

## EXEMPLES DE TEXTES PROPOSÉS à l'oral d'anglais concours A BCPST session 2017

**Scientists are armed with the truth. But it won't win them the culture war,** by Anne Perkins, The Guardian, Sunday 23, April 2017

The scientist as hero is familiar enough. What's less familiar is scientists demonstrating with placards and banners declaring "Science improves decisions" and other inflammatory assertions, such as "Science belongs to no country because knowledge belongs to humanity". "Evidence not arrogance," they demanded. But you don't have to be anti-science to see that there is an inevitability about its difficult relationship with politics. It is the point where knowledge and belief collide, which is why it is now the crucible of the culture wars. Scientists can't but be the villains of the Brexit narrative. They are highly educated in the ultimate transferrable skills. They are the quintessential citizens of the world, people who keep their passports in their back pockets, and often work not just in towns where they were not born but in countries their parents never imagined visiting. They might dream of a Nobel prize, but they may also have an eye on a job in Silicon Valley.

More challenging than their lifestyles, however, is their insistence on the sanctity of evidence and the importance of making decisions based on established fact. Expert-deniers trade on the natural resistance to uncomfortable truth by asserting that the truth is a negotiable quality. Donald Trump thinks windfarms are bad for your health, and low-energy lightbulbs give you cancer. He has linked childhood immunisation with autism. Although he tweeted yesterday that "rigorous science is critical to my administration", he has yet to appoint a scientific policy adviser. In one way, this is an argument that was already well rehearsed when Pope Paul V took on Galileo 400 years ago. Science and belief have always rubbed up against each other. They find compromise positions. Popes die. In the end, science emerges victorious.

Yet there are differences. Trump is not arguing from some alternative, God-centred perspective. He just doesn't like facts that contradict what he wants to say. The expert-deniers rest their case on experts sometimes being wrong. They refuse to recognise that to know something properly, it must be capable of being proved wrong. If it is, that in fact constitutes the advancement of knowledge.

There is another reason science is at the heart of this argument. Science is good when it makes life longer, easier, richer and more comfortable and convenient. It is a harder sell when it points to unacceptable realities. It's disagreeable to stop smoking or to drink less alcohol or to avoid sugary drinks. The people who make cigarettes, booze and fizzy drinks are often unscrupulous in defence of their products and their profits. Accepting that our way of life threatens the sustainability of the planet was never going to be easy. And there are millions of voters who believe Donald Trump can preserve their world: a world that depends on coal and cars.

There was plenty to admire about the scientists' protest. But it's increasingly clear that their greatest skill – unearthing the truth – is not enough to win a culture war.

## **Anxious Indians turn to astrologers for insight into future under Trump** *The Washington Post*, February 2, 2017

Astrologer Vinod Shastri practices next to the ancient observatory here, where the astronomers of the maharaja once monitored the heavens. Normally, customers coming to Shastri's tiny office — a fading sign over the door reads “Astrological Council & Research Institute” — give a handful of rupees in exchange for his help predicting auspicious times for marriage, charting a career path or healing a broken heart. But in the past six months, a rhetorically pugilistic, orange-haired politician from another continent has loomed large in their catalogue of worries.

It began with a dark-suited hotelier from Mumbai who jetted in for a day with one question: Would Donald Trump win the presidency? Shastri now fields up to five calls a day from clients wanting to know what the stars and planets have to say about the world's uncertain, post-fact future. Many are scared, he said. “When I told them that he will win, their response was that America will be destroyed and that he can do anything,” Shastri said.

Now clients are wondering “how his relationships will affect Indian leaders, how he will do for India, his relationship with U.K. [and] the effect he will have on Indian-U.S. business relations.” Indians have long embraced astrology, the practice — or, as many would say, pseudo-science — of divining the future by the movement of the celestial bodies. Families pairing up their daughters and sons for marriage consult star charts before the deal is sealed, and businesses hold launch dates on auspicious days and times.

