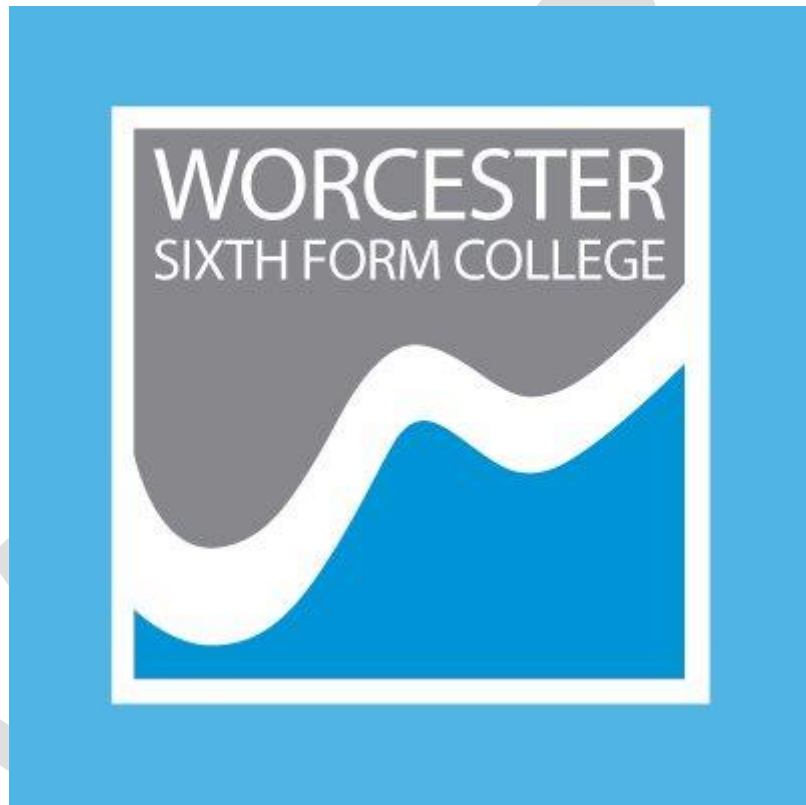


**Worcester Sixth Form College**

**DRAMA AND  
THEATRE STUDIES**



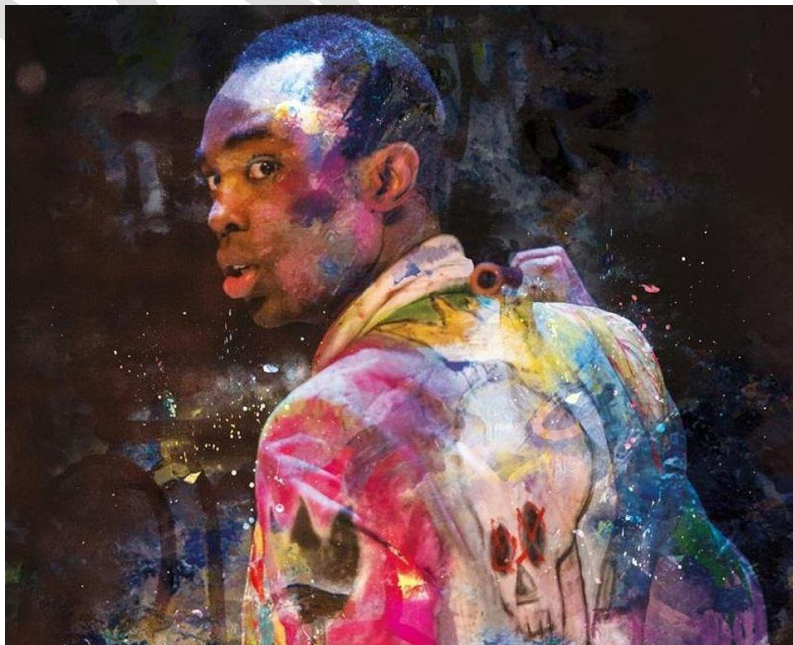
**Summer Tasks**

## Welcome to Drama and Theatre Studies at Worcester Sixth Form College



So, you are thinking about taking this course? Well done. Excellent choice. You will learn confidence and develop performance skills, study the history of drama as well as the current theatrical trends alongside developing your understanding and ability to analyse texts. It is a great subject, full of fun, challenge and discipline that students are very passionate about.

