid overall. Well, one solution to the appalling tax avoidance is the treatment of each multinational corporation as a single firm doing business over international borders. This would combat their overseas 'tax-haven' tricks and is a method the European Union are currently considering. For it to be fully effective, the UN would have to introduce a similar policy, something which is probably more plausible than you'd expect in a world where the restructuring of the UK's tax system was possible. Ultimately, systematic change will never be easy, but the various obstacles presented by taxing the rich more can be overcome, and so this proposition is still very much valid and achievable.

Overall, the inequality in our society must be addressed, and it is immoral to argue otherwise. With the nation plunging into another recession, the great divide between the haves and have-nots will only augment. The economic situation of the Coronavirus Pandemic has produced those such as Mercy Baguma, found dead in her flat next to her starving child, and well as those like Jeff Bezos, who could give \$100,000 to each of Amazon's 876,000 employees, and still have more money than he did at the start of the Pandemic. This degree of disparity cannot continue, and taxing those such as Bezos a little bit more could yield the funds necessary to bring about systematic change to end homelessness and lift thousands out of poverty, something which would undoubtedly help the economy and please capitalists. So why is it that we've allowed the richest to persuade us we don't want wealth tax? Why is it that we, as a society, are comfortable with such horrific inequality? And so why is it that the idea of taxing the rich is met with eye-rolls and groans? Therefore, I firmly believe that this country needs to restructure its methods of taxation to a system which is as loophole-tight as possible, which actually taxes the rich's wealth, and which, ultimately combats the shocking inequality which is worsening by the day.

The removal of Edward Colston's statue - by Howie Doohan

The removal of Edward Colston's statue from Bristol was long overdue, not just because it pleased the many who had been sickened by the sight of a benefactor and fierce protector of slavery being celebrated in their city but because of the anger it revealed, simmering under all sides of the political spectrum. Britain's history is undeniably controversial but because the darkest acts in our history often played out far from our shores we have become apathetic towards it. Focusing on our land alone it is easy to convince ourselves our history is a boring one of Tudor kingdoms, religious squabbling, and steam trains. However, Spain's history is different.

In the 1930s Spain suffered a huge civil war in which Republican and Nationalist political ideologies turned neighbours against each other until an eventual Nationalist win. It was a war in which many disappeared, and some are still searching to find the fates of their relatives to this day. This war was followed by almost forty years of harsh rule by the dictator Franco whose legacy is controversial in Spain. After Franco's death this history was so immediate, and peace so fragile, that, as part of the transition to democracy a compromise, called the Amnesty Law was created: freeing all political prisoners whilst also preventing the prosecution of Franco-era crimes. Unlike our unspoken British collective apathy, Spain's blind eye to its painful past had to be codified and enforced with the ironic effect of making their ignorance all the more visible and easier to condemn.

Our recent acknowledgement of the importance of remembering history has finally opened discussions on how to properly do so. Conversely, the debate over historical remembrance has been front and centre of Spanish politics for years with the conversation blowing up again this September after the approval of a draft for a second memory law: a state authorised view of history. Its ongoing conflict over the past is far from simple and does not provide a roadmap for Britain to follow, but it does point out that the transition to truth is a tricky path and marks out the potholes we should try to avoid.

The Spanish 1977 Amnesty Law has been opposed for years by activists with personal connections to a past they feel they aren't allowed to remember. Jose M. Galante was an ex-prisoner from the Franco era who struggled with reminders of his past in the most horrific way. "I live just metres away from the person who tortured me", he complained in an international documentary in 2018. "A forgetfulness of all and for all" is the infamous description of the Amnesty, also known as the Pact of Forgetting. It received bipartisan support in the 70s, yet now the UN asks for its repeal for its protection of human rights abuses. Though those like Jose could never forget the repression of an era that followed him until his death; new generations are growing estranged from their history. With no compulsory education of this period, the government has failed in its role of educating its people. This however has not erased discussions of the past; Spanish society continues to conflict over the remembrance of the war and dictatorship, but the government's historically hands-off approach created a vacuum that quickly filled with misinformation. Franco's grave, covered in fresh flowers from constant visitors, was a site of pilgrimage for his supporters decades after his death until he was removed from the public Valley of the Fallen less than a year ago. Built during the Franco era, the Valley of the Fallen contains a basilica run by Benedictine monks, a towering cross, and the graves of 40,000 war dead from both sides of the Spanish Civil War - with Republican soldiers often moved without the consent of families - and prominent marked graves for the founder of the Fascist Falange party, Jose Antonio. Inaugurated on 1st April - a date known as Victory Day in the Franco calendar - to the words "The anti-Spain lays beaten but it is not dead" it was inarguably created to celebrate a Fascist victory yet the myth that this is a site of reconciliation, first used as a deflection by Franco, is now mistakenly or maliciously used to maintain the site in its current form. The damage done by misinformation is a dire warning and the pervasiveness of the rival narrative will pose an obstacle to Spain's current plans to make the site politically neutral;