Indian politicians are particularly superstitious, known to consult their pet astrologers on cabinet shake-ups and big speeches. Vaibhav Magon, 25, the founder of Askmonk, an astrology application for mobile phones, says his business has seen a “huge spike” in Trump-related queries to its in-house astrologers in recent weeks — mostly from investors and would-be immigrants worried about visas. “People are uncertain about the future, and they're looking for astrologers to guide them or come up with a solution,” he said. It is not surprising that his Indian clientele would turn to astrology during tumultuous times, he said. “Astrology is inherent within us, whether it's taking a decision to get married or starting up a business.”

Agarwal has been working in the United States on a temporary H-1B visa, a program for highly skilled foreign workers that the White House has targeted for reform, and was worried that the program might be modified or changed. “People in my age group want to know if they're in a position to rise in their careers and what the future looks like. That's what I want to know,” Agarwal said. “Is he going to do something that's going to put my future in the line of fire? If so, I'd rather stay back [in India] and build something here.”

The astrologers all agreed that prospects for the international community in the United States do not look good and warned him to watch Trump's new policies carefully. Nevertheless, Agarwal says, he decided to go back to Chicago — for now.

## **Chinese university to open in Oxford despite ideological crackdown at home** *The Guardian*. April. 6, 2017

One of China's top universities is preparing to open a campus at the heart of British academic life, just months after President Xi Jinping called for Chinese universities to be transformed into strongholds of Communist party rule. Peking University, an elite Beijing institution where Mao Zedong once worked as a librarian, will open a branch of its HSBC Business School in Oxford early next year, the respected financial magazine Caixin reported on Thursday.

The school is setting up camp in Foxcombe Hall which it recently purchased for a reported £8.8m. The 19th century manor was home to the eighth earl of Berkeley. Peking University said courses at its Oxford campus, which is not connected to the University of Oxford, would focus on "professional knowledge of China's economy, financial market and corporate management". Wen Hai, its dean, said Peking University had beaten off competition from three rivals, including an unnamed Oxford college, by offering a "very tempting price" that left the sellers "little room to say 'no'".

Speaking to Caixin, Wen said the university had been able to do so thanks to its close ties to China's Communist party. Those connections allowed it to "to expedite the transfer of money transfer needed for the acquisition" despite tight capital controls imposed by Beijing in an attempt to stop firms and citizens shifting large sums of money overseas. Last summer's vote to leave the EU, which has seen the pound plummet against the Chinese yuan, will also have helped the buyers.

Caixin said the university's decision to expand into the "city of dreaming spires" came as Beijing pondered ambitious plans to boost the global standing of China's top universities. Peking University, currently ranked the world's 29th best university, had been handed billions of yuan by the government to "improve its research facilities and recruit teaching staff from top universities abroad to boost its international profile", it said.

Prestigious British schools have set their sights on mainland China over the last 15 years with public schools including Harrow, Dulwich College and Wellington all opening spin-offs. British universities have also made moves into the mainland, where it is now possible to study at campuses operated by the University of Nottingham and the University of Liverpool.

Peking University described its Oxford campus, designed for students from both Europe and China as "a bold step" and "an important milestone for the development of China's higher education, given its inferior position globally over the past century".

The acquisition comes a few months after President Xi, whom liberal scholars accuse of presiding over a severe crackdown on freedom of expression, declared Chinese universities should be party "strongholds". Echoing a 1932 speech by Joseph Stalin, Xi called teachers "engineers of the human soul" whose "sacred mission" was to help students "improve in ideological quality [and] political awareness".

Mainland China now has two universities in the world's top 40, according to the Times Higher Education rankings. Even so, senior Communist party leaders have looked abroad to educate their offspring.

## **How to get ahead in Silicon Valley: hide being a woman, says male 'expert', *The Guardian*, September 29 2016**

A Wall Street Journal article encouraging women in technology to “create an online presence that obscures their gender” has drawn expressions of outrage and shocked disbelief from the community it purports to advise. Writing for a regular column dubbed “The Experts”, venture capitalist John Greathouse suggested that women should escape the gender bias that pervades the tech industry by pretending not to be women. “A gender-neutral persona allows women to access opportunities that might otherwise be closed to them,” he wrote. “In your LinkedIn profile, Twitter account, email address and online correspondence use your initials (or a unisex name) and eliminate photos.”