I've outlined **THREE** compulsory tasks for you to do – you need to bring your notes on these to the first lesson when you come to college in September. However, these tasks are not designed to torture you but to guide and encourage you to explore the exciting and vibrant world of Drama and Theatre further. I hope you find time to complete as many of the tasks as you can. Remember, at A-level, the more effort you put into your work, the more interest and satisfaction you will get out, as compelling and exhilarating ideas sparkle around you like stars!



## Keeping it practical

It will be hard to do drama practically in lockdown – but not impossible! My Year 12s are currently making Quarantine Theatre using technology! Here are some suggestions to keep active and to exercise your performance skills.

**Compulsory Task 1 – please do the monologue task and then choose at least one other from this list. Try them and write a page of notes on each on how you got on.**

1. **Learn and stage a monologue to camera.** Watch it back and give yourself some constructive criticism. I've put a bunch of interesting monologues at the end of this booklet. Some are for male actors and some for female– but see beyond gender by all means. Research the plays and find out about the characters and their circumstances to make choices about age, accent, state of mind etc.
2. **Developing physical skills:** Vamos Theatre Company specialises in mask work. With the face covered and the voice silenced, the emphasis is on the body. The physical performance of the actor is important no matter what play you are doing and what style you are working in so why not work through Vamos' [tutorials](#) on mask work and refine your physical expression. Create a mask of your own (a paper plate would do!) and practice to the camera on your phone or in front of the mirror.
3. **Give Shakespeare a go!** This [site](#) has a number of monologues by Shakespeare you could try. The [following series](#) is an excellent introduction to playing Shakespeare with plenty of practical exercises and demonstrations by notable RSC actors (including some young famous faces!). Hours of expertise here.
4. **Make a puppet and learn how to make it come to life!** Click [here](#) to find out more.
5. **Learn some warm-up exercises** [here](#) and practise them at home.

## Learn about different theatre practitioners

**Compulsory Task 2– choose at least TWO of the following practitioners, research them and write a double-sided fact sheet on them.**

What is theatre? Different practitioners have different ideas. Spend some time watching and researching their work. Discover the work and practices of some new theatre practitioners you may not have studied at GCSE:

- Kneehigh and Emma Rice
- Theatre de Complicite
- Headlong Theatre
- Steven Berkoff
- Frantic Assembly
- Max Stafford-Clark
- Katie Mitchell
- Marianne Elliott

Each company/practitioner has a website you can explore. What makes each company/practitioner different and special? What ideas do they have about theatre and theatrical experiences? What key features define their work?

Here are some practitioners you probably did look at – but may not have done:

- Konstantin Stanislavski
- Bertolt Brecht
- Antonin Artaud

Research these stalwarts. Their influence can be seen in all kinds of theatre we see today.



## Preparing for the written paper : watching and analysing live theatre

**Compulsory Task 3– watch at least ONE piece of live theatre and write a paragraph about a key moment of the performance, as described below.**

[Tune into YouTube](#) every Thursday to watch a play from the National Theatre. The plays will be available for a week after they have been screened. Why not choose a key moment – about 2-3 minutes of footage you thought was really successful – and practise vividly and analytically describing what you saw and evaluating why you thought it was successful? You could create a grid to plan your work –

The who	The what	The how	The why 1	The why 2
The name of the actor and the character being played	A line of dialogue or a movement	Describe how it was performed by the actor- use vivid descriptions as well as terminology	What was the effect? For example, what was conveyed about the character? What mood was created? Etc.	Why was this successful? Because it evoked your sympathy, made you laugh, successfully highlighted an important theme in the play, created suspense and tension?

– and then write it up in a paragraph.

Here's a reminder of those key acting skills:

Voice: *tone, accent, emphasis, pause, volume, pitch, inflection, pace*

Physical: *gesture, posture, stance, gait, facial expression, spatial relationships*

In partnership with the BBC the RSC will be airing past productions on BBC platforms including iplayer. Click [here](#) to find out more. You could do the same kind of exercise with these productions plus Emma Rice's *Wise Children* and Mike Barlett's *Albion*, also to be screened on the BBC.



Some more optional tasks – please try to find time for some of this:

### **Preparing for the written paper: read and research your set texts**

We study two plays for the written paper. They are *Antigone* by Sophocles and *Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker.

If you are planning to join us in September, why not source these plays and read them?

Then research each play's historical context, genre, style and themes.