converting the Valley of the Fallen into a civil memorial by removing the remaining Fascist leader from his marked grave and putting the government in charge of running the site. All of this is hoped to be achieved as part of the government's newest proposed memory law which passed its first stage on 15th September and is hoped to become policy by next summer. The bill bears the same name as its 2007 predecessor, the Democratic Memory Law. This draft provides a range of changes such as banning organisations endorsing Franco, including historical memory in the teacher training curriculum and entrusting the state with the exhumation of mass graves.

The latter of these measures may seem insignificant, but Spain has ranked in the top three for the world's highest number of mass graves and recent years of right-wing Partido Popular rule led to difficult times for the excavation industry when the government cut funding for recovery projects. The Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH) was one organisation who struggled significantly due to the change of government until they received a cash prize as part of a Puffin Award for Human Rights activism. Whilst the importance of their work was lost on the Spanish parliament, it was clear to the workers who continued unpaid for two years to ensure their lab was kept open. It was even clear to a union of Norwegian electricians who donated thousands of Euros to ARMH after they witnessed Spain's neglect of Franco's victims on a trip to the country. With the government back in the hands of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party who passed the original Democratic Memory Law, it seems that Spain is making progress, but memory laws are not the perfect path they seem.

Thanks to its original Democratic Memory Law Spain is in the process of removing statues and street signs of Franco and Franco-era generals. Jose M. Galante once complained about waking up every day on "a street dedicated to this war criminal" referring to General Yague, a man also known as the Butcher of Badajoz but, fortunately, the street name has since been changed. This is clearly progress and commemoration of criminals do not belong on

the streets yet, despite the success of this operation, the act of changing street names is not free from criticism and can be used to show the fatal flaw of memory laws.

MELA (Memory Laws in European and Comparative Perspectives) researchers Uladzislau Belavusau and Anna Wójcik are concerned' with the States' power to control history in Poland where similar memory laws have been removing street signs affiliated with "communism or other totalitarian regimes". This act removed co-founder of the Communist Party of Poland Józef Lewartowski from a street built on the rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto, the very place he organised Nazi resistance until he was shot by the Gestapo. Belavusau and Wójcik believe that "a complete erasure of Lewartowski... implies that his efforts and sacrifice – just because he was a member of an ideologically communist party – are somehow less important than that of other heroes. ... [this] in fact contributes to the process of erasing historical figures of the political left and the contribution of minorities in Polish history." This warning is necessary and the risk of abuse of power is significant, but I believe that international oversight and grassroots action can hold governments to account; the biggest hurdle to using history as a political weapon is public concern and action. We must educate ourselves so that we can hold our governments to account to ensure these powers are not abused. The effectiveness of memory laws is both a blessing and a curse as the power they wield can be used for good or ill, but they replace a much larger evil in Spain exemplified by the myth of reconciliation that protected a Fascist dictator for decades.

If historical truth is something that we should all be motivated to protect then we must allow governments to preserve history through education. The effect of governments neglecting this duty can be dire and the vacuums left without a required curriculum can be just as dangerous as state indoctrination. Volkhard Knigge, a museum director at the former Buchenwald concentration camp, believes that the rise of neo-Nazi offences at the site – such as visitors taking smiling selfies at cremation sites – is because "The memorials can't compensate

for what schools are no longer doing." A centre for education becoming an accidental shrine to Nazism shows just how difficult it is to properly handle history but the damaging legacy of the Pact of Forgetting shows that ignorance is never the answer and that Spain's decision to teach history to its teachers is revolutionary.