The tech industry is a notoriously hostile environment for women workers. Women are greatly outnumbered at most major tech companies, and a 2016 survey found that 60% of women working in Silicon Valley had experienced sexual harassment. A 2015 report on Silicon Valley found that men were earning 61% more than their female counterparts.

Greathouse largely ascribes such disparities to unconscious bias rather than intentional discrimination. “I happen to believe that this bias is at least somewhat the result of unconscious factors,” he wrote. “Much like a book, people cannot avoid judging their fellow humans by their ‘cover’.” Greathouse bolstered his case for women to hide their gender by pointing to the “blind auditions” used by orchestras, which helped professional orchestras transform from being 95% male in the 1970s to much more equal. Of course, under the orchestra system, both men and women screen their identities during auditions.

The idea has gained traction in the tech industry, where some startups are attempting to transform the hiring process by anonymizing candidates. Interviewing.io, for example, is a platform that allows tech companies to conduct technical interviews through an entirely anonymous system. The program includes voice masking technology that obscures a job applicant’s gender and is already being used by companies including Uber, Twitch, and Lyft.

“There’s this axiom in this article that the status quo is working and we just need to do little tweaks,” said Aline Lerner, the founder and CEO of interviewing.io, in response to the Wall Street Journal article. “The real issue is that résumé-based hiring is not working very well. Any kind of hiring that opens up to biases is not working.” Lerner said that using the anonymous interviewing tool helps neutralize those biases by allowing employers to “focus primarily and exclusively on whether that person can write code or not”. She also pointed out that all candidates need to use the tool, not only the women. “In order for anonymity to be viable it has to be full anonymity.”

Greathouse’s article makes the implicit argument that fixing gender bias is the responsibility of women, not men. His calls for gender neutrality interestingly do not apply to men, suggesting that his idea of neutrality is in fact simply male.

Greathouse did not immediately respond to requests for comment. He is a managing partner at Rincon Venture Partners, a venture capital firm that invests

in web-based businesses. According to its website, Rincon has two male managing directors. The firm also lists 12 advisors, 11 of whom are men.

## Wrong division

### The trend of separation in the skies

SEGREGATION on airlines has a long history. Sometimes it is understandable. Carriers' business models depend on them drawing a curtain between those of us stuffed into economy-class seats and our betters who have paid for lie-flat beds. But new forms of segregation are replacing it. This time, though, they are less to do with enshrining differences and more for the benefit of those being segregated. Or so the argument goes.

On 11th January, Ashwani Lohani, the boss of Air India, told *The Hindu* newspaper that the carrier plans to reserve six seats in the front rows of its aeroplanes for women passengers who are travelling alone. As the paper explains:

The move assumes significance, as it comes soon after an on-board incident in Air India's Mumbai-Newark flight late last month where a flyer reportedly groped a woman co-passenger. During the flight, a business class passenger changed his seat to sit next to a female passenger in the economy class and allegedly groped her when she fell asleep.

Separation when travelling feels like a trend. Japan has had female-only carriages on some of its commuter trains for over a decade. Their introduction was a reaction to a record number of women complaining that they had been groped on Tokyo trains. It is not only on planes and trains. Some business hotels, for example, have experimented with women-only floors. Female taxi services can be found in many cities around the world. This is all unfortunate, but understandable. If some women feel vulnerable when travelling alone, they have the right to have that uneasy feeling countered.

Still, it is a conundrum. Segregation might be a short-term solution, but it is no answer if we want to change attitudes in the long term. Much better to mitigate the causes of the problems, rather than simply hive off sections of travellers. Take the Air India case above (the details of which are still far from clear). In a similar situation, solutions might range from placing solo women next to families, to questioning why on earth a man might want to swap a business class seat for one next to a young woman flying on her own.

There is a further issue. The more others are segregated from us, the more we expect similar treatment for our own clans. El Al flights, for example, have been disrupted in recent years as *haredi* (ultra-orthodox) Jews have refused to sit next to women who have been assigned an adjacent seat, as their faith prohibits contact with a non-related female. Planes can get stuck on the runway as the innocent women are pressured (sometimes by employees of the airline, it seems) into swapping seats.