Search for reviews of recent productions to find out more about the plays' themes and to find out how the plays have been staged

### **Read, read, read!**

[Nick Hern Books](#) will be giving away a play every Wednesday! No need to spend any money to keep reading. You could join them on Twitter to discuss the plays. Why not work your way [through these 25 excellent](#) contemporary plays?

### **Get lost!**

The National Theatre has [a YouTube channel](#) with tonnes of informative videos. Why not get lost in it all?

### **Swot up on your theatre history and theatrical movements**

YouTube channel [CrashCourse](#) offers bite-size videos on theatre history and important movements in theatre, for example expressionism, epic theatre and absurdism (to name just three). Watch these informative videos and make notes on them. Search for online productions of any plays mentioned. Then go down the rabbit hole of YouTube to explore these movements, plays and playwrights in more depth. Some of the work you see may be bad. Very bad. But you need to see bad theatre as well as good theatre!

I very much look forward to greeting you in September. Enjoy your Summer. Please do get in contact if you have any questions; [Isabel.swift@wsfc.ac.uk](mailto:Isabel.swift@wsfc.ac.uk)



## ***Educating Rita* by Willy Russell**

Rita:

See, the properly educated, they know it's only words, don't they? It's only the masses who don't understand. But that's because they're ignorant; it's not their fault, I know that, but sometimes they drive me mental. I do it to shock them sometimes; y' know if I'm in the hairdresser's – that's where I work – I'll say somethin' like 'I'm as fucked as a fanny on a Friday night!' and some of the customers, they'll have a right gob on them just 'cos I come out with something like that.

[Frank Yes, but in the circumstances that's hardly ...]

But it doesn't cause any kind of fuss with educated people though, does it? Because they know it's only words and they don't worry. But these stuck-up ones I meet, they think they're royalty just because they don't swear. An' anyway, I wouldn't mind but it's the aristocracy who swear more than anyone, isn't it, they're effing and blinding all day long; with them it's all, 'I say, the grouse is particularly fucking lovely today although I'm afraid the spuds are a bit bollocks, don't you think?'

(She sighs.)

But y' can't tell them that round our way. It's not their fault; they can't help it. But sometimes I hate them. (Beat.) God ... what's it like to be free?

\*

## Rita 2

*angrily*) But I don't wanna be charming and delightful: funny. What's funny? I don't wanna be funny. I wanna talk seriously with the rest of you, I don't wanna spend the night takin' the piss, comin' on with the funnies because that's the only way I can get into the conversation. I didn't want to come to your house just to play the court jester. (....)

I don't want to be myself. Me? What's me? Some stupid woman who gives us all a laugh because she thinks she can learn, because she thinks one day she'll be like the rest of them, talking seriously, confidently, with knowledge, livin' a civilised life. Well, she can't be like that really but bring her in because she's good for a laugh!

I'm all right with you, here in this room; but when I saw those people you were with I couldn't come in. I would have seized up. Because I'm a freak. I can't talk to the people I live with anymore. An' I can't talk to the likes of them on Saturday, or them out there, because I can't learn the language. I went back to the pub where Denny was, an' me mother, an' our Sandra, an' her mates. I'd decided I was n't comin' here again. I went into the pub an' they were singin', all of them singin' some song they'd learnt from the juke- box. An' I stood in that pub an' thought, just what the frig am I trying to do? Why don't I just pack it in an' stay with them, an' join in the singin'?

*(Angrily)* Just because you pass a pub doorway an' hear the singin' you think we're all O.K., that we're all survivin', with the spirit intact. Well I did join in with the singin', I didn't ask any questions, I just went along with it. But when I looked round me mother had stopped singin', an' she was cryin', but no one could get it out of her why she was cryin'. Everyone just said she was pissed an' we should get her home. So we did, an' on the way home I asked her why. I said, 'Why are y' cryin', Mother?' She said, 'Because- because we could sing better songs than those.' Ten minutes later Denny had her laughing and singing again, pretending she hadn't said it. But she had. And that's why I came back. And that's why I'm staying.



