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THE SPECTATOR

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The plot against the Pope

By *Damian Thompson*

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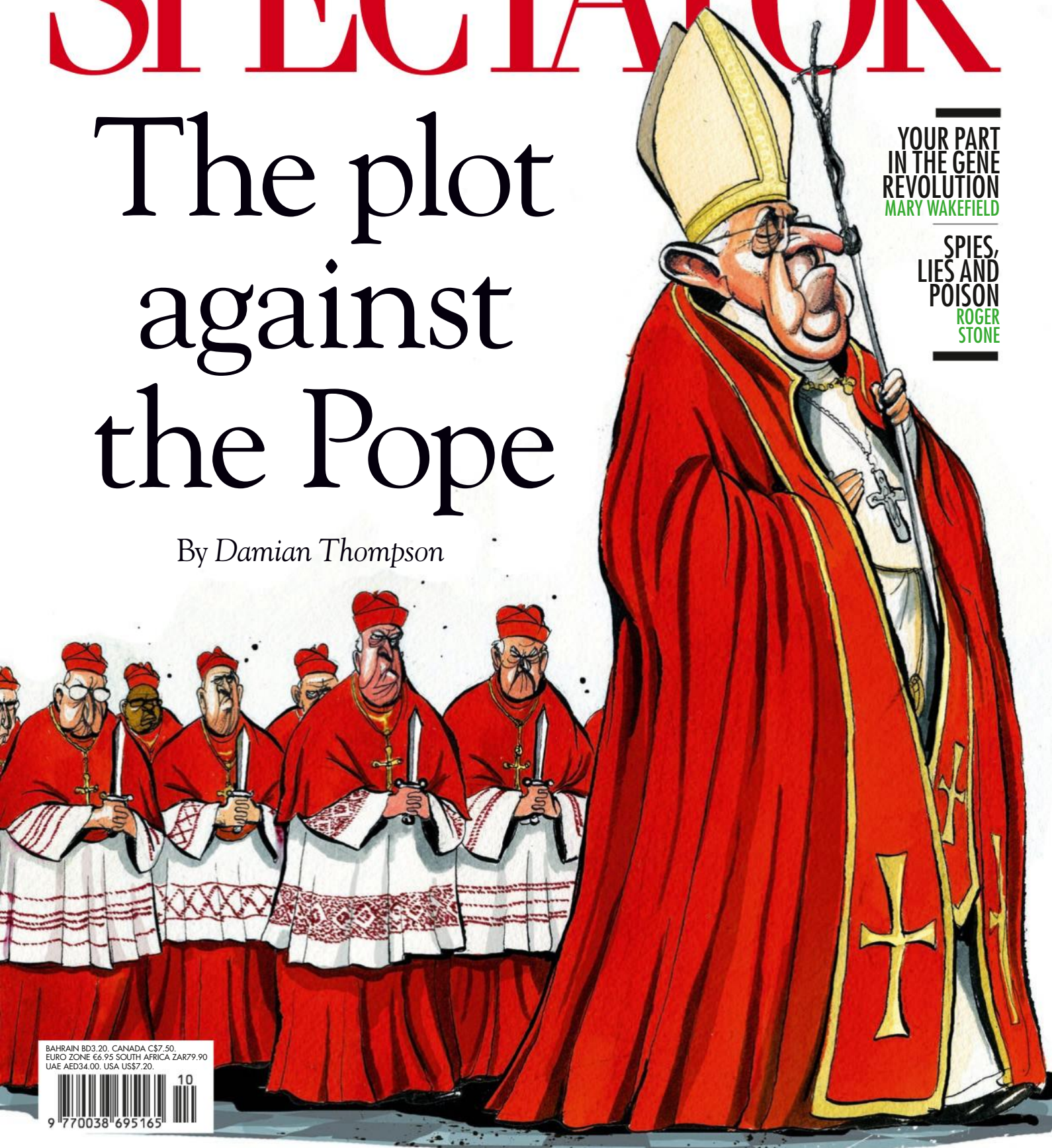

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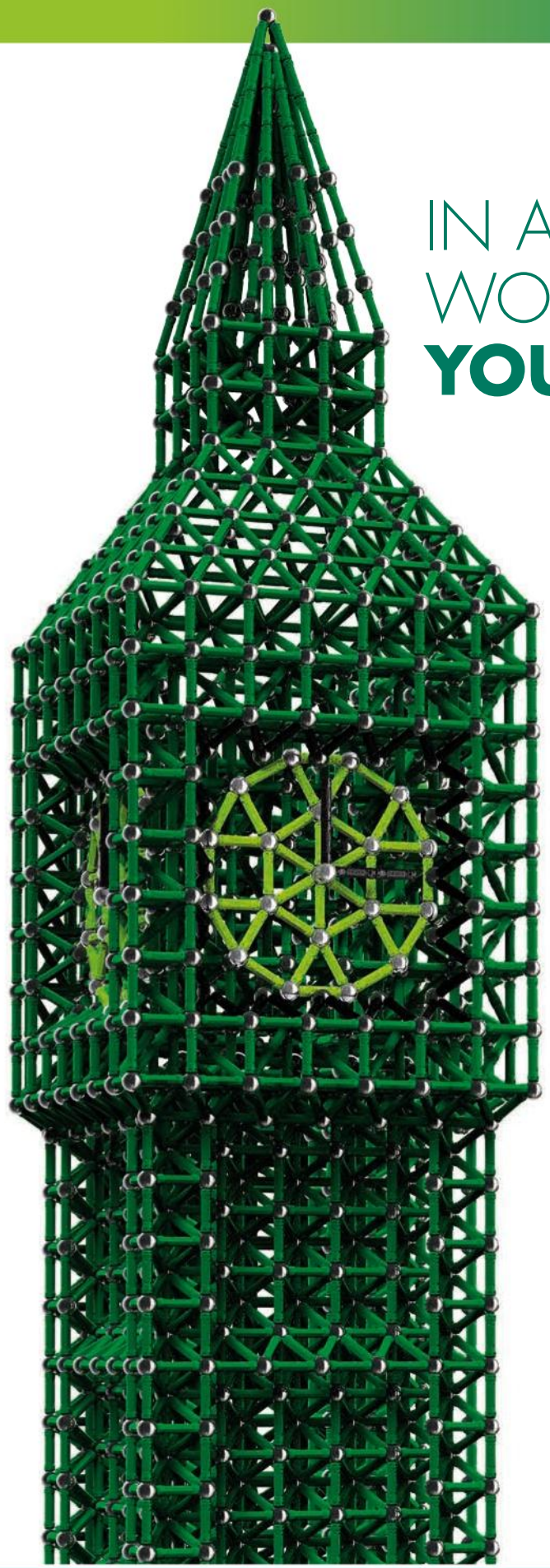

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THE SPECTATOR
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Ambition deficit

Political prejudices are incredibly hard to shift, even when they are demonstrably untrue. In the minds of many, Labour will always be the party for public services and for looking after the low-paid, usually by raising taxes. Tories are seen as crueller but more efficient — the sort of party you call in to clean up a mess, cut taxes or defend the realm. Not the party that would care much about the worse-off.

In fact, it was Labour that kept the top rate of tax at 40 per cent — and the Tories who allowed national debt to balloon and troop numbers to fall. And as of this week, it was the Tories who raised taxes.

Philip Hammond's first Budget was supposed to have been conducted under the pledge, issued no fewer than four times in the 2015 Conservative manifesto, that they would not raise taxes. 'Instead, we will ease the burden of taxation,' the Tories promised — and people believed them.

But Mr Hammond has instead decided to splurge on infrastructure, and proposes to increase the tax burden to its highest level for 30 years. The self-employed have been told that their National Insurance tax rate will rise by 2p in the pound. These are tax rises that will hurt everyone.

For a while now, MPs have been wondering what Mr Hammond and Theresa May would do with the historic political opportunity that lies before them. The Labour party is in disarray; never have the Conservatives been able to be more confident of winning the next general election. This is a time when the Tories could, if they chose, set the terms of debate. Given that nothing in politics ever stands still, this moment of opportunity may not last for long.

Mr Hammond has now delivered two Budget statements, both distinguished by a lack of ambition. We now are presented with a betrayal of a manifesto pledge and relatively small measures, here and there, to fix various problems. If Mr Hammond does have any ideas with what his party could do while the opposition is imploding, then we have seen precious little evidence of it.

He boasted during his speech about the Tories being the party of the NHS, as if this were the Tories' appeal to Labour voters. It makes sense to try to appeal to moderate Labour voters at a time when they are being abandoned by their party, but there must be a better way to do so. He could have pointed out that conventional Conservatism — lower taxes and bold welfare reform — has worked extraordinarily well.

If Mr Hammond does have any radical ideas, then we have seen precious little evidence of them

So far, the Tory reforms have meant that it is the income of the lowest-paid which has risen the most, while the top earners have seen the biggest losses. The various warnings about austerity — that it would hit the poorest hardest — were wrong for a simple reason: welfare reform led more people into work, which improved their lot considerably.

All this was missed by critics who were fixated on Osborne's reduction of the top rate of income tax from 50 per cent to 45 per cent. This change actually saw the share of tax from the best-paid rise. As Philip Hammond said in his Budget statement, the top 1 per cent now pay 27 per cent of all income tax collected. This is because his predecessor cut, rather than raised, taxes.

Where the Tories did summon the courage to apply Conservative principles, the result was not just more prosperity but a fairer society as well. Tory policies have ended up milking the rich in a way Labour has never managed — another triumph of what should be known as progressive conservatism. Even the Tories seem to treat this as a dirty secret. These policies pushed inequality down to a 30-year low — to date, no government member has made this point.

