

“Hell is Other Britons” by Tom Whyman

Straight from the get-go, Whyman declares his position in his title, “Hell is Other Britons”; this establishes not only that he believes Brexit is a success of foolhardy Englishmen, but also his distinct, blunt style.

He then begins his story with a ostensibly irrelevant and light anecdote of his younger life in “a pleasant town with a pretty center,” which contrasts strongly against his perceptions of a “suburban ugliness.” He paints both sides of the picture, however, without an ounce of diffidence. This contrast gives a more lively image of his hometown, the image of a dainty suburban town complemented by darker insider information.

The story, however, seems to become an angry rant; it is a “hell ... that you can never leave,” one that infects you with a torpor that forbids change and progress; there exists “nihilism” and “demons crawling.” As Ella wrote about Cohen’s “doomsday” view of future violence, the same appears to be the case in Whyman’s employment of angry expletives.

It’s not.

There’s a new clarity as Whyman begins to describe Brexit in detail. Suddenly, albeit briefly, the interest switches outside himself to the trauma of Cox’s death — this is a move from narcissistic superficiality to a national crisis, a dramatic change in perspective. He also acknowledges that he was in a state of selfish complacency until this point, which avers his negative tone and allows him to transition to a more positive one.

Then, a sense of finality arrives as the editorial comes full circle and his conviction is so beautifully justified when he realizes: the Brexit vote was not just a mindless, irrelevant task; no, “this was a referendum on Alresfordism.” “Alresfordism” is Whyman’s name for the unassuming jail of his hometown Alresford; it suddenly dawned on him that it suddenly had become the microcosm of a portentous future Britain.

Such a realization uses a “framing device” — the repetition of a theme in the beginning and end, hence coming full circle — and a powerful analogy — the symbol of Alresford’s troubles superimposed onto Britain.

By now, pathos plays in with a hidden whisper, a pleading to reverse this decision not for his country so much as for his life. A noble, relatable cause, not the seemingly unfounded anger.

Even so, he doesn’t reach any “charitable motive” such as Emily described in Friedman’s writing; no, he maintains his tone, concluding with a string of comical, derogatory terms, wishing for a “demented, throbbing, fecund nature to overrun this ... stupidity [they] set for ourselves.”

This is about another article condemning Brexit, perhaps limiting the spectrum of the content I am analyzing, but I thought its views and stylistic choices were too good to pass up.

“You Break It, You Own It” by Thomas L. Friedman

In an example of the “frying pan to the fire” analogy, Friedman commences with antithesis to emphasize the fact that Brexit “is not the end of the world” — it is just on the way there. This creates a mood of a broken promise: the hopeful possibility of a fresh, non-accusatory view on Brexit, broken almost immediately by the clarification that it is, indeed, to follow this common path.

And thus there is an almost playful tone Friedman broadcasts, one meant to provoke the reader. There is no obvious happiness, but the dreariness could disappear, hence hooking the reader throughout Friedman’s work.

Friedman then throws some complimentary phrases at England, commenting on its past as “a major European power, a longtime defender of liberal democracy, pluralism and free markets”; but this thought is not emphasized. Rather, it is tossed to the side, bundled together tightly and dryly with asyndeton so the next phrase, well-articulated and sprinkled with a preponderance of negativity, is the one to resonate with the reader: “cynical” politicians who “exploit” the “fears” of the commoners. Once again, he uses juxtaposition of phrases from better to worse to more effectively seed a weighty understanding.

Next, the reader is given the analogy of a dog chasing a car, a euphemism of the previous hypothetical situation where the referendum actually follows through, the dog being the unassuming, democratic, anonymous, ignorant mass of citizens seeking to catch the before unreachable power to decide Britain’s future.

But the hypothetical becomes truth. The unreachable is achieved. The “leave” vote wins the referendum. Now what? The people have no idea what to do.

Logos in this simplified model allows Friedman to discuss his reasoning — that Brexit is rash and very unprepared. To complete the persuasive model, he alludes to Trump’s close-minded wall and the moronic ability of unrealistic modern citizens who “think that life can just imitate Twitter — that there are simple answers to hard questions” to generate angry pathos, and he uses the words of a global consulting business leader and an executive director at a prestigious university to back up his claim with ethos.

But just when the reader is thoroughly convinced of Friedman’s implied apocalypse-by-stupidity, Friedman suddenly concludes with a startling change of tone, one that brings him hope for “Regrexit” and for “Americans [to] dump Trump” and again shows the unpredictable variability he uses to manipulate the reader’s feelings.

This final thought effectively cheers up the reader. Isn’t it wonderful to know that Brexit might not be the end of the world?

“Choosing Leaders: Clueless or Crazy” by David Brooks

The title achieves three feats — and all through its helper alliteration. Alliteration is there to draw attention, advertising the article to prospective readers. Alliteration is there to create rhythm, a system of subtle sameness, to show that a leader either “clueless or crazy” will have similar, severe results. And alliteration is there to declare directly the dilemma of this dichotomy, succinctly and stridently.

But this title also attacks leaders without distinction. Namely, political leaders. Arguably the most powerful people in the world. Therefore, such a claim that all leaders are “clueless or crazy” seems far-fetched, empty, and quite opinionated. So Brooks quickly establishes his view (the title and a quick introductory paragraph) and uses examples for much of the remaining article (the subsequent fourteen paragraphs) in order to quell any doubts — in other words, he drops his political hot-potato claim and scurries away to drag out his evidence before anyone can blame him.

After his highly accusatory exposition, Brooks leads into a very straightforward, old-school method: repetitive case studies. Politicians are reduced a few paragraphs as he states the fallacies in a cool manner while maintaining his tone with a select few vocabulary sprinkled regularly throughout: Corbyn is the “incompetent, inexperienced outsider,” Cameron a figure of “calm cluelessness,” and Trump an “overflowing soufflé of crazy incompetence,” among others.

In addition to purely political content, much of the article also consists of little blurbs and “fun facts” about the politicians, what might be the prosaic equivalents of theatrical asides. Although they seem nothing more than rumors and popular news — the stories including a barbeque by Boris Johnson that was “boozy, shambolic, disorganized, and ill-disciplined” and “how an email from [Gove’s wife] to [Gove] got leaked to the press” — they definitely are critical pieces of evidence, adding to the ridicule that Brooks imposes on the politicians. Furthermore, they are humorous and relatively unknown, and a little gossip-y content is always interesting to read.

All in all, what I believe Brooks did best was write with aplomb, even with a politically-loaded and highly critical stance. He does not waffle, does not dither, does not waver when he outrightly accuses top leaders from two great nations. No, he holds the angry, accusatory stance of a great number of Americans and Britons alike, as well as the political know-how and literary expertise to wind it up in a passionate editorial that so many of us can agree upon.