## ***People, Places and Things* by Duncan Macmillan**

### **Emma**

With a play you get instructions. Stage directions. Dialogue. Someone clothes you. Tells you where to be and when. You get to live the most intense moments of a life over and over again, with all the boring bits left out. And you get to practise. For weeks. And you're applauded. Then you get changed. Leave through stage door. Bus home. Back to real life. All the boring stuff left in. Waiting. Temping. Answering phones and serving canapés. Nothing permanent. Can't plan. Can't get a mortgage or pay for a car. Audition comes in. Try to look right. Sit in a room surrounded by people who look just like you, all after the same part. Never hear back. Or if you get the part it'll be sitting around in rehearsal and backstage making less than you did temping. Make these friendships with people, a little family, fall in love onstage and off and then it's over and you don't see them again. You try not to take it personally when people who aren't as good as you get the parts. When you go from being the sexy ingénue to the tired mother of three. But you keep going because sometimes, if you're really lucky, you get to be onstage and say things that are absolutely true, even if they're made-up. You get to do things which feel more real to you, more authentic, more meaningful than anything in your own life. You get to speak poetry, words you would never think to say but which become yours as you speak them.

*When he shall die*

*take him and cut him out in little stars, and he will make the face of heaven so fine that all the world will be in love with night, and pay no worship to the garish sun.*

## **After The End by Dennis Kelly**

**Louise (Female 20s):** I think a lot about what makes people do things. What makes us behave in certain ways, you know. Every night I've been thinking about this. Trapped in whatever, behaviour, I dunno, cycles of violence or something and is it possible to break, these cycles, is it possible to break... And I'd be sitting there thinking about this and this cat, this gorgeous cat with no tail would come to my door. I'd have the back door open because the garden looks, and she'd be terrified at first, it looks beautiful it really does. So I bought some food for her and the first time she just sniffed at it and ran away, the moment I moved, you know, no sign of her for the rest of the night, and I'm thinking, reactions and responses, patterns, violence breeding violence, and the next night she's in a bit further and I'm looking at her tail thinking 'that's been cut off' and I don't think it was, I think she's a Manx, I think they're born without tails, and the next night she's further in and I'm beginning to get used to this, beginning to look forward to it. And the next night she's in and she's eating and from then on she's in every night; she's on my lap she's following me around, she's wating on the window ledge for me when I get home. And we sit there every night and I'm thinking behaviour and patterns and is it actually possible to break these patterns of whatever and she's eating and meowing to be let in. Every night. And one night she scratches me, out of the blue, cats, you know, just a vindictive cat-scratch, look: (Shows him.) See? She knew she'd done wrong. Took her three nights to get back into my lap. And I'm stroking her and thinking. Warm, delicate, you know. And I put my hands around her neck. And I squeeze. And I squeeze. Until her neck is about the thickness of a rope. And I still squeeze. And I'm sitting there – and this is last night – with this dead cat in my lap, and I thought I'd come in and see you. And here I am.

## ***The Encounter by Complicite***

**Loren** I slept until I thought I was dreaming of a jaguar and its grunt. And then I woke. There was a jaguar. In the village. A jaguar in the village. I sat bolt upright. In the nearest hut, children cried in panic, the noise of the village tripled in volume.

I heard Red Cheeks screaming. Six or seven other young men brandishing spears and burning branches, ganged up in the middle of the clearing. I found myself in front of the gang of young men and Red Cheeks gestured for me to follow him. I'd always wanted to see a jaguar hunt so I stepped closer to him. But I was furious with myself for not having my camera.

SFX: jaguar grunt.

We scrambled over the wet grass into a solid wall of fogged-up forest vegetation. The torches went away into the darkness like flares. Keep up, come on. I'm in my mid-fifties, they're in their twenties. The worst scenario would be to be left alone in the dark. The grunt rang out again.

SFX: jaguar grunt.

Where are they?

AYYYAYYA!

I heard Red Cheeks shout unexpectedly. The young men had stopped right in front of a spiny thickness. The beast had crawled underneath it – a cluster of thorny plants between the roots of a huge tree. I headed for it as fast as I could so as not to miss the spectacle. Red Cheeks suddenly pushed me. Powered by this and my own momentum, I ran straight into the thornbush.

He dropped his torch and stepped on it. The other burning branches disappeared in the same instant.

Total dark followed.

I was trapped.

Darkness. Sound of the thornbush created live using brushes on the ears of the binaural head. I thought of the jaguar, and then I realised there wasn't one. Red Cheeks had imitated the grunt himself and now I'm alone. The jungle is all around me. Where are they? Listen. They've gone back to the village. I've got to get out of the thornbush. The thorns are in my arms, my legs, my body. I could die ten times over before anybody finds me. Come on. Get out of this, just push out. It doesn't matter how painful it is, just push out.