One mooted solution has been to have an area in the cabin set aside on El Al flights for *haredi*. But that is a slippery slope. If everyone got their way, and cut themselves off from those who offended their sensibilities, planes would soon run out of space. Some Asian carriers have now introduced child-free zones where passengers can put distance between themselves and anyone inconsiderate enough not to have grown into a fully functioning human being. In the long term, harmony tends to arise when people are not forcefully segregated.

*The Economist*, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

## Princess Stabs Pop Star? Finally, a Royal Return to Form

Terence Blacker, *The Guardian*, Monday 28 November 2016

At last, in our bewildering world, there is reassuring news. A sinister buffoon may be about to become the most powerful man in the free world, our country may be staggering cluelessly into an uncertain future, [...], but, in one area at least, the old standards are being maintained. Members of the royal family are still behaving like twits. Until this past weekend, some of us may not have known or cared about Princess Beatrice. [...]

Now we know. Princess Beatrice is the daughter of Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York. She has just carved her name in the history books by stabbing the singer Ed Sheeran in the cheek. At a party at the Royal Lodge in Windsor, another pop star, James Blunt, joked that he would like to be knighted. Mock knightings turn out to be quite the thing at royal parties, apparently – it was one of Fergie’s favourite japes – and so Princess Beatrice reached for a ceremonial sword, raised it high over her head, and slashed pop’s ginger man in the face.

At a time when there has been a dearth of royal madcap stories – Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge are decorative but dull, Prince Harry is behaving himself, Prince Charles is mellowing – the “princess stabs pop star” story represents something of a return to form. The British public expect at least some of the royal family to make fools of themselves. It is largely what they are there for. They are court jesters to the nation. [...]

In the mid-1980s, I wrote a book with Willie Donaldson to mark the marriage of Prince Andrew and Fergie. Called *101 Things You Didn’t Know About the Royal Lovebirds*, it was written under the name of Talbot Church, a court correspondent who called himself “the man the royals trust”. It was meant to be a parody of tabloid journalism – prurient, snobbish, ill-informed and, above all, absurd.

The problem, we quickly discovered, was that people, and indeed much of the press, will believe anything about the royals. Among the 101 things revealed was a story that Fergie had once been arrested in a New Orleans brothel, having mistaken it for a hotel. Her Romeo prince was so impervious to pain that on one occasion, during Prince Charles’s mystical phase, he startled his brother by levitating over a lighted gas ring.

The stories were run by the Sun as fact. One anecdote found its way into Kitty Kelley’s biography of Prince Philip. When, years later, Talbot returned to cover the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, the same thing happened. I wrote that the Duke of Edinburgh suffered from a rare condition called “royal Tourette syndrome”, and that three equerries had been given the responsibility of keeping him away from President Obama. The next day, Paul Dacre, editor of the Daily Mail, furiously asked his journalists how they had missed the story.

Fiction blurs effortlessly into fact when it comes to the royal family. They were post-truth long before it became fashionable.

**Doubts About the Promised Bounty of Genetically Modified Crops,** By DANNY HAKIM. OCT. 29, 2016 *The New York Times*

The controversy over genetically modified crops has long focused on largely unsubstantiated fears that they are unsafe to eat. But an extensive examination by *The New York Times* indicates that the debate has missed a more basic problem — genetic modification in the United States and Canada has not accelerated increases in crop yields or led to an overall reduction in the use of chemical pesticides.

The promise of genetic modification was twofold: By making crops immune to the effects of weedkillers and inherently resistant to many pests, they would grow so robustly that they would become indispensable to feeding the world's growing population, while also requiring fewer applications of sprayed pesticides.

Twenty years ago, Europe largely rejected genetic modification at the same time the United States and Canada were embracing it. Comparing results on the two continents, using independent data as well as academic and industry research, shows how the technology has fallen short of the promise.

About 20 years ago, the United States and Canada began introducing genetic modifications in agriculture. Europe did not embrace the technology, yet it achieved increases in yield and decreases in pesticide use on a par with, or even better than, the United States, where genetically modified crops are widely grown.

