

Good evening, everybody...

And thank you for coming...

Thank you, above all..., Theresa...: I know the timing - in the middle of a general election... - is not ideal...

Thank you on behalf of the College...

And thank you on behalf of the University...: *your* university...

What an extraordinary public servant you are...

And have long been...

And will surely long remain...

I hope, too, that you will soon be back here...

When things are calmer, maybe...

Assuming, that is, that they ever are...

Brasenose was, alas, not your college.

That was St. Hugh's...

But it is none the less {Brasenose is} a *great* college...

So great indeed... that the *Notable Alumni* page... on its website... doesn't even feel it necessary to mention that *William Golding, writer...* was also something else...: winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature...

So great that my fellow friend - our friend... - David Cameron, is merely... *Prime Minister of the United Kingdom...*, rather than *Prime Minister of the United Kingdom...* and *Architect...* - brackets... *accidental...* - of *Brexit...*

BBC now stands for not only what you think but also for Brexit, Brasenose, Cameron!

You know, it wasn't a race - really not... - but I still can't quite believe that the Amersi Foundation Lecture Theatre got there first...with the if's but's and when's still colouring the Brexit tapestry!

Well done, John - John Bowers... our Principal and well done, Brasenose... and the whole Lecture Theatre team..., particularly Julia and of course our own Frankie! Thank you!

APPLAUSE

Brasenose, of course, was one of the five first all-male colleges to deign..., or dare..., to admit women...

That was back in 1974... - coincidentally, Theresa, or perhaps..., when one thinks about it..., *not* so very coincidentally..., the year that you came up.

It was a step - no...: a broad and long overdue, stride forward... - of which William Golding must have strongly approved...he is known to have said and I quote:

{*William Golding, Brasenose Alumnus*}: "I think women are foolish to pretend they are equal to men. They are far superior and always have been."

And most men of reason would not disagree...? Although, today some might.....!

Brasenose was founded in 1509 by two men...: a bishop... and..., pleasingly both for me and John, our Principal..., a barrister..., the first layman ever to found an Oxford college...

1509 was an interesting year...:

- Henry the Eighth ascended the throne...
- Catherine of Aragon married him...
- John Calvin was born...
- And Erasmus - some might think *appropriately*... - wrote *In Praise of Folly*...

It was also over 500 years ago...

Education..., scholarship and its dissemination..., the pursuit of knowledge and understanding..., the realisation of human potential..., the spread of opportunity and ideas..., and collaboration..., teamwork...

As you - all of you... - know..., these are things that are close to my heart...

And these are the things this place... - the *Nose*... - has been doing, supremely well..., for half a *millennium*...

And shows every sign of continuing to do - but even better... - for another...

Our Foundation feels proud to have become part of its life and work..., its history..., its very fabric...

But we also feel humbled...

You begin by learning how to make money...; then, how to hang on to it...; and then, how to give it away...

Thank you, Brasenose, for being..., at one and the same time..., the perfect tutor... *and* the perfect cause...

Of course, we feel humbled, more than anything..., by the thought that we now..., so to speak..., share a billboard... with the legendary **William Stallybrass**...

Some of you will know of Stallybrass but not most..., so, those who do, please indulge me for a moment or two, while I explain...

One of the great legal minds of his day..., and another barrister..., the extremely British William Teulon Swan Stallybrass... - who was actually christened not Stallybrass... but... Sonnenschein... but was nicknamed *Sonnners* to the end...

Sonnners became a towering Oxford figure...: Principal of Brasenose for over ten years...; champion if not creator of its then decidedly, even excessively..., hearty culture...; University Vice-Chancellor...; and very unlike John, a tyrant, feared by all...

His was a great life...

His death, though..., in a grisly accident..., and, I'm afraid, whose anniversary was for years toasted in champagne by the college fellows... - did not honour him...but contains lessons for us all...

And, it must be said, for any referendum-inclined prime ministers out there, in particular...{note}

If you're almost blind, as {former principal Stallybrass} was...; and on a rapidly moving train, as *he* was...; and it's after dinner, as it was...; think twice before you open any doors...: think twice and then... take double care...

Doors don't always lead where you think...

Poor Stallybrass's funeral service was conducted by the new college chaplain, Leslie Styler..., who had... been appointed in mistake... for another candidate...

This was his brother..., *Geoffrey Styler*..., who tragically had to go to Cambridge... and become Dean of Corpus... instead...

Actually, not so tragically from my perspective: I hedged my bets and have close ties to Corpus, too...

Stallybrass's blindness luckily contributed to the swap as our Styler was a popular figure who stayed for decades..., becoming a bit of an institution himself...: so much so that **Jeffrey Archer**..., another Brasenose alumnus..., and we trust future Nobel laureate..., gave him a walk-on part in his novel..., *Only Time will Tell*...