I try to pluck the barbs out of my skin. I can't get them out. I wave my arms in the air to coagulate the bleeding... The sound of insects begins to grow, louder and fuller.

SFX: mosquitos and flies all around the binaural head.

I'm like a magnet.

Formations and formations of gnats streak through the air towards me. I scratch an arm; they pucker my face. I've got to move, to shake them off. I creep away slowly. A creeper hits me in the face, then another. I tell myself, okay, an animal would sense my approach. Less gnats. I breathe. I stop. They find me again. I dance. This is a torture. I have to think about something else.

Think of something else. Think of evolution. I can't see anything and then I do see something. A spider. Whose four pairs of eyes are luminous. I bring my eyes so close to him that his eyes are probably reflected in mine.<sup>38</sup> I edge closer. Through the eyes, I look into a palpitating mass of electric fire, the light is coming from within. How did he evolve this way? How did Barnacle evolve to talk to me this way? Time. Time is the answer.

A snake slithers along the branch, towards the spider. He cries some sort of distress on the spider frequency, the snake gobbles him up and then we are back in darkness.

Total darkness.

## ***Escaped Alone* by Caryl Churchill**

**Sally** all this about birds, I don't quite like about birds because birds leads to cats, pigeons leads to cats, cat among the pigeons, next door's tabby had a pigeon such flapping and couldn't kill it, wouldn't, just played about kept grabbing it again and the bird was maimed someone had to ugh, and pigeons like rats leads to cats rats cats rats are filthy plague everywhere, only how many feet from a rat, and pigeons are filthy, rats are filthy, cats are filthy their bites are poison they bite you and the bite festers, but that's not it that's not it I know that's just an excuse to give a reason I know I've no reason I know it's just cats cats themselves are the horror because they're cats and I have to keep them out I have to make sure I never think about a cat because if I do I have to make sure there's no cats and they could be anywhere they could get in a window I have to go round the house and make sure all the windows are locked and I don't know if I checked properly I can't remember I was too frightened to notice I have to go round the windows again I have to go round the windows again back to the kitchen back to the bedroom back to the kitchen back to the bedroom the bathroom back to the kitchen back to the door, the door might blow open if it's windy even if it's not windy suppose the postman was putting a large packet and pushed the door and it came open because it wasn't properly shut and then a cat because they can get through very very small<sup>26</sup>and once they're in they could be anywhere they could be under the bed in the wardrobe up on the top shelf with the winter sweaters that would be a place for a cat to sleep or in a wastepaper basket or under the cushions on the sofa or in the cupboard with the saucepans or in the cupboard with the food a cat could curl up on the cans of tomatoes a cat could be in with the jam and honey a cat could be in the biscuit tin, a cat could be in the fridge in the freezer in the salad drawer in the box of cheese in the broom cupboard the mop bucket a cat could be in the oven the top oven under the lid of the casserole in a box of matches behind a picture under a rug back to the bedroom a cat could be under the bed in the duvet in the pillowcase in the wardrobe a cat could be in a shoe on a hanger under my dress in a woolly hat inside a coat sleeve a cat could be in any of the drawers so I tip them all out and shake every – cat behind the books on the shelf behind the dvds a cat could be in the teapot with the keys a cat could be on the ceiling a cat could be on top of the door a cat could be behind me a cat could be under my hand when I put out my hand. I need someone to say there's no cats, I need to say to someone do you smell cat, I need to say do you think there's any way a cat could have got in, and they have to say of course not, they have to say of course not, I have to believe them, it has to be someone I believe, I have to believe they're not just saying it, I have to believe they know there are no cats, I have to believe there are no cats. And then briefly the joy of that.

## ***Amongst Friends* by April de Angelis**

**Lara** When is a private life not a private life? When it becomes a commodity, of course. The poisonous fungus of kiss'n'tell, the Gordon Ramsay mistress syndrome.

You've shunted aside any concept of decorum and privacy in favour of hard cash  
You've joined the Heather Mills clan of whingers. You want to unleash on a long-suffering public yet another through-the-keyhole self-regarding, worthless book 'all whining for myself'.

The greedy and vindictive always happy to exchange their privacy for benefits, especially financial ones, the moment a publisher waves a big fat cheque, like the starter flag at Monaco, they unleash their most awful Z-list secrets, reams of dirty washing all strung out to make a fast buck like a bad episode of *Hollyoaks*.<sup>70</sup> Ever considered you might have a narcissistic personality disorder? What mental ugliness to want to strip your friends naked – shove them into a cage of half-starved tigers with the raw liver of salacious gossip strapped all over their bodies and watch them be slowly disembowelled. Classy.