An analysis by *The Times* using United Nations data showed that the United States and Canada have gained no discernible advantage in yields — food per acre — when measured against Western Europe, a region with comparably modernized agricultural producers like France and Germany. Also, a recent National Academy of Sciences report found that “there was little evidence” that the introduction of genetically modified crops in the United States had led to yield gains beyond those seen in conventional crops.

At the same time, herbicide use has increased in the United States, even as major crops like corn, soybeans and cotton have been converted to modified varieties. And the United States has fallen behind Europe's biggest producer, France, in reducing the overall use of pesticides, which includes both herbicides and insecticides.

One measure, contained in data from the United States Geological Survey, shows the stark difference in the use of pesticides. Since genetically modified crops were introduced in the United States two decades ago for crops like corn, cotton and soybeans, the use of toxins that kill insects and fungi has fallen by a third, but the spraying of herbicides, which are used in much higher volumes, has risen by 21 percent.

By contrast, in France, use of insecticides and fungicides has fallen by a far greater percentage — 65 percent — and herbicide use has decreased as well, by 36 percent.

Fears about the harmful effects of eating G.M. foods have proved to be largely without scientific basis. The potential harm from pesticides, however, has drawn researchers' attention. Pesticides are toxic by design — weaponized versions, like sarin, were developed in Nazi Germany — and have been linked to developmental delays and cancer.

The industry is winning on both ends — because the same companies make and sell both the genetically modified plants and the poisons.

## **I'm a Deliveroo rider. Collective action is the only way we'll get a fair deal**

Callum Cant, *The Guardian*, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017

I started working for Deliveroo in Brighton last summer. At first, it wasn't a bad job, but month by month I noticed my earnings declining. We're paid £4 per drop, with no hourly rate, and I was having to wait longer and longer for each new order. Even though I was getting more efficient and learning how to get around the city faster, I was making a lower hourly rate.

Now it's got so bad that last Saturday I made £12 between midday and 7pm. That's £1.71 an hour. Minus costs such as bike maintenance and phone data, I earned practically nothing for seven hours' work. That's not an unusual story. Average wages have been nosediving for all the couriers. Supposedly "peak" hours can pay less than minimum wage, and some evenings 25-plus couriers hang around at our zone centre, desperate for orders. Deliveroo don't care if we're all waiting around: with no hourly wage our time costs them nothing.

But the lack of work isn't the only problem. After an accident last month I was unable to work for two weeks and had a smashed phone screen. Because Deliveroo gives us no sick pay and no insurance, I had to foot the cost of lost wages and repair myself. All told, one accident ended up costing me over £200. Being a bike courier is a dangerous job, and accidents like this aren't uncommon.

In this context, it's no surprise that we started to get organised. In November, riders started distributing the Rebel Roo, a self-organised bulletin that spread info about strikes and the fight for better wages and conditions by Deliveroo riders. By January, we had set up a first meeting and met with the grassroots Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), who agreed to represent us.

Things escalated quickly from there. The next Saturday, 4 February, there was a spontaneous strike that caused multi-hour delays for deliveries and cut order volume by about 50%. During the strike we held an assembly to come up with demands. First, a higher pay-per-drop rate of £5, to give us a living wage. Second, a hiring freeze, to create more work for the couriers already working for Deliveroo. Third, no victimisation of trade union activists. The IWGB gave Deliveroo an ultimatum: they had two weeks to meet our demands, or we would start a campaign.

Within two weeks Deliveroo wrote to riders confirming they were not taking on any new recruits, but pay stayed the same, and so when the two weeks ran out we began a campaign. Immediately an ITV investigation featuring Brighton riders was released, followed by public meetings, the support of the shadow chancellor John McDonnell and, on Tuesday last week, a mass bike ride protest with Deliveroo riders and supporters coming together to demand a living wage and £5 per drop. Along with a similar campaign by the Industrial Workers of the World in Leeds and Bristol and the strikes last summer in London, we're proving that the only guaranteed way to improve conditions in the so-called "gig economy" is through the organisation and action of the people who work in it.

