

LEARNER



Alan Brouder

The Gunpowder Plot



Historischer
Roman



Langenscheidt

One

Professor Anthony Johnson **shuffled** slowly around the **lecture theatre**, carefully examining each of the fresh-faced students before him. Twenty-seven pairs of eyes avoided his stare as he moved silently between the wooden desks, pausing occasionally behind a random student for a few moments of quiet **intimidation**. Britain's brightest young minds **fidged** nervously **with** their pens, half-afraid that their eccentric teacher would attack them at any moment.

As Johnson moved quietly back towards the top of the oval, wood-panelled room, he folded his hands casually behind his back, making the brown leather patches on the elbows of his tweed jacket stand out like the wide eyes of a **praying mantis**. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the students raising their eyebrows as if quietly confirming to one another that their new professor was indeed quite mad. With his back to the class, Johnson peered out over the half-moon spectacles that perched **precariously** on the end of his long, thin nose. Ignoring the padded lecture hall behind him, he studied the gold-framed print of Vermeer's *The Allegory of Painting*, which he had placed in the centre of the wall behind his desk. Tipping his head slowly backwards, he stroked his greying **goatee**, displaying to the class the bald patch on the top of his head. He gazed up at the portrait of Clio, the Greek muse of History, with her blue

to shuffle [ˈʃʌfl] schlurfen **lecture theatre** [ˈlektʃə ˌθiətə] Hörsaal
intimidation [ɪnˌtɪmɪˈdeɪʃn] Einschüchterung **to fidget with sth.**
[ˈfɪdʒɪt wɪð] mit etw. herumspielen **praying mantis** [ˌpreɪɪŋ
ˈmæntɪs] Gottesanbeterin **precariously** [prɪˈkeəriəsli] *hier:* aben-
teuerlich **goatee** [ɡəʊˈti:] Spitzbart

dress, feather-decorated hair, her eyes lowered in the direction of the large book she held to her breast; and suddenly he broke the silence.

“FOOLS,” he boomed at the top of his voice, turning quickly on his heels and **glaring** at the class, “will tell you that the study of History is little more than a luxurious **pastime** for those who can afford not to work!” He took a step forward, his large green eyes **bulging** as they scanned the room and finally came to rest on a young girl, trembling with regret at having taken a seat in the front row. “FOOLS,” he cried again, pointing a skeletal finger at the door as if the forces of darkness were at that moment gathering great armies in an unholy war against him, “will tell you that the discipline of History can never be a *real* science!”

He was nodding his head repeatedly now, helpfully confirming the truth of this revelation. “FOOLS will tell you that historians can never be *ob-jec-tive!*” He whispered this last word softly as though it offended him to speak it. “If any of you agree with these sentiments, you can get out now.” The professor looked around the room, pausing to allow the students a moment to consider. “Go on! Go off and study flower-arranging or basket-weaving or **tap-dancing** or whatever the hell you like!”

Johnson gained immense pleasure from **inflicting** this micro-drama **on** his new students every September. Judging from their expressions, he felt he might now be ready for a career on the stage.

to glare at sth. [ˈgleə ət] etw. wütend anstarren **pastime** ˈpɑːstaɪm] Zeitvertreib **to bulge** [bʌldʒ] sich wölben **tap-dancing** [ˈtæp,dɑːnsɪŋ] Steptanz **to inflict sth. on sb.** [ɪnˈflɪkt / ɒn] *hier:* etw. über jmdn. hernieder gehen lassen

“How many of you,” he asked, “will become true historians? Which of you will discover the secret to understanding the past? Who amongst you ...”

He knew his motivational speech by heart and was able to **rattle** it off like a prayer learned in childhood, allowing his mind to wander onto simpler things, such as how the students seemed to grow younger by the year. It was extraordinary, he thought, that most of the first years sitting before him were little more than **impure** intentions in the minds of their parents when he had studied History here at Oxford in the early 2020s.