Only Time will Tell...: a proverbial phrase dating back, as it happens, to the early 1500s: and, who knows, perhaps to 1509 and the bishop, the barrister and the beginnings of Brasenose...

Only Time will Tell...: an everyday kind of a saying... but..., in a context such as this..., and at a time such as ours... - a time that will surely fascinate future generations... - an expression that gives pause for thought...

Because the truth..., as often as not..., is that time *doesn't* actually tell...

Or not very accurately...

Or with much consistency...

Or at least not when by *time...*, we mean *posterity...*

And by *tell...*, we mean *judge...*

Take our friend, Henry the Eighth...:

The plain truth is, that he was a most intolerable ruffian, a disgrace to human nature, and a blot of blood and grease upon the History of England.

This is not I saying but Charles Dickens...

Today, though historians such as Alison Weir recognise that his reign contributed an extraordinary legacy - modern Britain. Henry began his reign in a mediaeval kingdom; he ended it in what was effectively a modern state. We are still living in the England of Henry VIII.

Now to a confession....

A few nights ago, I had a dream...

A dream about Oxford, the city of dreaming spires, itself... but an Oxford half a century after Brexit... and an Oxford subtly changed...

As I often do in dreams..., I began in the air..., flying balletically between the city's landmarks...: from the Oxford..., now the *Brussels...*, Martyrs Memorial... in Saint Giles...; to The Eagle and Child up the road, now The Boris and Jacob..., with its famous *Old Etonian frontbencher, honoured by the elegantly elongated pub sign...*; and then to the one-man-and-his-dog *Cummings Must Fall* encampment outside Oriel...ala Cecil Rhodes style.....

I finally came down to earth outside All Souls..., as a strange yet familiar figure emerged..., in a velvet-collared tan overcoat... and fruitcake-flecked tie..., puffing heavily on a Union Jack cigarette...a figure whom somehow... - by some mystery... - I knew to be the Regius Professor of Brexit...

Then it was on past the Radcliffe Camera..., now the Faculty of Brexit...; through sea upon measureless sea of tourists... and into the Bodleian..., now the *Brexit*, Library...; past the Sheldonian Theatre..., now the Graduate School of Brexit Studies...; and on to Blackwell's bookshop..., miraculously still with its apostrophe...

There, in the *sunless caverns* of its Brexit wing..., I found myself leafing through the *Greater Brexit Dictionary...*: 157 volumes... but still not quite at the end of the letter "N"...

Nobody voted to be poorer was there... and *No Deal...* and *Northern Ireland...* but *Norway...* - dear, neglected *Norway...* - was still to have its moment in the sun...

So, this is how it all finishes..., I said to myself...: an all-conquering..., all-consuming..., academic hydra...; a fiendishly tricky academic discipline..., with which to mould and torture vulnerable young minds...; a whole new academic industry, giving employment to thousands...

Oh dear, I thought.

It's the Schleswig-Holstein question Mark Two...

And I remembered the words of Lord Palmerston...:

"The Schleswig-Holstein question is so complicated, only three men in Europe have ever understood it. One was Prince Albert who is dead. The second was a German professor who became mad. I am the third and I have forgotten all about it."

No, history doesn't repeat itself...

But yes, it sure does *rhyme*...

With that, I jumped awake...

And then I thought something else...

When future generations of dons and of students take their chewed pens and freshly sharpened scalpels to our time..., tell your story and mine..., puzzle over the people and wonder over the dramas of Brexit... - the political drama, the cultural drama, the human drama... - one of the places they will do so... is none other than... the Amersi Foundation Lecture Theatre...

I believe I am therefore entitled to give those generations a message...:

- When you study us, do so with your hearts, as well as your heads... and note that there was reason as well as passion... and plain good sense... and dreams of a better..., more generous..., more unified..., and, in every sense, more democratic..., world... on *all* sides of the Brexit argument... before *and* during *and* after... the referendum...; and that there are reasons to admire..., as well as pity or condemn us...
- **Before you toast our passing in champagne..., remember that vision without action is a daydream and action without vision, a nightmare...;**
- And that we were there and you were not...; and that choosing between Boris and Brussels..., sovereignty and safety..., autonomy and affluence..., Brexit, No Brexit and Brino... was more difficult than it might look to you now...

- And that far from being deranged..., we were just earlier versions of you...; which means, in turn, that to understand us - or any people of the past..., or indeed of the present... - and, above all, to avoid falling into the trap of condescension..., or arrogance..., or inhumanity..., you need first to understand a thing or two about yourselves...

My friends, if you want to plant for a season..., you plant rice...

If you want to plant for the future..., you plant trees...

I hope and believe that the Amersi foundation Lecture Theatre is an orchard..., within a greater orchard..., within an even greater orchard..., and that all three of them... will bear fruit for many, many years to come...

Thank you, all of you, so very, very much... for being here with us to celebrate its first season...

Let's have a wonderful evening.

Mohamed Amersi
Brasenose College, Oxford
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