There has been another marked trend over the past few years, starting when Gordon Brown was chancellor. Successive budgets have seen tax policy swing towards favouring investment income over earned income. It was Brown who began hiking up National Insurance contributions in an effort to raise more revenue while sticking — in strict terms, at least — to his pledge not to increase the rate of income tax. It meant that people in work paid more while those living off their investments were unaffected.

Hammond has now continued that raid on the working population by increasing National Insurance contributions for the self-employed. Meanwhile, investment allowances have been generously increased. The amount which can annually be saved in an Individual Savings Account has gone from £15,240 to £20,000. In time, this will hugely boost the tax-free income available to be enjoyed by the retired. So taxes for workers will rise, while taxes on the asset rich (whose lot has already been greatly helped by quantitative easing) will fall. This makes a nonsense of government slogans to 'make work pay'.

Getting Brexit right was always going to be the top priority of Theresa May's government, but she also has an unprecedented opportunity to enact the kind of reforms that Tories are supposed to be all for. From what we have seen so far, it looks as if this opportunity is being squandered.

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THE WEEK

BOOKS & ARTS

BOOKS

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CONTRIBUTORS

Joanna Trollope is the author of more than 20 novels, including *The Choir*, which became a BBC television series. Her diary is on p. 9.

Danny Kruger, who writes about drugs on p. 18, is a former chief leader writer of the *Daily Telegraph*, and was a special adviser to David Cameron.

Frances Wilson's books include biographies of Thomas de Quincey (*Guilty Thing*) and Dorothy Wordsworth; she considers Jane Welsh Carlyle on p. 32.

Steven Poole has written books about video games (*Trigger Happy*), dishonesty (*Unspeak*) and the history of new ideas (*Rethink*). On p. 34, he contemplates nothingness.

D.J. Taylor's most recent books are *The Prose Factory: Literary Life in Britain since 1918* and *The New Book of Snobs*. He reviews a portrait of the literary editor Karl Miller on p. 39.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK

Home

The Lords passed two amendments to the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill, voting by 358 to 256 to guarantee the residence rights after Brexit of EU nationals living in Britain, then by 366 to 268 to give Parliament 'a meaningful vote' on the final Brexit deal. Lord Heseltine was sacked as an adviser to the government for voting for the latter amendment. Jeremy Corbyn published details of his tax return, which showed a total income of £114,342 but proved puzzling because, according to the Labour party, the £27,192 received for his first seven months as leader of the opposition was included under pension and benefits income. Professor Stephen Hawking, the well-known physicist, said, 'I regard Corbyn as a disaster,' adding, 'I think he should step down for the sake of the party.' Transport for London set about building 400 houses in Greenwich in the hope of making more than £1 billion. The annual rate of house-price inflation fell to 5.1 per cent, against 10 per cent a year earlier.

Philip Hammond, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, presented the Budget in possession of higher than expected tax receipts. The Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast of growth this year, he said, had been revised from 1.4 to 2 per cent. He said the Budget provided a 'strong, stable platform for Brexit'. National Insurance would go up for the self-employed. There was some business-rate relief for enterprises (specifically 90 per cent of pubs) hit by rises and £2 billion over three years for social care. He drew attention to new T-levels for technical education and funding for 110 new free schools. GP triage at A&E departments would get £100 million this winter.

Elections in Northern Ireland left the Democratic Unionists with 28 seats and Sinn Fein with 27, the SDLP with 12 and the Ulster Unionists with ten. The DUP, by falling below 30 seats, lost its power over the 'petition of concern' mechanism that has in the past acted like a veto. There were fears that same-sex marriage legislation might now be introduced. PSA, the owner of Peugeot and Citroën, agreed to buy GM's European operations for £1.9 billion, including the Vauxhall factories at Ellesmere Port and Luton that employ 4,500 people. Aberdeen Asset Management and Standard Life agreed a merger that would create a fund manager overseeing assets worth £660 billion. The singer George Michael died aged 53 on Christmas day of natural causes, from heart and liver disease, a coroner found. Arsenal lost at home 5-1 to Bayern Munich in a Champions League game.

Abroad

President Trump issued a new executive order banning the entry of all refugees for 120 days and halting for 90 days entry to America for people from six Muslim-majority countries: Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen — but excepting Iraq, which had been included in an order made in January and ruled unlawful in the courts. Earlier, Mr Trump had tweeted a message saying: 'How low has President Obama gone to tapp [sic] my phones during the very sacred election process.' James Clapper, Mr Obama's director of national intelligence, said: 'I can deny it.' WikiLeaks claimed that the CIA spied on people from inside television sets. Police in the Spanish province of Leon arrested a Romanian man in connection with the sudden simultaneous disappearance of 160 people after lunch in a restaurant in Ponferrada, leaving an unpaid bill of €9,000.

North Korea prevented all Malaysians (thought to number 11) from leaving the country and Malaysia angrily reciprocated against the 1,000 or so North Koreans there. This followed a postmortem finding that Kim Jong-nam, the half-brother of North Korea's ruler, had been killed by the VX nerve agent at Kuala Lumpur airport. North Korea launched four ballistic missiles, three of which fell into a Japanese area of sea. China cut its growth target to 6.5 per cent and increased its military spending by 7 per cent. Melbourne introduced lights in the shape of women in skirts at pedestrian crossings, to promote gender equality.

Thousands of civilians streamed out of Mosul as Iraqi forces took the main government offices there, while the Islamic State retained control of the old city. Jordan hanged ten convicted terrorists and five others found guilty of sexual crimes. Tristan Voorspuy, a former British army officer, was shot dead on his ranch in drought-afflicted Laikipia, Kenya, by pastoral herders. Peru recalled its ambassador to Venezuela after Venezuela's foreign minister called Peru's president a coward and a dog. CSH

DIARY

Joanna Trollope

Oh dear. Usually writers who contribute to these diaries start with something like, 'To Paris. To launch my novel at Shakespeare and Company.' Well, I went instead to Penarth, which is a charming seaside suburb of Cardiff, and got a right royal welcome. I told the customers of Griffin Books (and Book-ish in Crickhowell and Cover to Cover in Mumbles) that I forbade them to buy books from Amazon. If they didn't support their independent bookshops, they would lose them. And bookshops are vital for community health. Think what Daunt's did for Marylebone High Street; started its transformation from a non-street to a destination street, no less.

Speaking of Daunt's, do you realise that their business rates are about to double? Baroness Rebuck has asked in the House of Lords that independent bookshops be given special community status as far as business rates are concerned. With literacy levels at the shameful level that they are in this country — I'm banging another drum here, as a trustee of the National Literacy Trust — we need every scrap of assistance for reading to be put back on the cool agenda.

Goodness, Wales is gorgeous to look at. The landscape is sublime. I woke in Abergavenny to snow on the Black Mountains, interspersed with emerald green valleys — all that rain is not for nothing. The natural beauty only heightens a troubling question. Wales voted for Brexit, but every road, university and waterfront improvement scheme — and they are everywhere — is EU-funded. Excuse me? What were all those warmly welcoming people I met thinking of exactly?

Then Pershore, where I have never been before, and where I was interviewed by Linda Smith, the impressive Director of International Trade for Hereford and Worcester, in the community theatre (community again — of course…). This was appropriate as my new novel, *City of Friends*, is about women and work. I can't actually think of another novel about work at the moment, which is odd when you think what a huge factor it is in most modern lives. It strikes

me as strangely old-fashioned to identify women only by their romantic lives. I think that would make a good essay title, followed by the instruction 'Discuss'.

I realised, sitting in the train between Durham and Newcastle, that you get a spectacular view of the Angel of the North on the horizon: it isn't just from the A1. I am so happy to be back in Newcastle, even in the rain, which is falling in sheets. It's a terrific city and so beautiful — all those hills for the streets to swoop up and down, and the Tyne with its seven bridges, and the lovely people. I have a view of the Sage and the Baltic across the river from my hotel window — it's a world-class view by any standard. The Sage, especially at night, is a building of architectural wonder.

The ward of Ouseburn in Newcastle was a wasteland of industrial dereliction a decade ago. Now, thanks to the Ouseburn Trust (here we go again — a community-driven enterprise) in partnership with the local authority, it has become Newcastle's energetic cultural heartland. I do a reading event (for the Forum Bookshop in Corbridge) in the Biscuit Factory on Stoddart Street, a vast and varied showcase for arts, crafts and design, which is humming with people, then walk back down to the river through the shining dark streets. Wonderful.

And now for the North Pennines, beloved of W.H. Auden, who was obsessed with the lead mines of the area as a boy. It is spectacular country and only 11 miles from Consett, which I can never think of without remembering the closure of the steelworks there in 1980, which cost nearly 4,000 jobs. I know it wasn't some kind of political vendetta, and that the Ruhr Valley and Ohio were part of the same global industrial decline, but that kind of academic overview doesn't mean anything to the abruptly unemployed. No doubt my feelings about Consett and similar closures may account for my response to regeneration wherever I find it — relief as well as admiration.

Last stop Hexham, right on Hadrian's Wall, which Auden called, rather grandly, the Roman Wall. I'm staying in Blanchland, which is ridiculously ancient and pretty, and where the key to get into the church is a foot long. There are walkers everywhere, an amiable gathering of Hairy Bikers in the village car park, and the post office sells Kendal mint cake and ginger jam, made locally. Christopher Isherwood wrote of Auden that 'his romantic travel wish was always towards the north'. Not the only one.

City of Friends *by Joanna Trollope is published by Mantle.*

A Budget to keep Brexit off the rocks

Chancellors often enjoy a Budget for the chance it gives them to show off. They enjoy wrong-footing their opponents with a dramatic and unexpected announcement right at the end of their speech — the much-anticipated rabbit pulled from the hat.

But Philip Hammond is not a political showman. He must be the only Chancellor in living memory to have played down his first Budget, telling colleagues with big ideas to come back to him this autumn.