“Of those of you who decide to stay in this class, most of you will perform adequately. Some of you will do respectably well. And we may even **unearth** one or two independent thinkers amongst you. What is quite certain, however, is that there will be a few of you for whom the only history you will study this year will be the paintings on the walls of the King’s Arms pub in Hollywell Street.”

The students **emitted** a collective nervous laugh as the professor playfully **scowled** at an unshaven youth with greasy hair and tired red eyes.

The first day of the new academic year was always Johnson’s favourite; he **relished** the challenge of winning over the students with his eccentric charm and **intimidating** passion. He loved the possibilities that the first day held – the knowledge that he would meet a couple of outstanding

to rattle sth. off [ˌrætəl / ˈɒf] etw. herunterrattern **impure** [ɪmˈpjʊə] schmutzig **to unearth** [ʌnˈɜːθ] ans Licht bringen **to emit** [ɪˈmɪt] ausstoßen **to scowl at sb.** [ˈskaʊl ət] jmdn. finster anschauen **to relish** [ˈreɪʃ] genießen **intimidating** [ɪnˈtɪmɪdeɪtɪŋ] einschüchternd

new students, the chance to persuade a few others of the value of studying History, and the opportunity to make his classes more engaging. He wondered whether any of the young faces sitting in front of him would one day change history themselves. Oxford had produced countless presidents, prime ministers, and Nobel prize winners; Johnson thought it a **grave** injustice that there was no Nobel Prize for History, and regularly encouraged his students to start an annual protest outside the Concert Hall in Stockholm.

The professor was passionate about his subject. He was irritated by what he called ‘these annoying presentists’ – people who believe that the time in which they live is somehow deeply significant in the history of humanity, that only their generation has been confronted with monumental, **unprecedented** challenges. “How,” Johnson asked the class, “can we possibly judge the importance of our own era if we cannot accurately compare it against all other times?”

As the professor continued his monologue, he caught a brief glimpse of a woman in black peering in through the glass **pane** of the lecture theatre door. She smiled at him, nodded a silent greeting and then disappeared from view.

When the students eventually filed out of the room, Johnson began to gather up his papers and books and put them **haphazardly** into his battered leather satchel. As he struggled to turn off the digital monitor – he had a natural **aversion** to all things technological – he was startled by a voice from just behind him.

“Professor Johnson.”

grave [ɡreɪv] schwerwiegend **unprecedented** [ʌnˈprezɪdntɪd]
beispiellos **pane** [peɪn] Scheibe **haphazardly** [hæpˈhæzədli] will-
kürlich **aversion** [əˈvɜːʃn] Abscheu

Exercise 1: Are the following statements true or false? Mark each box with either a “T” or an “F”.

1. Professor Anthony Johnson enjoys teasing his students.
2. Johnson studied History at Oxford in the late 2010s.
3. Johnson’s biggest ambition is to join the ranks of Nobel prize winners.
4. Johnson is enthusiastic about his chosen subject.
5. Johnson’s regular place of work is an operation theatre.
6. Johnson is in his mid-twenties.
7. The room is oval-shaped with wood panels.
8. Johnson’s hobbies include tap-dancing and basket-weaving.
9. Johnson prefers to avoid new technology.
10. Johnson expects that most of his pupils will be independent thinkers.

“Yes?” Johnson turned to see a woman standing before him with thick white hair styled in a **pageboy cut** which hung to her shoulders. He judged her age to be somewhere around seventy, from the crow’s feet around her **piercing** blue eyes; they were kind and sincere, reminding him at once of his grandmother, with whom he had lived as a child.

“That was quite a performance,” she said with a slight smile, as if suggesting that they were both part of a successful **conspiracy** against the students. “For a moment I wondered whether you were teaching History or Drama.”

pageboy (hair)cut [ˈpeɪdʒbɔɪ ˌheəkʌt] Pagenkopf **piercing** [ˈpɪəriŋ] durchdringend **conspiracy** [kənˈspɪrəsi] Verschwörung