The removal of a dictator from a public site of worship seems so obvious that the powerful resistance the government faced seems almost laughable. The sensationalism of Vox (a far-right Spanish Party) is comically excessive, but describing the ruling party who is introducing the new memory law draft as wanting to "rewind history to win the civil war and establish an anti-Spanish communist republic" is only funny until you realise Vox won 11% of the votes in 2019 after the slogan "make Spain great again" was interpreted by some as a call to return to the Franco era. There are grave consequences to an ignorant population.

There are no easy ways to remember history but, no matter how difficult or divisive, it must be done because if we don't those who protect Fascism and historical inaccuracies will do it for us. So, let's talk about our history as much as possible, talk about it at monuments, at gravesites, and at street corners but, most importantly, let's talk about it in schools. Not only so that we can selfishly understand how today's society has formed, but out of respect for those like Jose who never lived to see the death of his torturer/neighbour the infamous Billy the Kid who died just this May; Jose passed away from Covid-19 during the beginning of the pandemic and he is just one person who has been permanently denied justice for their mistreatment. The stupidity of Vox's vitriolic language demonstrates exactly how debate should not be done but their ferocious rhetoric is not unwarranted; great power comes from how we view the past and, for them, the stakes are undeniably high. If Spaniards learn of the mass graves and the violent rhetoric of Franco over the stolen bodies of his enemies maybe they won't be so keen to return to his era. Spain's government should be celebrated for taking the responsibility away from Fascist supporters or the whims of generous Scandinavians and into their own hands but we

should remember that the hands of the government are only safe so long as the people hold them to account. Britain has a lot to learn from Spain, but our biggest takeaway should be that there is always more to find out about ourselves and our past.

The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse and what it means to me – Pat Baccery



A boy perched up on a twisting intertwining branch. To his right a bundle of fuzz that makes out a dirt stained mole. Huddled next to the young boy. To the glimpse of an eye it appears they are facing each other engaging in conversation.

My first question is, what do you think they are discussing (the characters in the picture shown above)... the Boy and the Mole? Yes, you heard me correctly. The Boy and the Mole, that are both perched up on the limb tree branch. Personally, I imagine the Mole telling the boy all about sage life experiences he has had. Perhaps even telling him about cake (I'll get to that later) and all about the future; what to expect in life, the transparencies and the more hidden challenges. I get this from the image because of their body language- the boy is dangling his legs down by each side of the twisted tree arm with his shoulders hunched forward. He is sitting very childlike and innocent, like a child sitting waiting patiently on a park bench making sure if it's okay to go and play or not while making his posture appear very hunched like most children's postures are, as we all get told growing up, "sit up, you'll thank me later for it" usually by our old granny or grandad. In contrast to the mole, which is of course much smaller than the boy but, in my estimation, much more wise, much like our old granny or grandad.

Just by the way the tree branch props up on where the mole is perched and the moles nose is the highest part of him to me this suggests he is very aware of his surroundings, while the body of him as a whole seems very calm despite the height difference and being so high up for such a little creature, suggests little fear in the tiny animal.

Now that I have got you thinking about this picture, I want to give some background- the picture was illustrated by the author himself, Charlie Mackesy. Artistic master-piece in my opinion, however, this is just a redrawn copy of the original piece that stole the hearts of a rather small audience to begin with but evidentially a grown fan base. The picture was uploaded to Instagram two years ago and a raised discussion in the comment section about what the two were talking about, the answers were warm and varied widely from jokes about "the boy and the mole discussing politics" all the way to more heartily and nostalgic, one person said;

"took me right back to the feel of my own storybook childhood"

Nether the less, it created a great discussion on this one picture despite Charlie's small social media following in the time it was posted. To me the picture makes me think about the communication between the two and wonder what they are talking about.

The quote underneath this picture on page 23 is powerful and is one of my favourite pages throughout the whole book;

"most of the old moles I know wish they had listened less to their fears and more to their dreams"

Subsequently the mole has seen others grow old with regrets and to me this is a warning to the boy that it's better to be scared and follow your dreams than grow old and regret the chances you didn't take. For me this is the mole and his wise words guiding the boy for his future and telling him it's okay to be afraid of the things you want to do most as it will be worth it in the long run. Moreover, reminding the reader of these things too.

Flash forward two years later Charlie Mackesy has now sold more than 250,000 copies (in the united states) sellers even had to hire extra

drivers to ensure the book copies were stalked up from 2019-2020.