This lack of showmanship should not be mistaken for an absence of serious intent. He is unique among recent chancellors for two reasons: he has no ambition to move one door along to No. 10 Downing Street, and he can be confident of a long stint in the job. Indeed, he is pretty much unsackable — and his opening joke about getting fired suggested that he thinks as much. As Theresa May attempts to navigate her way through Brexit, her Chancellor plays an important role in reassuring the City, the markets and Tory Remainers that all will be done sensibly. If he walked out, saying it was impossible to do Brexit well, the pound would have more than a bad day on the foreign exchange market.

Gordon Brown's tenure at the Treasury was defined by his desire to move next door. Every Budget was an attempt to show Labour MPs that he could do the top job better than the then incumbent. The key to understanding his speeches was to look for the sleight of hand that let him magic that rabbit from the hat. The apogee of this came in his final Budget. I have never heard the House of Commons cheer louder than when Brown announced he was cutting the basic rate of tax by 2p. But this decision contained the seeds of his destruction, paid for as it was by the abolition of the 10p rate of tax.

George Osborne's aim was slightly different. He was constantly trying to reshape the economy in ways that would tilt Britain to the right, making it an easier place for Conservatives to win elections. His were the Budgets of a political strategist who knew which way he wanted to move. Everything from his decision to introduce pension freedoms to cuts in corporation tax was designed with one overall aim in mind.

Hammond does have a vision for the British economy. But it is a markedly less political one than his predecessor's. Tellingly, he doesn't see the rise in self-employment — a phenomenon that will create a new set of workers particularly sensitive to tax rates and therefore keener on a smaller state — as a boon to the Tories but as a threat to the tax base. His increase in National Insurance rates for the self-employed was an economic decision, not a political one. It won't be popular with many Tory members. But it sounds as if this blow will be softened by state-funded maternity and paternity leave for the self-employed.

Unsurprisingly for someone who studied PPE at university, Hammond's great interest is in productivity. It doesn't require a Nobel prize in economics to work out that productivity growth is the biggest weakness of the British economy, and Hammond believes there are two keys to increasing it: infrastructure and skills. Having concentrated on infrastructure in the autumn statement, he turned his attention to skills in this Budget. The question now is whether these reforms will be more successful than previous efforts. T-levels, the new technical qualifications, are not a bad idea. But too often in the past, technical education in Britain has ended up being dumbed down. David Willetts, the former Tory minister, used to say that because of the people Tory ministers encountered they were very aware of threats to the hedge-fund industry, but nowhere near as aware of problems for manufacturers. Much the same goes for technical education.

Hammond remains convinced that uncertainty will take its toll on economic growth at some point

'Now we're behind him let's push him over.'

This Budget was a reminder of how much Brexit dominates our politics, and will continue to do so. Hammond is a fiscal conservative, but without Brexit one doubts that the rest of the government would have accepted so easily the Treasury's insistence that better-than-expected tax receipts must be set aside for any trouble ahead. He might have chosen to strike a far more upbeat public tone about Brexit in recent months. But the Cabinet knows that he remains privately convinced that uncertainty will take its toll on economic growth at some point.

Inside No. 10, they argue that Brexit and the Conservatives' economic agenda complement each other — that they are two sides of the same coin. The steps needed to improve productivity are, for instance, benefits in their own right and will be part of getting Britain and its workforce match-fit for Brexit. But in the short term, the key question is whether the economy can stay as resilient throughout the Article 50 process as it has done in recent months.

In the medium term, the issue is whether Britain can take advantage of the opportunities that Brexit offers. After all, leaving the European Union is simply the removal of a constraint rather than a guarantee of success. So the nation has to seize its chance to make this the best place to build a technology company or carry out medical research.

That will require a shift in mindset — it will no longer be enough to be *one* of the best places in Europe to do these things. Britain will have to accept that it is now competing at a global, not regional, level. Broadband speeds, for instance, should not be measured against France and Germany but South Korea and Japan.

Hammond's first Budget won't make waves. It was worthy but not radical. His autumn Budget, which he has always said will be the main event of this year, will need to be a more ambitious affair.

THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

After he left the Blues and Royals in 1981, the young Tristan Voorspuy drove a motorbike from London to Cape Town. Thus began his love of Africa. He also learnt to fly, and arranged to travel alone to Kenya from England in a single-engine aeroplane, using only a schoolboy atlas. Luckily, his brother Morvern, a professional pilot, heard of this plan and prevented it. But Tristan reached Kenya by other means, and became a Kenyan citizen. For 30 years, he was a leading conservationist there and set up and ran the accurately named firm Offbeat Safaris, which allows guests to ride among the great beasts of Africa. Recently, armed hordes and their cattle invaded the land on Sosian, the Kenyan ranch he jointly owned, and whose land and wildlife he had rescued after the environmental degradation they had suffered from overgrazing in the 1990s. In an email he sent last month, before the Sosian invasion, Tristan warned of the effects on wildlife he had seen in recent attacks on other estates. He said that the invaders were reviving the status rituals of the Pokot tribe, which involve the killing and mutilation of elephant, giraffe etc. Last weekend, they burnt out the house of one of Tristan's business partners. He got on his little white stallion Loita and rode off alone to investigate. The horse was found injured. Tristan was later found dead. He had been shot.

It would be wrong to call such a shocking death 'fitting', but its drama did reflect Tristan's life and character. Whether illicitly growing cannabis in his parents' garden as a teenager, riding in the Grand Military at Sandown, or out in the bush, he was always bold — never bolder than when trying to defend the land, fauna and flora of Africa. His attitude to everything, including riding, was forward-going, confronting danger rather than avoiding it. A few years back, I went on one of his safaris. Tristan was our guide. The risky bits were the best. It was wonderful, for example, to ride very close to a family of elephants and watch their peaceful grazing, and then, when the senior mother had decided we had got too near, to see her flap her ears and lead the charge against us. But it

was wonderful only because Tristan knew how to get us out just in time. I have an excellent photograph of him shouting our retreat as 20 elephants loom behind him. On a different holiday, at which I was not present, he led his party through a defile and surprised a gathering of hippo, which, for human beings, are the least amiable of African mammals. Because of the narrowness, the passage back was difficult. Tristan naturally stayed until everyone else was safe, but in the melee his horse reared and threw him. He lay on the ground, rolling himself in the recommended ball for 20 minutes while hippos pushed him around and took a few chunks out of his back. Then they got bored and left. He was both skilful and lucky to have survived.

I could not have enjoyed the Mara more, so it was natural to want to return. But conversation with Tristan made me wonder. I sensed that, because of population pressure and bad politics, everything was getting more adverse. Nothing could break Tristan's spirit, but he was encountering ever worse headwinds. So I thought I should content myself with my one visit, in case later ones seemed sad, and to treasure every memory of it. I may have given above the impression that Tristan was a typical gung-ho Englishman. He was not only that. It was attractive, for example, that when we were just about to begin a wild gallop, he would stop to note an obscure wild flower and tell us about it. And it was a delight in camp, at evening, to hear him recite poetry by heart — 'The Fox's Prophecy' was a favourite. He could be rude and angry; he was always funny; he was kind and interested and, in matters of nature, learned. All this was because he was passionate, filled with the fatal love of Africa.

The Electoral Reform Society (ERS) is a slightly sinister body. Behind the banner of fairness, it is doctrinaire. I recently received its press release: 'Hereditary by-election: world's most elitist election described as "ludicrous" by campaigners.' The society purports to be upset by the system in which the remaining hereditary peers in the House of Lords elect a new member if one of the sitting ones of their party dies. Just now, the Conservatives have such a by-election. Evelyn Waugh once famously remarked, after surgeons had cut out a growth from Randolph Churchill and pronounced it benign, that it was typical of modern science to find the one bit of Randolph that was benign and remove it. Similarly, the ERS condemns the one bit of the House of Lords (otherwise ever more stuffed with placemen) which is in any sense elected. In fact, there is a way of getting rid of these by-elections, though one the ERS might not like. A knowledgeable MP points out to me that if Theresa May wants to flood the Lords in order to get enough votes for Brexit, there is no need to create fresh titles. Much simpler to reinstate the full 800-plus hereditaries who, though they have lost their automatic right to sit and vote, remain peers.

I have never been to the South Lakes Safari Zoo, which has just lost its licence. In media reports, it sounds unpleasant. But two points are worth bearing in mind. The first is that it is under attack by fanatical opponents who want to close *all* zoos, so their criticisms should be treated with caution. The second is the amazing gullibility of my trade when it comes to statistics. Every report repeated that, over the past four years, 500 animals have died in the zoo, as if this were shocking. To know whether it is, one needs to be told how many and what sort of animals were in the zoo, and what sort of death rate is normal. Without such information, it is like saying that '500 people died in X hospital in the past four years' and then pulling a long face of disapproval, when in fact that rate of expiry might be the lowest ever.

The plot against the Pope

It is no secret in Rome that several cardinals want Francis to step down

DAMIAN THOMPSON

On the first Saturday in February, the people of Rome awoke to find the city covered in peculiar posters depicting a scowling Pope Francis. Underneath were written the words:

> Ah, Francis, you have intervened in Congregations, removed priests, decapitated the Order of Malta and the Franciscans of the Immaculate, ignored Cardinals… but where is your mercy?

The reference to mercy was a jibe that any Catholic could understand. Francis had just concluded his 'Year of Mercy', during which the church was instructed to reach out to sinners in a spirit of radical forgiveness. But it was also a year in which the Argentinian pontiff continued his policy of squashing his critics with theatrical contempt.

Before the Year of Mercy, he had removed (or 'decapitated') the leaders of the Franciscans of the Immaculate, apparently for their traditionalist sympathies. During it, he froze out senior churchmen who questioned his plans to allow divorced-and-remarried Catholics to receive Holy Communion. As the year finished, the papal axe fell on the Grand Master of the Knights of Malta, Fra' Matthew Festing, who during an internal row over the alleged distribution of condoms by its charitable arm had robustly asserted the crusader order's 800-year sovereignty. Francis seized control of the knights. They are sovereign no longer.

