

LETTER TO THE EDITOR ΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΕΚΔΟΤΗ

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This England

The viewer of the latest biopic from Sky Atlantic “This England” is warned at the beginning that “*This is a fiction based on real events*”.

The title of this six-episode serial, is borrowed from Shakespeare’s play, *Richard II*.

The central theme is the COVID-19 pandemic as it afflicted Britain in the first half of 2020. In the epicentre is the Etonian and classicist Boris Johnson, the recently deposed Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, by his very own Conservative Party...

Boris caught COVID-19 and required hospital treatment. The course of his illness and recovery occupies part of this series. On moments of reflection Boris, standing by a window watching the rain, recites excerpts from *Richard II*, also deposed.

*This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.*

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In other scenes, Boris speaks in Latin and in ancient Greek, the endowment of his Etonian/Oxford education and love of classics!

To some viewers, certain scenes from Boris’ episode of recuperation from COVID may pass unnoticed or indeed be puzzling...

The bust of a bearded man with a helmet drawn back is transported with great care from 10 Downing Street to Chequers –the country residence of the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom– and a few weeks later, back to its original place. Boris recuperated from COVID at Chequers before he returned to Downing Street. He has publicly declared his admiration of two men.¹ One was Winston Churchill; the other, the man represented in the peripatetic sculpture!

I am familiar with this bust. I have had one in my possession for over thirty years. Initially, it adorned my flat in Fulham when I was working in West London. And since my retirement it now lives in my garden in Essex. A gypsum copy of the original from the British Museum (itself a Roman copy of a Greek original – the name is inscribed in Greek). It is the Athenian statesman and general Pericles, he, who fostered Democracy in ancient Athens; he, of the Funeral Oration recorded by Thucydides (Περικλέους Ἐπιτάφιος); he, who glorified the Parthenon.

When I bought my copy from the shop opposite the British Museum, the young lady selling it, asked if it was going to adorn my Restaurant...

Greened from the falling leaves of the tree above, my Pericles requires restoration every summer with a new coat of white paint (fig. 1).

Apothecary to the Queen

Queen Elizabeth II died in Balmoral on 8th September 2022. Just two days after accepting Boris’ resignation and appointing a new Prime Minister. The Death certificate was signed, according to the London “TIMES”, by a local General Practitioner.² His official title was *Apothecary to the Queen*.

Few people, even in England, will be familiar with such a title.



Figure 1. Pericles in my garden.

Apothecary (from the Greek αποθήκη, store-house) is an archaic term for a professional who formulates and dispenses medicines to physicians and patients.

Today the Apothecary is known as a chemist or a pharmacist. In several North European countries, a retail pharmacy is still known as Apoteket.

I am an *Apothecary*, or to be precise, I hold a diploma of the Society of the Apothecaries of London which is registrable under the medical acts and which qualifies me to practice medicine, surgery and midwifery in England. I have practiced medicine in London for 43 years. As a member

of this *Worshipful Society*, I am also entitled to drive my sheep along the London Bridge into the city of London. I have yet to exercise this privilege, which is rooted in 800 years of tradition; going back to medieval times when London Bridge was the only crossing over the river Thames and the sole route into the City for trading. Freemen were granted the right to bring the tools of their trade into the City, which would have included sheep and cattle going to market. This is now a ceremonial event attended every year by the Lord Mayor of London in full regalia. It was last enacted on 25th September 2022.

The Society of Apothecaries was incorporated as a City Livery Company by royal charter from James I in 1617, in recognition of the apothecaries' specialist skills in compounding and dispensing medicines. The Society of Apothecaries has been licensing doctors to practice medicine since 1815.

The Society's Coat of Arms (fig. 2), features Apollo (the god of healing) killing the dragon of disease, supported by two unicorns and a rhinoceros (its powdered horn was credited with medicinal properties). The motto, from the first book of Ovid's "Metamorphoses", translates: "I am spoken of all over the world as one who brings help".

Traditions die hard in the land of Richard II and Shakespeare!

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Figure 2. The Coat of Arms of the Society of Apothecaries in London.

* He is a retired medical oncologist. He lives in England. The post-nominal LMSSA indicates Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery of the Society of Apothecaries.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ**Αυτή η Αγγλία**

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*Formerly, Charing Cross Hospital, London, UK**Αρχεία Ελληνικής Ιατρικής 2023, 40(4):566–568***Λέξεις ευρετηρίου:** Apothecary, COVID, Περικλής, Σαίξπηρ**References**

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