## Should exercise be compulsory at work?

*BBC News, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017*

The news this week that more than 20 million people in the UK are physically inactive has led to a lot of discussion over how to tackle the problem. But with no easy solution and rates of obesity rising fast has it come to the point that exercise should become part of our working day?

"Exercise in the office isn't a new idea. But it's such a clear win-win - in terms of health, morale and productivity," says Ryan Holmes, the CEO of HootSuite, a social media platform. Holmes makes a passionate case for exercise becoming part of the working day and bosses paying for it. His social media tech company has about 700 employees, and exercise before, during and after working hours is encouraged, in the small on-site gym.

Tech giant Google led the way in office gyms but Holmes doesn't believe a company has to have a gym on site, and says he encouraged staff to exercise even when they were a small start-up. "We made it clear that anyone could block off an hour for exercise during the day, provided it didn't conflict with meetings and they made up the time (by having lunch at their desks, for instance)." And he believes it's more than worth it. "I see employees return from workouts refreshed and better focused on their jobs. Time lost on exercise is made back and more in terms of improved productivity."

The government issued guidelines in 2015 on how promoting a culture that improves the health and wellbeing of employees is "good management and leads to healthy and productive workplaces".

And there is an economic case for promoting exercise at work - healthy staff mean fewer absences due to illness. Each year, more than a million working people in the UK experience a work-related illness. This leads to around 27 million lost working days costing the economy an estimated £13.4bn.

A study at Bristol University showed that employees who can exercise at work "are more productive, happy, efficient and calm". Exercise re-energised staff, improved their concentration and problem-solving and made them feel calmer.

Exercise breaks are a feature of a number of large Japanese companies. In 2010, China reintroduced mandatory exercises twice a day at state-owned companies after a three-year gap. Making exercise compulsory would be seen as a step too far for a country like the UK, but with more and more desk-bound jobs these days, do employers hold the key?

One place to start could be for employers to ban "cake culture" in the office. Prof Nigel Hunt, from the Faculty of Dental Surgery at the Royal College of Surgeons, says the habit of bringing cakes into the office fuels obesity and dental problems. He suggests staff should be rewarded with fruit, nuts or cheese instead.

Another very simple step to help our health in the office is to stand up more. Standing up three hours a day, five days a week for a year, would be the equivalent of "running 10 marathons", according to experts. NHS Choices recommends breaking up long periods of sitting time with "shorter bouts of activity for just one to two minutes". And some people now choose to work standing at higher desks.

# Scientists See Aquaculture in America's Future

Mike O'Sullivan – VOA News – October 02, 2016

LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA — "We must plant the sea and herd its animals," the late ocean researcher Jacques Cousteau said more than 40 years ago, "using the sea as farmers instead of hunters."

Scientists who share the vision of thriving fish farms off the California coast met at workshops this year and last sponsored by the NOAA Sea Grant program.

NOAA, the federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, this year opened federal waters on the U.S. Gulf Coast to aquaculture, and a private commercial venture hopes to build a massive fish farm off San Diego on the Pacific Coast.

Ocean farms must be situated carefully, based on ocean currents, depth and other conditions, and scientists must watch for potential pollutants and disease, said Jerry Schubel, president and CEO of the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, California. Schubel is one of the scientists advocating for aquaculture in federal waters off California. He says fish farmers must only breed native species to maintain the balance of the region's ecology.

Some environmentalists are worried about the impact, and Schubel says that fish farming has been done badly in some places where pollutants have entered the food chain.

"We should start with a couple of farms that are located in the right spots, monitor them very carefully, set high standards, and that would relieve some of the concern that many in the public have," he said.

## Aquaculture booming worldwide

"Populations of wild fish in the oceans today are approximately half or less than half of what they historically were," said Paul Olin of California Sea Grant, based at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography near San Diego. He says the shortfall is being made up through land-based and ocean-based aquaculture, which together account for more than half of all seafood produced for human consumption.

Americans are the world's third largest seafood eaters, after the Chinese and Japanese, and U.S. demand is growing. Yellowtail and striped bass are prime candidates for fish farms in coastal California, as are red drum and cobia on the Gulf Coast. China and other Asian countries are world leaders in aquaculture. Other major producers include Norway and Chile. The United States has lagged, partly because of its productive fisheries, said James Morris of NOAA's National Ocean Service and National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, "but we know that going forward in the future that aquaculture is a solution to the growing demand for seafood," he said.