So the sarcasm of asking the Pope about his 'mercy' is pretty obvious. But Italians noticed something else. '*A France'… ma n'do sta la tua misericordia?*' is local dialect — the Romanesco slang in which citizens taunted corrupt or tyrannical popes before the fall of the Papal States in 1870.

Although the stunt made headlines around the world, it is unlikely to have unnerved the Pope. There is a touch of the Peronist street-fighter about Jorge Bergoglio. As his fellow Argentinian Jesuits know only too well, he is relaxed about making enemies so long as he is confident that he has the upper hand. The posters convey impotent rage: they are unlikely to carry the fingerprints of senior churchmen.

In any case, it is not anonymous mockery that should worry the Pope: it is the public silence of cardinals and bishops who, in the early days of his pontificate, missed no opportunity to cheer him on.

The silence is ominous because it comes

amid suspicion that influential cardinals are plotting against Francis — motivated not by partisan malice, but by fear that the integrity and authority of the papacy is at stake.

Antonio Socci, a leading conservative Vatican-watcher, says that cardinals once loyal to Francis are so concerned about a schism that they are planning to appeal to him to step down. He predicts that the rebellion will be led by about a dozen moderate cardinals who work in the curia.

The stakes are high because the discontent arises from an argument about a central tenet of the faith

Their favoured candidate is understood to be Cardinal Pietro Parolin, a veteran diplomat who serves as the Pope's secretary of state, a post that combines the duties of prime minister and foreign secretary. Parolin is unusually powerful because the Pope indulges him. Power has drained from other Vatican departments towards the secretariat of state. It is Parolin who is pushing the church towards an accommodation with Beijing that, critics say, would betray faithful Chinese Catholics; it was also Parolin who moved against the leadership of the Order of Malta, which had sacked one of his well-connected friends.

The argument for replacing Francis with Parolin rests on the latter's administrative skills: unlike the current Pope, he is not given to wildly impulsive decisions which he then reverses without bothering to tell anyone.

But even if a group of cardinals are determined to elevate Parolin, what chance do they have of succeeding? It's true that when Pope Benedict resigned, he created an extraordinary precedent: that popes can choose to stand down. But to nudge an unwilling pope over the edge would be a tall order, even by the standards of today's Vatican skulduggery.

If, however, we remove the fanciful speculation, we are left with a real story. It is no secret in Rome that certain cardinals who voted for Francis are now worried that he is leading the church towards schism, and that he must therefore be stopped. There are many more than a dozen of them and, though they may not yet be ready to act upon their concerns, they would like this pontificate to end sooner rather than later.

The stakes are so high because the discontent is not fundamentally about personality: it arises from an argument about the central tenets of the faith.

In the end, it all boils down to the question of giving communion to people who are either divorced and remarried or married to a divorced person.

Non-Catholics, and indeed many Catholics, find it hard to understand why this is such a big deal. Put simply, the Catholic church is the only worldwide Christian denomination that takes literally the parts of the Bible (Luke 16:8, Mark 10:11, Matthew 19:9) where Jesus says that divorced and remarried people are committing adultery. This isn't to say that church authorities haven't hypocritically (or compassionately) bent the rules down the centuries — but the teaching has remained unchanged.

Until now, anyway. In April last year, Pope Francis released *Amoris Laetitia*, ('The Joy of Love'), a 200-page document in response to a synod of the world's bishops that had rejected any change to the teaching that Catholics in irregular marriages should not receive communion.

To cut a long story short, Francis appeared to go along with the synod's wishes. But a footnote in *Amoris Laetitia* hinted (and it was just a hint) that couples, in consultation with a priest, could decide for themselves whether to receive the sacrament.

A few progressive cardinals and bishops — most significantly in Germany, where Catholicism looks an awful lot like liberal Protestantism — seized on this footnote and declared that divorced-and-remarried couples could have communion if their consciences were clear.

Whereupon countless cardinals, bishops, priests and canon lawyers said, no they can't. But Francis, without going on the record, let it be known that yes they can — in his opinion, anyway. And he's the Pope. So please would bishops everywhere start falling into line and support a more liberal stance on communion for the remarried, even though he has never formally articulated it?

A split like this over the meaning of marriage threatens to do to the Catholic church what the issue of homosexuality has done to the Anglican communion: creating rifts between liberals and conservatives and dividing the church in the West against the church in the developing world.

To a great many in Rome, it looks as if the Pope is single-handedly ripping apart church teaching — in defiance of his own hierarchy. 'It's utterly bizarre. He's actually been ringing round asking for support on this,' says a priest in the Vatican. Like an American president lobbying senators? 'Exactly. But he's not getting the answers he wanted. Instead, there's this silence that has not greeted any other papal exhortation I can think of.'

Why the silence? The answer is that the Pope has put cardinals and bishops in an impossible situation.

Consider the case of England and Wales. Cardinal Vincent Nichols, president of the bishops' conference, could not issue a set of German-style 'anything goes on divorce' guidelines even if he wanted to (and no one knows what the inscrutable Nichols really wants, except perhaps to be Pope himself).

The conservative Bishop Philip Egan of Portsmouth has already said that there will be no change of pastoral practice in his diocese, full stop. Nichols couldn't even sell relaxed guidelines to his own Westminster diocese: at least one of his bishops would rebel.

This dilemma is being replicated all over the world. Two thirds of diocesan bishops either believe that the Pope is monkeying with the fundamentals of Christian doctrine or, taking a more lenient view, think his misguided compassion has created pastoral chaos. And the chaos will persist for as long as this man is Pope.

Which is why — despite various efforts to cast Francis in the role of 'great reformer' squaring up to satin-clad dinosaurs — moderate cardinals are ready for a new pope who can kick this wretched issue into the long grass.

But how can this be achieved? The moderates aren't keen to join forces with anti-Francis conservatives, who are already, as those posters showed, taking resistance to extraordinary lengths.

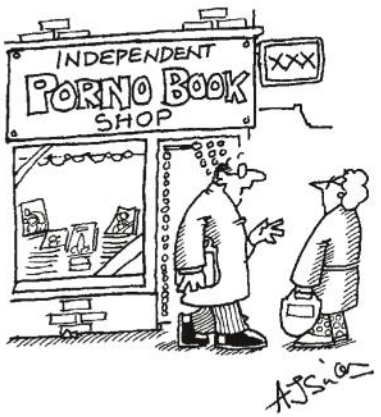
At the end of this month, the University of Paris-Sud is hosting a conference on 'the canonical problem of the deposition of heretical popes'. The organisers are not openly suggesting that Francis falls into this category, but others may draw their own conclusions. Two of the professors giving papers have asked the Pope to rule against 'heretical' misunderstandings of *Amoris Laetitia* — which he refuses to do. So some of the theoretical discussions of deposing popes may be rather pointed.

But can Francis really be forced out of office by canon law? Moderate cardinals wouldn't countenance it even if it were possible. That leaves what Socci calls 'moral suasion', otherwise known as arm-twisting. Several cardinals believe that this is what happened to Benedict XVI, though the pope emeritus insists that the decision to resign was his alone. Benedict, a theologian, grew to hate being pope. Francis, by contrast, loves it so much that he hasn't taken a holiday since walking on to the balcony of St Peter's. That doesn't mean that no one will try to persuade Francis to step down, but God help them when they do.

This leaves the Catholic church in deadlock. To quote one Vatican employee, 'Liberal or conservative, what most cardinals want is release from the endless fatigue created by Francis.'

The plotting will go on, of course: some clerical politicians can't stop themselves. So will the papal lobbying, but it is unlikely to bear fruit. And the longer the deadlock lasts, the angrier and more outspoken Francis will become. Which leaves the Vatican in the worst possible situation: a plot against the Pope that is an open secret, but which has little chance of success.

The word 'Catholic' means universal — yet now local tension between the liberal and conservative strands of the faith is intensifying, and is being made worse by the Pope himself. Many priests have absolutely no intention of giving communion to couples in irregular marriages. So the couples are left wondering who is right: their priest or their Pope? The conditions for a schism are there, for those with an eye to see them.



'It's just a front. It's actually Waterstones.'

Cuckold

It wasn't the unruly agitation of sparrows
along the back benches, but the flight of arrows
from you and the warblers under your wing
that pierced Cock Robin's lower chamber – poor thing!

Although your erstwhile partner prepared a noose,
fouled the nest, and turned your swan into a goose,
you rose like a phoenix from your campaign desk,
and joined the hen party as a diplomatic guest:
spiky plumage smoothed, placed by your host,
high up the pecking order in a fly or die post.

How will you deal with the terns across the pond,
the chiffchaffs near the channel,
the crossbills perched beyond?
How will you handle the unforgiving hawks,
the beaks as sharp as knives,
and those as curved as forks?

Talking cold turkey, cutting the mumbo jumbo:
a stately Brexit peacock, or a feather-headed dodo?

— *A.K.S. Shaw*

Poison, spies and lies

A conspiratorial lunch with Donald Trump's old friend Roger Stone

PAUL WOOD

Washington DC

Roger Stone — political consultant, agent provocateur, friend and confidant of Donald Trump — arrives for lunch with a bodyguard in tow. 'I've had way too many death threats,' he explains. He says he's recovering from poisoning by polonium, a radioactive substance used to kill the Russian defector Alexander Litvinenko in London. Litvinenko, he says, had 'a much larger dose, probably done by British intelligence'. But the British government named the Russian agents responsible, I reply. 'What was the proof?' he asks. 'It's all mirrors. You know that.'