Now that you are aware of some background on the book I'd like to enlighten you on why it was such a hit, because if I do say so myself it's not like any other book I've read before, there is no target age, there is no initial "start" to the book and there are lots and lots of illustrations. If you're an advanced reader going for a massive story with a stereotypical start, middle and end then this is not the book for you, however, I do believe that everyone at least once in their life should read this book. Some critics even started that it changed the way the viewed life as a whole. So yes, it does not have all the stereotypical ingredients for an amazing book, but its unique and even for the advanced readers out there, you won't be disappointed by it. I received the book as a Christmas present one year. For me it was an unusual gift to receive but by far my favourite. Jotting down on the page and what it meant to me.

The book radiates a sense of nostalgia and a warm feeling of kindness. Through the book, as the reader you are witnessing the short but impactful conversations between the boy, the mole, the fox and the horse. With a brief explanation of the meaning of the book by the author in the very beginning. This is the only text out of the whole book that explains the base outline of the meaning of the book, the author has done this because they do not want to take away from other people's experiences with the book, this is because if the book becomes too structured by "guidelines" I suppose it wouldn't be as impactful, as the book is interpreted differently by each individual person. That's what makes it so unique. The nostalgia is very noticeable and one of the things I find really charming about the book.

Many of the pages start with the boy asking the mole a question about life and the mole answering in short but meaningful answers and with many references to cake. Yes cake. The mole loves cake. I find this very sweet in a way, it makes the book more magical and as if it exists in a land far away, where boys can speak to animals if they need advice and moles can eat cake. It creates a new view on the world and inspires the reader to live more in our world the

way they do in their own magical world, overall things that are impossible can also be inspiring regardless of how big or little they are, like a talking mole who has a greed for cake. However, the mole and his love for cake is also seen as the side to the mole that is greed. The mole references cake many times throughout the boy's meaningful questions, suggesting he is not the wisest of the four characters.

I believe each individual character symbolises something different too, as I stated earlier, I believe the mole represents a wise figure, someone like an old, wise, grandad with a bit of quirkiness to him (like the cake reference) The author also stated that'

"all four characters represent different parts of the same person" he explained "the inquisitive boy. The mole who's enthusiastic but a bit greedy, the fox whose been hurt so is withdrawn from life, slow to trust but wants to be part of things, the horse who's the wisest, deepest part of your soul"- the guardian Nov 2019

While the horse is seen as the wisest, I also see the mole that way too as right from the beginning of the book he is by the side of the boy, however, his talk of cake can tamper with his responses. Moving forward, when we are first introduced the fox, the fox's intent is to kill the mole, this is how the reader is aware of the hurt the fox has experienced- he has been hurt (in the fox's case trapped in a snare) therefore, wants to spread hatred and hurt to others due to his own experiences, this is a common reaction for humans who have been hurt as well, however, when it is put down on paper it seems easier to understand. Continuing despite the fox threatening the mole: "if I wasn't caught in this snare I'd kill you" said the fox" However, the mole is not afraid as he understands that if the fox stays caught in the snare he will die (as the snare symbolises death), but if he sets the fox free he is aware that he could potentially die.

This message is a very impactful one as the mole is willing to risk his own safety for the fox to be free and safe.

"so the mole chewed through the wire with his tiny teeth"

Overall, this teaches the reader not to judge people so quickly, their bitterness could only be

a side effect of what's hurting them deeply inside, and the only thing you are risking by being kind to them and showing them some compassion is them hurting themselves even more, so be kind- this is what this specific page taught me, however, for each individual person this could vary.

The horse is very important, the guardian stated the horse is supposed to be the deepest part of the soul, linking in with the many wise words he suggests to the boy, one of my favourite quotes from the horse is-

"Tears fall for a reason and they are your strength not weakness"

This is impactful as it teaches the reader that even when you're feeling your most vulnerable and weak, it is actually just another form of strength, much like asking for help. There are many references from the horse to why asking for help makes you stronger and to not be afraid of it. Furthermore, teaching the reader to not be afraid to ask for help.

Overall this book holds a very special place in my heart. It did not take me long to read however, just picking it up and flipping to any page to read the conversation between the characters is inspiring. It taught me to be kind to myself and shown me a whole other world created by these four characters and what they resemble. I believe that everyone must read this book, even if it is just one page. Nostalgia reflected through the book as a whole is heart-warming and something I believe to carry with me for the years to come. When in need for some wise words