The commercial venture off San Diego hopes to place 48 underwater cages off the coast, each 11,000 cubic meters. It would eventually harvest 10 million fish a year. Federal officials are evaluating the proposal, which has many hurdles to clear. It's timeline is unclear.

There are fish farms in state waters and several mussel farms in federal waters off the coasts of California and Massachusetts.

## **The immigrant experience, reimagined through art,** Christian Science Monitor, May 11, 2017

As if the process of becoming a US citizen weren't full of enough symbolism, Andrea Birch-Christian was naturalized inside an art museum. "It feels good, it feels happy," Ms. Birch-Christian said after the May 4 ceremony at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art. This month, the ICA hosted its first naturalization ceremony, welcoming 137 immigrants from some 50 countries. The ceremony was done in conjunction with a survey of more than 20 years of work by the American visual artist Nari Ward. Like Birch-Christian, Mr. Ward immigrated to the US from Jamaica, in his case as a 12-year-old.

Birch-Christian and few (if any) of the newcomers had ever heard of Ward. They simply showed up at the location assigned by the Citizenship and Immigration Services. But the swearing-in was a fitting addition to an exhibit meant to challenge notions of what it means to be American, organizers said. "Art museums are important civic spaces for us to learn and connect," museum director Jill Medvedow said during the event, noting that Ward's work "illustrates what it is like for him to be an immigrant from Jamaica."

But Ward's work is more than an expression of his personal journey from Jamaica to New York, where he lives today. At a time when immigration has become a contentious political issue, he's emerged as one of the most visible artists fostering conversations about the topic in ways that go beyond Republican and Democrat talking points.

To be sure, the museum couldn't have anticipated that the survey would become so relevant to the current political discussion. It originated in Miami in November 2015 and has also shown in Philadelphia. But the messages in his work have taken on new significance under the Trump administration. In another sign of Ward's growing cultural influence, he won this year's Vilcek Prize in Fine Arts. It's a \$100,000 award given annually to immigrant artists.

One of the most prominent installations in "Nari Ward: Sun Splashed," which runs through Sept. 4 in Boston, is "We the people." The piece spells out the opening words to the preamble of the US Constitution in shoelaces. It's an arresting image. And it's an installation that epitomizes Ward's style of repurposing everyday objects – most of which he culls from New York City streets – to convey powerful cultural and political messages.

But why shoelaces? Why not string or yarn or rope? When Birch-Christian and her husband, Sandy Christian, walked into Ward's show, they recognized images from their native Jamaica – but weren't sure what to make of the laces. Mr. Christian thought they could reference Jamaicans' penchant for reusing common objects.

Ward's work is loaded with metaphor and dual meaning. That way, he says, viewers will draw their own conclusions. "I'm trying to find those middle spaces," says Ward. "There's always the contrast that creates the conversation."

For him, the shoelaces served as a visual effect to "We the People" and as a vehicle to make the piece collaborative. Ward sought to create individual connections with the powerful phrase. At other installations of the piece, many of the laces were donated by individuals. In Boston, members of the ICA's teen group helped assemble the piece; youth groups at other museums have also been involved with its installation.

## **Government is completely unprepared for the coming robot takeover, MPs warn,** *Andrew Griffin, Wednesday 12 October 2016, The Independent Tech*

The government is unprepared for the fundamental changes to our lives that robots will bring, according to MPs. There is no strategy for developing the new kinds of skills that workers will need after automation and artificial intelligence takes over their lives, according to a new report from the Science and Technology Committee.

Technological advances like driverless cars and supercomputers are turning science fiction into real life, the report warns. But the government is doing very little to prepare for that future, MPs have said. The report urges the government to set up a commission that would stop artificial intelligence from destroying our lives rather than enriching it. The senior MPs did point to the various good that is coming from AI – through self-driving cars and computers that can help diagnose diseases. But it pointed to the huge dangers, too – including the potential bias of computer systems, like when the Google Photo app labelled black people as gorillas. Tania Mathias, acting chairwoman of the committee, warned: "Science fiction is slowly becoming science fact, and robotics and AI look destined to play an increasing role in our lives over the coming decades.