Stone blames his 'poisoning' on 'the deep state', a term that in Trumpworld means the intelligence community. Trump has taken to Twitter to accuse the deep state of tapping his phone on President Obama's orders. 'This is Nixon/Watergate. Bad (or sick) guy!' Stone has called for Obama to be 'charged, convicted and jailed'. All this adds a layer to the tangled skein labelled 'Trump and Russia'. At its heart is a simple charge: that Trump was bought or blackmailed by the Kremlin. Stone is accused of being a Russian conduit to Trump. Both men say they are victims of a conspiracy of lies by US intelligence agencies, a 'silent coup'. Stone is an icon to a mass of Trump supporters who believe this is the hidden truth behind the President's difficulties.

Stone slides into the restaurant's wood-panelled booth. He's in his sixties, white-haired, and wearing a bold pinstriped suit impeccably cut to make him look like a 1930s gangster. He lives in Florida and maintains a deep year-round tan. On that tanned flesh, beneath the crisp white shirt, right between his shoulder blades, he has, famously, a tattoo of Richard Nixon's smiling face. Stone worked for Nixon and has seen ten presidential races. He likes to quote the famed Republican political strategist Lee Atwater on how to succeed in politics, and life: 'Lay low, play dumb, and keep moving.' He adds three corollaries, Stone's rules: 'Admit nothing; deny everything; launch counterattack.' I imagine he's given this advice to Trump; he sees the President 'from time to time', he says.

'Access' is the currency of Washington and it is hard to be certain how much Stone truly has. But he has known Trump for almost 40 years and he describes their history in his new book *The Making of the President 2016*. At the start of this relationship, you find the thread that Trump's enemies say runs all the way to the Kremlin: money and organised crime. Stone was introduced to Trump in 1979 through Roy Cohn, the Trump family's mobbed-up lawyer. Stone writes that he went to see Cohn at his offices and found him 'wearing a silk dressing gown. His heavy-lidded eyes were bloodshot from a late night of revelry. Seated with Cohn was his client, "Fat Tony" Salerno, boss of the Genovese crime family.' Some attribute Trump's early success as a New York developer to Cohn's

mafia connections. They controlled the concrete. Stone tells me: 'In his defence, the same people he bought concrete from also sold it to New York state and New York City. That was the only unionised concrete in the city.'

Wayne Barrett, a legendary muckraking New York journalist, told me before he died (of natural causes) that he had found '25 to 30 mob connections' in Trump's past. Today, the allegations are about the Russian mob, rather than the Italian-American mafia. Russian money is heavily invested — or laundered — through the New York property market. Trump won't break your legs, I say to Stone, but isn't he happy to take money from the guy who will? 'Money is definitely important to him, yes,' says Stone, drifting off into silence.

A source in the 'intelligence community' told me you could draw a line from Putin's mafia state, through Russian organised crime, to Trump's businesses. This connect-the-dots supposition is what the President and his allies denounce as malicious nonsense. But by their own standards — Obama wasn't born here, Cruz's dad killed Kennedy, British intelligence killed Litvinenko — it's fair to ask about such speculation. Could Russian organised crime have supported Trump on behalf of the Kremlin? 'It's highly unlikely,' Stone says. 'The danger with the current laws and regulations, it's too easy to prove, too easy to find, and that's certain jail time — it's not a grey area.'

Two months ago I wrote that the FBI was investigating exactly this. Several sources told me there was a secret intelligence court order to get the electronic communications of two Russian banks into the US. The *New York Times* later named Stone as one of the inquiry's ultimate targets. 'I don't have any Russian contacts,' he tells me. 'No Russian clients. No Russian money. I didn't speak to any Russians during this presidential campaign. The whole thing is a canard. If they have evidence to the contrary, go ahead: indict me. If you can't, then it's time for an apology because this is bullshit and it's getting tedious.'

Stone similarly dismisses claims that the Kremlin has video of Trump with prostitutes in Moscow in 2013. 'Zero chance,' he says, adding that Trump is a germophobe and has a 'well-founded paranoia' about being taped while travelling. This repeats the President's denials but Stone has an interesting story about that visit to Moscow, for the Miss Universe contest. It came, he says, from Trump's head of security. 'Their handler in Moscow, presumably reporting to the government although ostensibly working for the pageant, said to him, "We're going to send some girls up to Mr Trump's room afterwards for entertainment."' The head of security posted guards outside Trump's room, Stone tells me, and 'It never happened.' Still, this supports one of the claims in the Christopher Steele dossier: that the Kremlin was trying to co-opt Trump.

Last weekend, Trump and Stone issued their tweets accusing President Obama of ordering wiretaps at Trump Tower. I was disconcerted to find the White House citing my story of two months ago as evidence of this. Since Watergate, a president can't order the wiretapping of an American citizen. It is possible, though, for Americans to be monitored as part of surveillance of a foreign entity ordered by the intelligence court — that seems to be what happened to Trump's now-departed national security adviser, General Mike Flynn. Trump may have tweeted himself into a corner by calling for Congress to investigate a 'wiretapping' that was part of an investigation into his Russian ties. They may have to ask what was the 'probable cause' for any secret court order. Perhaps Trump didn't see this implication. Or he just couldn't restrain himself. Or the President is simply working from the Stone playbook: 'Admit nothing; deny everything; launch counterattack.'

Paul Wood is a BBC correspondent and fellow of the New America foundation.

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Dumbing down the house

How the National Trust is spoiling its treasures

HARRY MOUNT

Osterley Park on the western fringes of London is a rare survival. A Robert Adam house, with splendid Adam interiors, it's still surrounded by its Elizabethan stables, an 18th-century landscape and classical follies — in the middle of urban Hounslow. Over the past decade, this Georgian gem has been increasingly despoiled and dumbed down by the National Trust.

The Trust is spending £356,000 to turn Osterley Park into a child-friendly leisure centre. As one of the huge posters strapped to the park fence says, the money will pay for 'A new skills area for young families providing kids with a safe place to learn to cycle and gain confidence'. Why splurge this vast amount of money on something you can already easily do on the paths at Osterley, i.e. bicycle? And why use pointless language like 'skills area' and 'safe place', instead of just calling it 'a place where you can learn to ride a bike'?

It's just a small part of the disastrous dumbing-down of the National Trust — all in the name of the Trust's great gods: accessibility, interpretation and storytelling. Everywhere you go now at Trust properties, you're never allowed a free thought without being bombarded by idiotic, history-free messages.

At Prior Park, Bath, one of the greatest mid-18th-century landscapes in the country, the grotto has been ruined by an enormous video screen, with a cartoon showing a Disneyfied vision of Prior Park. No facts are allowed to intervene in National Trust Kiddy World. Instead, the noticeboard outside the grotto asks you to 'Think about how each area of the garden makes you feel…'. By the elegant, urn-topped piers at the entrance to Prior Park, a massive purple-and-white poster asks you to 'Join the Cadbury Egg Hunt — Enjoy Easter Fun at the National Trust.'

Try walking round the garden at Kingston Lacy in Dorset and you can't move for blackboard signs propped against the trees, scrawled on in chalk, saying, 'Snowdrop-lovers are also known as galanthophiles.'

Open a kitchen cupboard in Standen, the arts-and-crafts house in West Sussex, and you're presented with a rolling pin, a mixing bowl and a copy of the *Daily Mirror* from 1942, with a photo of General Eisenhower on the cover. Why? Who keeps their newspaper in a kitchen cupboard? Move into the dining room and, on a bright spring lunchtime, the curtains are closed, while the table's set for dinner, with electric candles and tureens of plastic carrots and potatoes.

At Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire, at lunchtime, the table in the 18th-century parlour is set for tea, with a plastic fruitcake and a copy of the *Daily Telegraph* from 3 June 1953, the day after the Queen's Coronation. In a nearby chair, there's a copy of *Country Life* from February 1976, showing a snowy lakeside scene. So where are we supposed to be? Eighteenth-century Wimpole Hall, summer 1953 or winter 1976? We're never told.

These weird, empty stage sets are upper-class murder scenes — as if the Earl of Hardwicke has been whipped away from the tea table just as he's about to have a slice of cake, and strangled somewhere in the servants' quarters — or 'The Servant's Rooms', as they are called in the illiterate signs at Osterley.

You're never allowed a free thought without being bombarded by idiotic, history-free messages

The desire for fact-free interpretation is so great that the National Trust has even taken to writing rubbish on doors and blinds. At Standen, the butler's pantry door is painted with the banal words, 'After breakfast at eight I would go into the pantry and make sure that the silver was polished according to what they wanted that day.'

When National Trust signs aren't illiterate, they are patronising, as at Osterley: 'It was the scullery maid's job to empty and clean the chamber pots every morning. A very smelly job.' A tree stump at Hughenden has a sign next to it saying, 'Please do not climb on me.' At Cliveden in Buckinghamshire, work on the South Terrace is fitted around the bats' hibernation cycle: 'Can you believe everything has to be scheduled around this sleepy little chap and his friends?' reads the notice. If any facts do sneak into the signs, they have to be dumbed down, too. So the Kingston Lacy estate is described as once covering 'over 10,000 hectares (over 14,000 football pitches!)'

The overall effect is extremely depressing. You go away from National Trust houses weighed down with namby-pamby, childish, hectoring commands, constantly ordered to think in a particular way. Gone is the magical, mysterious, sublime aesthetic effect that unadulterated great houses and landscapes gently lay down on your soul. The moment beauty is explained, it loses its lustre.

The National Trust need to attract visitors but they don't have to destroy themselves in the process. Blenheim and Chatsworth are vast money-making operations, but they haven't turned themselves into kiddy parks to get punters through the door. They know that the beauty and history of their houses and parks are their own magnetic attraction.

In all the houses I've been to, I never saw a single child look at the dumbed-down notices, either. The Trust is destroying these places to no real purpose.