I've got news for you. You're a talent-free zone, your book will be dismissed as nothing more than dispatches from the attention-seeking.

Who cares? You weren't Posh and Becks.

Though at least that poor demented twiglet had the nous to marry talent.

Nobody will be interested in your deranged ranting dressed up as a spiritual vocation. It'll have as devastating an impact as a bowl of wheatgerm at a kids' party.

One way and another, haven't the British public suffered enough?



## ***The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams**

Tom

I didn't go to the moon. I went much further—for time is the longest distance between two places. Not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoebox. I left St. Louis. I descended the steps of the fire escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space. I traveled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly coloured but torn away from their branches. I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise. Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass. Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of coloured glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colours, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger—anything that can blow your candles out! For nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura – and so goodbye...

## ***Shakers Restirred* by John Godber**

**Mel** This job's not bad you know. I used to work in the supermarket, now that was mindless, sat about all day, bored out of your head, dreaming of the weekend. At least when you're here you can have the odd cig and a natter. You see I just want an easy life, no pressures. And I want someone to care for me, and I think I've found that with Steve, I do. Adele thinks she's the only one with problems. Oh God who is she kidding? Talk about skeletons in the cupboard, I've got a kitchen suite full of them. You see there's something I've got to tell Steve; I think it's only fair. You see when I was sixteen I used to go to this tacky bar with my mates. I thought it was neat. It had an awful painting of the Manhattan skyline right around the walls. And a drawing of the Statue of Liberty that was about nine times too big sticking up from behind a skyscraper. The New York Bar ... oh what? ... I262thought it was great. And I met this bloke there. Pete, he was a barman. He was a lot older than me and really good-looking. I thought he was great. We had a brilliant time, a lot of laughs and I was still a virgin. He didn't force me to sleep with him, but I fancied him that much and it seemed the most exciting thing ever, that I couldn't help myself. I wasn't stupid though. I tried to get on the pill but I'd had jaundice when I was a kid, so I ended up with a cap. I'm not kidding, they're a right pain in the neck. I've got a coil now so it's OK. Anyway we went on holiday for two weeks to Scotland, I told my mum that I was going with my mates. I thought I was pregnant when I went but I didn't tell anyone. I was frightened, so I put it to the back of my mind. But it was impossible because I kept seeing pregnant women and mothers with pushchairs and tiny clothes on hangers and babies in magazines. So I went into the chemist and searched amongst the Durex for a DIY testing kit. Back in the camp site toilets I weed all over my hands trying to get it in the test tube. Why do they make them so small? Two hours later the change in colour and the sickness in my stomach said everything. I didn't really have time to think about it. I asked for an abortion. I mean neither me or Pete wanted to have this thing that would tie us down for ever ... It's a big responsibility. And what would my mum have said or my mates on the YTS? And what about the rest of our lives? I was scared as well, how could I look after a kid? I only had two GCSEs. I begged them to let me have it done up there in Scotland, so no one would know. They put me in this hospital by the sea. There were about eight of us in the ward. All the others had fluffy slippers and dressing gowns and orange juice by their beds. I had to make do with a hospital nightie, my stocking feet and a baggy combat jumper I'd taken camping with me. It's soon done, you bleed a lot and feel depressed, but it is a relief as well. Sometimes I think about it,263what it would be like now. It upset me. I want to tell people, talk about it, but I can't. The thing is should I tell Steve? We want to get married and I know this time it's right. He's got a good job, he's a roadie with a rock band, we might even be able to buy a house. I want to tell him because I want to be honest. But it can stop you having kids altogether can't it? I'm frightened that if he knows he'll leave me. No, I think I'll keep it a secret between me and you. Don't tell anyone, will you?