"It is too soon to set down sector-wide regulations for this nascent field but it is vital that careful scrutiny of the ethical, legal and societal ramifications of artificially intelligent systems begins now." The report said that the tech industry had been taking the lead in thinking about how AI might shape – and endanger – our lives. It praised the work done by various companies in setting up ways of exploring the future of robotics and how it might be harnessed. But it said that the government hasn't done enough to prepare for those same problems. Dr Mathias said: "Government leadership in the fields of robotics and AI has been lacking. Some major technology companies - including Google and Amazon - have recently come together to form the partnership on AI.

"While it is encouraging that the sector is thinking about the risks and benefits of AI, this does not absolve the Government of its responsibilities. It should establish a commission on artificial intelligence to identify principles for governing the development and application of AI, and to foster public debate. "Concerns about machines taking jobs and eliminating the need for human labour have persisted for centuries. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that we will see AI technology creating new jobs over the coming decades while at the same time displacing others. "Since we cannot yet foresee exactly how these changes will play out, we must respond with a readiness to reskill and upskill.

"This requires a commitment by the Government to ensure that our education and training systems are flexible, so that they can adapt as opportunities and demands on the workforce change. "It is disappointing that the Government has still not published its digital strategy and set out its plans for equipping the future workforce with the digital skills we will need."

## **Translated book sales are up, but Britain is still cut off from foreign literature**

Today is International Translation Day. Look at any bookshop bestseller shelf in the UK and you'll see translated names everywhere: Elena Ferrante, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Haruki Murakami, Swedish names all over crime fiction. Recent sales figures seem to suggest that the British public has steadily become more open to European and international authors: according to Nielsen, the number of translated books bought in Britain increased by an astounding 96% between 2001 and 2015.

But when you examine what is translated into English, only 1.5% of all books published in the UK are translations, according to a 2015 study by Literature Across Frontiers. Its author, Alexandra Büchler argues that the UK sale figures are pulled up by bestsellers. "I don't think we are getting the picture of piles of translated books not selling, because booksellers are really picky about who ends up on the shelves," she says. Bestsellers are the exception and beyond those lucky few, the plight of translated fiction remains pretty grim.

Where does this bias come from? With Brexit in mind, some point to an insular mindset, mixed with an imperialist complex. "Our alienation from Europe is partly to do with the fact that we don't read much European literature," says Susan Curtis-Kojakovic from Istros Books, a publishing house specialising in south and east European authors. "We read so much about America. And to me, Wisconsin is not any more interesting than Bucharest. And in fact Bucharest is to me nearer to my culture."

James Tennant from PEN International blames lack of translations on "the deep-seated protectionism of an island people and a certain complacency coming from the fact that our language happens to be, for the time being, the global lingua franca". Curtis-Kojakovic further explains: "We have so much literature in English – from India, South Africa and so on – that we have the false impression that we have the world in English."

This also means that British publishers can work without speaking or reading other languages, which makes them unable to source foreign books. Some publishers used to blame costs – the minimum UK rate recommended by PEN and the Society of Authors for translation is £90 per 1,000 words, and in addition to that, if an author doesn't speak English, an interpreter will need to be paid for public appearances.

But it all starts from school, according to Ann Morgan, who is reading 196 books – one from every country in the world – for her blog *A Year of Reading Around the World*. Morgan says that "at school in the UK we don't really read translations, we just don't develop that habit"; unlike French or German students, schoolchildren below A-level in the UK – with the exception of International Baccalaureate students – are only asked to read literature originally written in English.

So how do we break this chain? The International Man Booker prize has pointed to one way forward by awarding half of its £50,000 prize to the translator for the first time this year. Schools, bookshops, cultural institutions and publishers should follow. But we can all make a conscious decision to read more translated books. Because the way things stand, the UK is not just missing out on great books, but further isolating itself from the rest of the world.

*The Guardian*, September 30th, 2016.