But that doesn't matter. Interpretation and storytelling have become ends in themselves under the current director-general, Helen Ghosh, and her predecessor, Fiona Reynolds. Helen Ghosh was the one who said National Trust houses had 'so much stuff' in them that, in 2015, furniture was temporarily removed from Ickworth's library to make way for beanbags. She is also the one who has turned the Trust into an eco-charity, declaring, 'The effect of extreme weather is the single largest threat to our conservation work.'

In the face of the green tide, curatorial scholarship has been discarded. I have been at a seminar where a senior National Trust employee declared that the reaction of someone who knows nothing about Stowe and its gardens is as valid as a leading architectural historian's reaction. I have heard the head of one of London's great museums say they were horrified that the Trust's Peckover House in Wisbech had no Polish agricultural workers visiting from nearby towns.

Some brave curators take a stand against the idiocy. One in the West Country, talking off the record to avoid reprisals, objected when asked to take a death mask off a wall because it was too 'gloomy' for the children. As the curator wisely told them, 'Children love death and gloom.' What's much more gloomy is when the greatest conservation charity in the world turns into a politicised leisure centre.

This is an extract from the forthcoming Charles Douglas-Home Memorial Lecture, to be delivered at Stationers' Hall in London on 15 March.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

America confronts Germany

From 'The revelation of Germany to the United States', 10 March 1917: Even if Mr Wilson stops short at his present stage, he has undeniably pulled the tiger's tail. It cannot be expected that the tiger will forget this… if we were Americans we should be very much alarmed. We think we should want to make sure of killing the man-eater while the chances are good.

ROD LIDDLE

What I did on International Women's Day

It was International Women's Day on Wednesday of this last week. The *Guardian* had enjoined its readers to send in reports of what they had done to advance the struggle, or how they had been in some way oppressed by men — perhaps raped, or talked to as if they were stupid, or looked at a little coldly when they squirted breast milk over fellow diners at The Ivy. I tried to think of something I had done for the cause but came up short, sad to say.

So instead I tried to show solidarity by spending a substantial amount of International Women's Day looking at a photograph of Emma Watson's tits. The actress is a radical feminist campaigner and has even been given some kind of role at the United Nations to advance the cause of female liberation across the globe. Presumably as part of this drive to stop men regarding women as sex objects, Emma got her tits out for *Vanity Fair*.

I have to say, I heartily approve. They seemed to me attractive and exquisitely English breasts. Far superior, in my opinion, to the bulbous, vulgar, artificially enhanced cantaloupes which adhere to many American actresses — especially those who appear in films towards the lower end of the market. Emma's were modest, but not too modest. They were not in your face, but at the same time nor were they invisible. They eschewed the rather plastic perkiness which you see in many women's breasts these days: in short, they were self-possessed and confident breasts, neither thrusting nor yet cowed.

I suspect that, had he studied them with the same diligence I studied them, even Professor Dumbledore would have got a bit excited. Except that we learned by about book nine of the Harry Potter series — *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Irredeemable Bollocks* or whatever it was called — that Dumbledore batted for the other side, so perhaps he wouldn't. The poor professor had his new sexual orientation stapled on to him by his creator J.K. Rowling when it was politically expedient to do so, and henceforth one imagined him lusting after Severus Snape or maybe some of the more amenable house elves. Anyway, well done to Emma, and congratulations on a fine pair of baps.

She has been criticised for undermining the cause by this latest photoshoot, but I do not see any contradiction, even if in the past she has said things about other female performers — such as Beyoncé — appearing in states of undress. Quite the contrary: I think the feminist cause would be advanced enormously if Emma went further and decided to show us all what my 11-year-old daughter refers to as her 'front bottom'. There are

I tried to think of something I had done to help advance the cause but came up short, sad to say

plenty of publications or websites which would be happy to accommodate her in this, many of them emanating from Russia.

Having exhausted myself with Emma's tits, I metaphorically hosed myself down by studying an article written by a man called Bill Giles, who was once very familiar to us as a weatherman on the telly. Bill existed in a time before that law got passed which said that every weatherman has to be gay and should talk to us as if we were five-year-old children. He turned up every evening looking kind of normal, and told us if it was going to rain tomorrow, or maybe if it was going to be a bit windy. He did not tell us that we ought to root out our Wellington boots or galoshes, or instruct us to stay at home or – during periods of pleasant sunshine — insist that if we dared venture outside at any point without adequate covering then the melanomas would multiply on our skin and eventually metastatise throughout our bodies, leading to painful chemotherapy followed by certain death. He did not tell us not to go to work or not to use the roads. He did not try to scare the shit out of us by insisting that Storm Hermione was on its way and millions of people would die, when all that happened later was that a mild breeze slightly discombobulated some but not all of our garden ornaments. Bill came from a better, more intelligent time. Bill and that man with the lugubrious moustache, Michael Fish. And that other one called John Kettley, who had a silly song written about him which reached number 21 in the charts in 1988.

President Trump adopts a softer tone

Giles wrote a piece which was effectively telling the weathermen to calm down a bit. It is absolutely true that they have turned into a legion of immaculately turned-out bedwetters, pirouetting beside their little maps and shrieking at us that the world is about to end. There are too many severe weather warnings, was the gist of Bill's argument. To the extent that really severe warnings go unheeded, because we have become inured to them all and so take no notice whatsoever.

This seems to me so obvious as to be virtually incontestable; even mediocre weather these days requires some sort of fatuous advice from the perennially panicked gobs-on-sticks. Perhaps it is a reaction to Michael Fish's famous failure to predict the Great Storm of 1987, which was a genuine extreme weather event. Or perhaps it is the Met Office attempting to shoehorn its climate-change ideology into every evening forecast: the weather is getting more and more extreme, a consequence of global warming. Either way, I wish they'd shut up. Giles is right. The weather forecasts have become a nightly hissy fit, an injunction to panic.

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Enemies of the people

Hardly a week goes by without someone applauding Thomas Carlyle's objection to democracy: 'I do not believe in the collective wisdom of individual ignorance.' In other words, infinitely wise politicians should tell the unenlightened mob what to think, not vice versa. Such feelings have been common ever since the Athenians invented direct democracy in 508 BC, which lasted till 323 BC and handed to citizens in the assembly (the *dêmos*) the power to decide all Athenian policy.

One anonymous writer described the *dêmos* as 'ignorant, ill-disciplined and immoral', ascribing it to their 'poverty and lack of education'. The philosopher Plato thought a state could be well governed only by Platonic philosophers. The historian Thucydides rated oligarchies less liable to revolution. Aristotle agreed that monarchy would be the best of all, if only someone of the required standard could be found.

So much for contemporary intellectual rumblings from the sidelines. It was the Romans who turned it into fake news. They venerated Greek cultural achievements but felt there was something dodgy about the *dêmos*. Cato the Elder took up the theme of the corrupt, dissolute Greek, and Cicero elaborated it, characterising the *dêmos* as an inflamed mob.

It was Plutarch, a prolific Greek writer of the 2nd century AD with a great admiration for Roman stability, who really put the boot in. His *Parallel Lives of Famous Greeks and Romans* commonly characterised the Greek *dêmos* as 'animals' — unreasoning, unruly, volatile and degenerate and determined out of envy to strike down any great leader. Influential beyond any other classical author, Plutarch dominated discussions in the West about the best form of government from the 16th to 19th centuries. His idea that rule by a *dêmos* could be nothing but mob rule became the kneejerk position, and still is.

In the howls about mob rule, however, Switzerland, virtually a direct democracy for some 600 years, somehow never features. Animals, obviously.

— *Peter Jones*

How to make drugs boring

A former police chief on fighting cannabis by legalising it

DANNY KRUGER

Bill Blair, the former police chief of Toronto, slides into his restaurant chair and twinkles at the waitress. He's 6ft 6in, white-haired now but perky. Bill has 120 years of policing behind him. He, his father and his grandfather all served 40 years in the force. Now he's an MP and he's legalising cannabis in Canada.

The restaurant has been here since early in Bill's father's time on the beat. It claims to have invented the bacon cheeseburger. We sit round a plastic-topped table and Bill tells me how he ended up pushing drug reform.

'When I left the force all three political parties wanted me to run for office. I've spent my life avoiding politics and the other parties reminded me why. They just wanted me for political kudos. But Trudeau was different. He asked my advice on policy.'

Justin Trudeau, the handsome young leader of Canada's Liberal party, wasn't supposed to win the 2015 election. The Liberals were third in the polls, in part because they had a bunch of wacky policies — such as cannabis legalisation. Then, largely because of Trudeau's telegenic appeal and political savvy, they won.

A few months before the election, Trudeau asked Bill how he should handle his party's position on cannabis. The old cop gave him this advice: don't make it about cannabis. 'I asked him why he wanted to do it. He said because he didn't want criminals preying on kids. I said, "That's the policy. That's what we need to do."'

Cannabis use among young people in Canada is the highest in the world. Almost a quarter of all teenagers are regularly getting high, and while most grow up and grow out of it, some develop mental health problems and many more screw up at school. So Bill's advice to Trudeau was to make the top priority 'keeping cannabis out of the hands of children'. After the election, he wrote the new government's policy paper setting out a path 'Toward the Legalisation, Regulation and Restriction of Access to Marijuana'.

How, I ask, is legalising cannabis going to restrict access to it? Bill explains: 'Cannabis use is endemic in our society. It's a massive market and we're simply not managing it. Legalisation for adults means we can regulate supply and put our law enforcement resources where we need them: policing the minors' market and going after the really dangerous drugs that kill people.'

Bill complains that across Canada the police have given up enforcing the law. In big cities the sale and possession of pot is effectively decriminalised, giving criminals an open and unregulated market. 'It's the worst of both worlds,' he says: lots of weed and lots of crime.