## ***The River* by Jez Butterworth**

**The Man** I didn't even feel it flip. I didn't feel it leave my hands. But it must have found its last gram of life because all I felt was a shadow over the inside of my pink eyelids, and all I heard was a splash. It was gone. It was back. In the river. Alive. Swimming. Still alive. A miracle. And I crawled down the bank and I searched the water, deep into the water but all I could see down there was a small, seven-year-old boy gazing up at me, looking me straight in the eye, looking absolutely terrified. And I climbed up the bank and I sat in the bracken, alone, exhausted, and my uncle came up the bank and asked me what was wrong and... I cried. I don't know why. It wasn't because I lost my fish. It was because I had seen something I never knew was there. A force. A spirit. I'd felt it buckle and shudder in my seven-year-old hands. And it thrilled me. And it scared the life out of me. Who knows why I was crying. It was all I could think to do. But I never, ever, ever forgot that feeling. And I try to describe it. But you can't. You can't describe it. There are no words. But I was there. And I felt it. (Beat) My uncle said chin up. There's always tomorrow. You'll meet it again. Another day. And we came back here, and had sausages. And the next day I went back to the river, and I took off my clothes and I dived in the water, and I looked for the fish, and I couldn't find it, but when I surfaced, I was holding something. Something else.

## ***Punk Rock* by Simon Stephens**

**Chadwick** Human beings are pathetic. Everything human beings do finishes up bad in the end. Everything good human beings ever make is built on something monstrous. Nothing lasts. We certainly won't. We could have made something really extraordinary and we won't. We've been around one hundred thousand years. We'll have died out before the next two hundred. You know what we've got to look forward to? You know what will define the next two hundred years? Religions will become brutalised; crime rates will become hysterical; everybody will become addicted to internet sex; suicide will become fashionable; there'll be famine; there'll be floods; there'll be fires in the major cities of the Western world. Our education systems will become battered. Our health services unsustainable; our police forces unmanageable; our governments corrupt. There'll be open brutality in the streets; there'll be nuclear war; massive depletion of resources on every level; insanely increasing third-world population. It's happening already. It's happening now. Thousands die every summer from floods in the Indian monsoon season. Africans from Senegal wash up on the beaches of the Mediterranean and get looked after by guilty liberal holidaymakers. Somalians wait in hostels in Malta or prison islands north of Australia. Hundreds die of heat or fire every year in Paris. Or California. Or Athens. The oceans will rise. The cities will flood. The power stations will flood. Airports will flood. Species will vanish for ever. Including ours. So if you think I'm worried by you calling me names, Bennet, you little, little boy, you are fucking kidding yourself.

## ***The History Boys* by Alan Bennett**

### **Irwin**

The monastic life only comes alive when contemplating its toilet arrangements. Not monks stumbling down the night stairs at three in the morning to sing the first office of the day; not the sound of prayer and praise unceasing sent heavenwards from altar and cell; no, what fires the popular imagination is stuff from the reredorter plopping twenty feet into the drains. God is dead. Shit lives. Wanting toilet paper, or paper of any description, the monks used to wipe their bottoms on scraps of fabric... linen, muslin, patches of tapestry even, which presumably they would rinse and rinse again before eventually discarding them. Some of these rags survive, excavated from the drains into which they were dropped five hundred years ago and more, and here now find themselves exhibited in the abbey museum. The patron saint here, whose bones were buried at Rievaulx, was Aelred. And it is conceivable that one of these ancient arsewipes was actually used by the saint. Which at that time would have made it a relic, something at which credulous pilgrims would come to gaze. But what are these modern-day pilgrims gazing at but these same ancient rags, hallowed not by saintly usage, it's true, but by time... and time alone? They are old and they have survived. And there is an increment even in excrement, so sanitised by the years and sanctified, too, they have become relics in their own right... and more pilgrims come now to see them and these other remains than ever came in the age of faith. We are differently credulous and our cults are not the same but saner, wiser, more rational...

(He stumbles again.)

I think not. Sorry.