After lunch I walk a few hundred yards to see what he's talking about. Beside a vacant lot, a nondescript entrance gives into a small whitewashed room with huge glass

We do not need to ban everything bad. After all, the Victorians never prohibited alcohol

jars of weed on the shelves. I am proud to see one labelled UK Cheese, which turns out to be a revolting-smelling skunk made to a British recipe of incredible potency.

This is a 'dispensary' — illegal, but pretending to respectability by hanging an illuminated green chemist's cross amid the Bob Marley posters. Punters are required to fill in a form citing anxiety or back pain, which a girl with a ring through her septum efficiently files away before ladling out the weed. The police leave them alone; indeed last week some cops came round and warned the manager about a spate of robberies against dispensaries. You can see why that happens: shops like these can take $15,000 (£9,000) in cash a day (untaxed, of course).

I wander a few blocks north to the Village, Toronto's LGBT district. I'm looking for the city's biggest dispensary. I find it easily: a big green shopfront between two gay bars with a queue into the street. We shuffle along. A guy comes out looking cross.

'Sorry, we're not looking for anyone at the moment.'

'They're out of moonrocks,' he complains to the crowd. I learn that a moonrock is a marijuana bud dipped in cannabis oil and rolled in kief, the dust that hash is made of. When we get inside I see, through a fug of weed smoke, the big jars of grass and a range of exotic products: oils, liquids for vaping, all sorts of edibles. Most people are buying to take away. On low sofas at the back of the shop a dozen dismal stoners lie about smoking joints and pipes. It's like a Victorian opium den with ice hockey on the TV.

Canada is joining a global trend. From Uruguay to Portugal, countries are unilaterally withdrawing from the UN Convention on Drugs, which requires them to maintain the international prohibition. US states are doing it too: first Colorado, then Alaska, Oregon, Maine, Nevada and Washington have all opted to legalise. And last year, via a question on the ballot at the presidential election, Californians voted to join them. That's a population the size of Canada's and an economy the size of Britain's.

Legal cannabis is coming. But California, like Colorado before it, is the model of how not to do it. The focus in these libertarian frontier states is on freedom — and commerce. Colorado has deliberately turned itself into a tourist destination for potheads. Californians, in voting to legalise cannabis,

'Oh no — he's turned into a real boy.'

voted against an additional proposition to finance education and public health campaigns to encourage safe use. There will be billboards, TV advertising, Hollywood product placement. Bill Blair says, 'I call these the "Let's get the party started" places. I don't want a party in Canada. I want less people smoking cannabis — and I don't want to glamorise it so kids think it's cool.'

Canada's approach is to be as square as possible. There will be no advertising. Products will be sold in plain packages, with no sales alongside alcohol and tobacco. The greater the potency, the higher the taxes will be. It is, one must admit, all rather joyless. But after all, cannabis is joyless stuff. The Canadians are simply applying their national formula — liberal and boring at the same time — to a problem that deserves it.

Perhaps Canada's approach will appeal to our own dour Prime Minister. Cannabis use is endemic in British society too, including in the just-managing towns outside the metropolises which Theresa May wants to help. She has already signalled her concern about the crisis in young people's mental health. The illegal cannabis trade is a major contributor to this crisis. A brave step would be to commission a report looking at the impact on young people's wellbeing of drugs — including the effect of illegality, and the potential for a regulated market. As the campaigning journalist Mike Power recently suggested in a paper for the think-tank Volteface, this market could be entirely online, without Canada's horrid high-street dispensaries.

'All is permitted,' said St Paul — no liberal — 'but not all is beneficial.' We do not need to ban everything bad. After all, the Victorians never prohibited alcohol. They regulated it, taxed it and hedged it about with a culture of disapproval. In our own day, by the same means we have effectively stopped children getting access to booze, and reduced harmful adult use. Instead of the prohibition of cannabis we need an old Victorian virtue: temperance.

BAROMETER

Naming the weather

Former BBC weatherman Bill Giles has said he's fed up with storms being named.
— The practice of naming storms in the UK began with storm Abigail in October 2015, although some earlier storms, like Bertha in 2014, were the remnants of hurricanes already named in the US. The St Jude's Day storm of 2013 took its name from the saint's day on which it fell.
— The US National Hurricane Centre first named storms in 1950, when it started calling them by a phonetic alphabet: Able, Baker, Charlie etc. Three years later it switched to women's names, starting with Alice, a damp squib with winds not exceeding 60 mph. Its first male storm was Bob in 1979, a 65mph weakling.
— The practice began earlier in the Pacific; Australian meteorologist Clement Wragge was naming storms in the late 19th century.

Doing it for themselves

National Insurance contributions were to rise for the self-employed. Which industries have the most self-employment?

Construction	**24% of workers**
Financial/business activities	**23%**
Wholesale, retail and motor trade	**9.1%**
Transport, storage, communication	**6.9%**
Manufacturing	**6.3%**
Social work	**6.1%**
Hotels/restaurants	**3.3%**
Education/health	**2.5%**

Source: ONS

Diesel come, diesel go

Sales of diesel cars have fallen by 10 per cent following revelations about pollution. How did their numbers grow, in terms of a percentage of all cars sold?

UK		*EU*
6.4%	1990	**14%**
20%	1995	**23%**
14%	2000	**33%**
37%	2005	**50%**
46%	2010	**52%**
48%	2015	**52%**

Source: European Automobile Manufacturers' Association

Playing snap

William Hague called for Theresa May to call a snap general election this spring, which would be just two years after the last election. Eight general elections have been called after shorter periods:

1886	**6 months 24 days**
October 1974	**7 months 10 days**
1924	**10 months 23 days**
1831 and 1911	**11 months 16 days**
1923	**11 months 21 days**
1966	**17 months 15 days**
1951	**20 months 2 days**

Calendar clash

We lose something by planning our diaries too far ahead

JENNY COAD

On a Friday evening in May 2018 I am going to see the Broadway show *Hamilton*. We had to book the tickets two weeks ago. Fair enough, you might say — some theatre tickets sell out long before rehearsals have begun. Nonetheless, it seems a madly long way off and what if I forget about it between now and then?

This week I've tried to pencil in the cinema with a group of friends — no one was free until April — and Saturday supper with a couple: they couldn't do until July.

This is far from unusual. My diary tends to be filled weeks in advance and there is little room for unexpected pleasures without a shamefaced untangling of best-laid plans. Most of us are masters at unpicking things that sounded like a nice idea at the time. The builder is in. The children are poorly. I'm stuck at work.

All of which makes me wonder if we are over-organising our lives for no good reason at all. Being busy for the sake of it. Whatever happened to spontaneity? Even free time has become a thing we cling to, written in bold, desperate caps: KEEP FREE.

When was the last time a friend phoned at teatime and changed the course of your evening? Well, that would have been so nice, but you spent days filling in an online doodle calendar some weeks ago and you're committed that night, so sorry.

'Fancy a drink after work?' 'Love to, but are you around three weeks on Friday?'

It is rare to leave weekends entirely clear simply to take advantage of whatever might come your way. And if you do, it might be because you want to do nothing at all.

We should give our diaries and ourselves a break. Of course plans have to be made, dates marked, babysitters booked and diaries co-ordinated. My sister and boyfriend are both junior doctors, working to constantly changing rotas with weird hours and weekend shifts. If we didn't carve space out in advance, I might not see them at all.

Quietly-made plans are drip-fed to my boyfriend, who has a fear of overfilled weekends. I tell him if we don't pin down anything we won't be able to eat in that restaurant, see a talked-about exhibition before it ends, watch the latest film in our local cinema or catch up with equally busy friends.

It's exhausting. And it seems to be a distinctly British affliction.

A friend who moved to Santiago in Chile last year doesn't know what she is doing from one week to the next. Her South American friends laugh if she tries to corral them into a social commitment. 'If I organise something a week ahead of time or even a few days ahead, people think I'm crazy. They don't seem to have their lives planned out the way we do at home. "What if you agree to go for dinner and then, on that day, you don't fancy it?" they ask.' Well, quite. But the cult of cancelling is another topic entirely.

Is she short of things to do, people to see, places to go? Not at all — she's having the time of her life. And I don't think that's just

When was the last time a friend phoned at teatime and changed the course of your evening?

down to sunshine and pisco sours. It's the sense of liberation and opportunity.

An Italian colleague who moved to London from Sicily told me in amazement that she has to book playdates for her children weeks in advance. 'I didn't understand it at first,' she shrugged.

We don't always regret our well-made plans. But I can't help feeling that in living like this we are missing out. As Mr Knightley exclaims to Emma, who is disappointed not to be able to count on his presence at the spring ball: 'Why not seize the pleasure at once? How often is happiness destroyed by preparation, foolish preparation!'

Spontaneity is exciting. Vanessa Bell drew her friends Molly MacCarthy and Marjorie Strachey at what they referred to as 'spontaneous play'. The resulting photographs are on display at the Vanessa Bell retrospective in Dulwich Picture Gallery. Being models, they look graceful and, being naked, very unconstrained.

That sort of spontaneity is not for everyone, of course. The Bloomsbury set were nonconformist spirits leading what most of us would consider wild lives. But maybe we could take a cue from their approach and relax our feverish timetables a touch. So ditch the list of engagements, plan to plan less, and let's do something in August.

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SYDNEY NOTEBOOK

Tom Switzer

The other day, I went to a boozy barbecue near Sydney's northern beaches. The guests were all political mates of mine and we chatted about those insurgent populists who threaten to upend established conservative parties across the globe: Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders, Beppe Grillo and, of course, Pauline Hanson — Australia's version of all four. We put our wide-ranging discussion about domestic politics in an international context. But it was not until the next morning that I realised that we had not even talked about Malcolm Turnbull: he's our fourth prime minister in four years, who was famous in the UK in the 1980s as the defence lawyer in the *Spycatcher* case.