## **Mosquitoes by Lucy Kirkwood**

**The Bosen** There are five ways for the world to end. Spoiler alert. One. The Big Crunch. As you know, the universe is expanding but – sorry am I going too fast? Fine, in case you didn't know: the universe is expanding (why didn't you know that? seriously, read a book some time) but anyway let's say that the elastic snaps the worm turns and eventually it begins to *contract*, getting smaller hotter denser, a double decker wrapper in the microwave, till it's basically just a, just a very compact inferno, so that's one, okay, two, the Big Freeze, does what it says on the, Heat Death, everything becomes same temperature, the universe is now uniformly cold, dead and empty and nothing interesting ever happens again, number three, the Big Change, dark energy keeps growing, pulling the universe apart, till one day a bubble of lower energy shows up, expands at the speed of light, rewriting the rules of chemistry and destroying humans, planets, stars, et cetera, in at number four, if the amount of dark energy increases too fast we might get a Big Rip, which is, you know, pretty much what it, have you seen *Star Trek*? kind of like that, atoms shatter and the Earth (understandably) explodes, and by the way no offence, no offence, but it's unlikely that any of you are able to understand any of this in except in the most rudimentary terms. Most of you probably don't even know whether any of this is true or not (He pauses. Shields his eyes, scrutinising the front few rows, double-checking) .yeah. No. That's okay. That's okay. You're doing your best, and the thing is, it *feels* true doesn't it? The idea that all of this will end in a catastrophe over which we have no power, that's a given, that is a familiar and strangely comforting fact, be it fire, ice, cosmic menopause, atomic obliteration, or contagion perhaps, a virus spreading too fast for us to control, an ice floe melting too quickly, a shortage of food, a war over water, a bad day on the golf course for a sociopath with access to the nuclear codes, or for example, for example number five, one day you're at home cooking this soup I mean not from scratch or anything but you know you got that carton open so you're feeling pretty fucking pleased with yourself and as it starts to bubble you become aware your blood has been replaced by battery acid and this is, yeah it's a disturbing thought but it's a familiar one, you've had this thought before, many times actually but you've always been able to receive it with a kind of like a healthy skepticism, the way you think about crop circles or the charitable gestures of millionaires and but what's different today is that you can no longer tell the difference between this piece of information and any other piece of information, it arrives in your brain in the same font as any other *fact*: that is a toaster the kettle is metal you live in Geneva taekwondo is an Olympic sport angelica houston speaks fluent French the human immunodeficiency virus cannot be spread by mosquitoes anthrax is a disease aeschynite is a mineral your heart is a pump for battery acid you are cooking soup for your son your son is eight your son is upstairs in bed with a cold and that's when you realise somehow the seal of your body has *broken* and this acid this acid is no longer contained by your skin veins arteries flesh it's leaching through the pads of your fingers it's in your saliva the moisture in your eyes sweat on your back neck a wetness a taste in your burning corroding contaminating everything you black smears on the spoon on the bowl you've put on a tray to take to your son who is eight who is upstairs in bed with a cold with a temperature with a fever caused by a rot and suddenly you understand you are the rot you are the disease and then there is a sound like a click like the click of a catch of suitcase and there is relief there is relief because there is order now, whatever else, there is order and so you turn off the gas and leaving your coat and your wallet and your mobile phone behind you, you walk out of the



## ***Orestes: Blood and Light* by Helen Edmundson**

**Orestes** The thought that I have caused you pain is almost impossible for me to bear, and yet I must risk hurting you further now for I cannot let you go without begging you to listen to what I have to say and asking that you try to understand me. Do you think this was easy for me? An easy decision – to kill my mother? You think my wits are shaken now with guilt, but they were shaken first by the long, tortured days which followed when I learnt what she had done. Long days of questioning and turmoil. I was so far away, separate, no family to ask advice of – Menelaos, you. I forced myself to think dispassionately, to see it from every side: who did I owe greatest allegiance to – my father or my mother? My father who sowed the seed, began me, or my mother who sheltered me inside her as I grew? My father then, I thought. Then there was the fact of her adultery: whatever grievance she had against my father, she should not have debased herself and him by taking another man into her bed, opening herself to another man, an impostor, a lesser man, and when my father had gone to war to fight for all our state. That Aigisthos had to die was clear to me. But what of her? What of her? You say my actions have undermined our civilisation, but I thought of civilisation, of what was best for our people. I thought, the only true deterrent is death. Another woman, here in the city, now, who thought of murdering her husband must know that she would pay with her life. Nothing less. Even then I lost my nerve, swayed my own mind. For ten days I was going to spare her, to stay away and not come back, abandon my sister, deny my name. But the thought of my father raked my soul. My father, my father, killed in cold blood, betrayed, disposed of. And his breath was in my mouth and his tears were in my eyes and I knew that he would find no peace until he was avenged. The Gods. Apollo. I ran to Apollo's temple. The Gods, the Gods, my only hope. I fell on my knees and I begged for his help as though I were begging for my life, because I was. And He came to me, He spoke to me. The release of it. The hot, seeping release of it. The decision was His, the orders were His: kill her and Aigisthos too. Kill them. Avenge your father. I came here, and I did it. The right thing. And it was well done. For my God and for us all. It was well done.