In my hungover state, I texted my friends and asked them if they noticed anything odd about the night before. No one even brought up Turnbull. My BBQ buddies are no focus group: we're just a bunch of conservative journalists, academics and businessmen, who usually vote for the centre-right Liberal party (where the word 'liberal' still means more or less what it meant in the 19th century). Still, it's hard not to conclude that Turnbull, like another Tory 'moderniser', David Cameron, is passé. He is the moment that has passed into history.

It was not supposed to be like this. When Turnbull backstabbed his predecessor Tony Abbott in a Liberal party coup 18 months ago, the media herd declared 'hallelujah!' The 62-year-old climate enthusiast and former merchant banker, we were told, would transform Australia into a beacon of progressiveness. At the time, I remember attending one of those swanky dinner parties in metropolitan Melbourne where eyes lit up at the mere mention of Malcolm. There was a real sense of excitement. In an echo of Harold Macmillan's famous declaration that Brits had 'never had it so good', Turnbull declared: 'There's never been a more exciting time to be an Australian.' But the trouble for any politician exciting high expectations is that they can almost never be fulfilled. Once he was the 'it' man; everyone wanted to know Malcolm or be seen with him, especially in his posh Sydney electoral district, Wentworth (our equivalent of Notting Hill in west London). These days, if you were at the pub and saw Turnbull waltzing in, you'd look the other way, hoping not to catch his eye.

I've known Turnbull since 2006, when he was a rising star in John Howard's government. Back then, my wife Sarah was his press secretary, and it is fair to say we all got on reasonably well. In my experience, he can discourse on anything from demography and Sino-American relations to classical history and the Jewish diaspora. He is also a decent chap. Malcolm and his wife, Lucy, have turned their harbourside mansion into a very pleasant and lovely place. I am among many writers who have been dinner guests there. However, as can be the case with genuinely decent people, Turnbull has not been very effective at his job. Contradicting himself almost every week, he has stood fast in indecision. He has been consistently indecisive.

In the political-loser stakes, Turnbull has form. As the leading republican activist in 1999, he failed to win the referendum to ditch the monarchy, even though polls had supported constitutional change. When he was opposition leader a decade later, in 2009, ordinary Australians shrugged their shoulders with a profound lack of interest. Last winter, as the newly installed PM, he opted for a laggard election campaign that just drove about a million conservatives away from the party of Robert Menzies. We are only in March, but already his government has lost a prominent senator, who has created his own break-away conservative party, and there is talk of other lawmakers defecting to fringe right-wing groups. Meanwhile, the end of the mining boom means higher deficits as far as the eye can see. Labor — a party that barely registered a pulse a few years ago — is leading the government by as much as ten points. As a result, authority is draining away from Turnbull as if from an open wound.

The spectre of Pauline Hanson's One Nation has returned to haunt Australian politics. Two decades ago, the former fish-and-chip shop owner shocked the nation with her parliamentary maiden address complaining about the alleged dangers of Asian immigrants. She was immediately given the pariah treatment. But now she is back, her party controlling the balance of power in the parliament's upper house.

My BBQ mates and I are not really enamoured by Hanson, whom I've never met. But we understand why she attracts many folks, from Queensland to Western Australia, who deplore both major parties. Above all else, her resurgence represents a backlash against political correctness and identity politics. For instance, our leaders, bureaucracies and public broadcasters have long played down the problems posed by radical elements within Islamic communities, whereas many ordinary Australians recognise that a significant group of Muslims is much more resistant to integration into western society than other ethnic or religious groups. For now, Hanson is filling a void. As a result, she doles out the red meat to hungry conservatives who are turning away from Turnbull in droves.

Tom Switzer is a presenter on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Radio National.

MARY WAKEFIELD

What will you do in the gene-editing revolution?

The only time I ever saw a wolf in the wild, a small one, I was so frightened that I closed my eyes. It was a useful insight into the depths of my own cowardice.

Every day, with each new story about the exciting breakthroughs we're making in genetic engineering, I feel that same shameful urge to shut my eyes.

Far faster than anybody thought, we're working out the genes responsible for all manner of traits in all creatures great and small. Far more easily than anyone expected, we've moved from standard gene therapies to figuring out how to actually edit our own DNA, to ferret around inside living cells, snipping out duff genes and replacing them.

Until recently it was mostly mice at (or under) the cutting edge of this new technology. But late last year, just as everyone in the West was agreeing that human trials were a mistake, China piped up and announced that it had injected 'edited' genes into a cancer sufferer. Then America joined in. The University of Pennsylvania said that it was waiting for the final say-so on a trial which will edit the T-cells of cancer patients (funded, oddly, by Facebook's Sean Parker). The race is on. The science press have begun to talk about a new moonshot, another great international competition, this time between the US and China.

Edited humans! It's all happening at a dizzying pace. But it's this pace which requires us to stay alert. All of us, even those who recoil at the thought of genetic tinkering. The more I read, the more I think that we kooks and God-botherers, luddites and nonagenarians have got to start paying attention, because gene-editing will in the end affect all of us, and it's going to take our collective and varied wits to figure out what to do.

The Spectator reported on the whole affair in a cover story about this time last year, and introduced us to the discovery that's made this gene revolution possible: Crispr Cas-9. Crispr stands for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (meaning weird sections of seemingly repeated genes) and in its normal life it's a tool evolved by bacteria to use in their age-old war with virus-kind. Clever bacteria can snip out sections of hostile virus DNA and store them between sections of their own DNA (the palindromic repeats) so as better to know the enemy next time. It's this search-and-snip function that scientists have repurposed and reprogrammed — that lets us doctor all DNA.

The great worry of this magazine last spring was that gene-editing would mean the return of eugenics: that the future rich would buy all manner of genetic upgrades for their progeny, leaving poorer kids in a lower caste. This anxiety is widely shared but possibly misplaced.

Matt Ridley pointed out a few years ago, when Crispr first hit the press, that real eugenics is state-sponsored, coerced. Back in the bad old days, sterilisation programmes were enforced by governments who deemed only certain people worthy of breeding. The 21st-century rich may well pay to be Crispr's first guinea pigs, but if we all pay attention and hold our governments to account, cheap and safe gene therapy can be available to everyone. This fear of eugenics seems to me dramatically outweighed by the hope for people with single-gene disorders such as Duchenne muscular dystrophy, sickle-cell anaemia, cystic fibrosis, and for cancer sufferers. Who hasn't longed for a magic cure for poor friends and family with cancer? And in the end, will we really want to design our young? Do we want children much brighter, say, than ourselves? I look at my own fat, bossy baby and I think quite certainly not.

We can't stop this race and we shouldn't. But that doesn't mean we can just sit back and watch the show

If designer babies aren't the biggest worry, I'm afraid there's still no lapsing back into a happy ignorance. The real danger of gene-editing comes when we edit not just a living thing's DNA but its 'germ line' too, meaning that the changes we made can be inherited. As part of our great leap forward in genetics, we've invented a way of altering the basic rules of heritability. We can use Crispr not just to make changes to DNA but to 'drive' those changes through a species, dramatically upping the usual odds that they'll be passed on. We can become, in other words, the authors of evolution.

It's easy to see the upside. The Gates Foundation has invested tens of millions in a team at Imperial College London called Target Malaria, which has already succeeded in editing the genes of malaria-carrying mosquitos to make them infertile. If we released these edited mosquitos into the wild, if the mosquito population changed for ever, millions of lives could be saved. We could edit all manner of disease-carrying nasties: rats that spread fevers and plagues, mice that carry Lyme's disease. But what would be the effect on the environment? Gene drives affect whole communities in ways that are impossible to predict. Would the animals that munch mice die out, too? Would it unbalance the ecosystem? As much modelling as you do, it's hard to tell.

It's far too late for finger-wagging or dark talk of 'playing God'. We can't stop this race and we shouldn't, given the potential it has to relieve awful suffering. We believers have to accept that God doesn't cower in the dark spaces still undiscovered by science, growling when men in lab coats comes too close. If He exists, he's bound up in it all, in evolution blind or designed. But that doesn't mean we can just sit back and watch the show.

Robert Oppenheimer, inventor of the atomic bomb, said when testifying in his defence at a security hearing in the 1950s: it is my judgment in these things that when you (scientists) see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success.

In a free society, scientists should be free to discover and explore, but we have to educate ourselves about what they're discovering and exploring, or else our objections carry no weight. This time our world is at stake and the future of all species, including our own. We have to wake up.

JAMES DELINGPOLE

‘Cash for ash’ is one green scam among many

Toffs are like jackals: always quick to sniff out new carrion. I remember a few years back one florid aristo boasting what obscene amounts of money he was saving on his heating bills thanks to a brilliant new government scheme to incentivise wood-burning. ‘Probably no use to you —your house isn’t big enough,’ he said, pityingly. Then he went on to tell me about the solar array on his estate. ‘Makes perfect sense if you’ve got a few acres spare.’

But I haven’t told you the worst of it. The worst was that my friend felt really virtuous. Some might say that here was another well-heeled scrounger with a massive sense of entitlement raking in tens of thousands in subsidies for sitting on his fat arse. But as he saw it, he was doing his bit to save the planet. In fact, he went on to indicate — and I’m not making this up — that he considered himself a better person than me because all I did was write articles advocating for selfish, greedy causes like unfettered free markets, whereas he was making a real difference.

My toff friend, it goes without saying, was a massive fan of the kinder, gentler Conservatism of David Cameron. So, no doubt, are many other landowners who have benefited from the feed-in tariffs and other subsidy schemes that Dave’s ‘greenest government ever’ used to incentivise renewable energy. But I’m not. I think it was a disgraceful scam, an inexcusable waste of public money, and a grotesque, cynical and immoral wealth transfer from the poor to the establishment elite, with poisonous consequences we will be ruing for many years to come.

What’s happening now in Northern Ireland is but the latest example. There has been a power grab at Stormont, with the majority Democratic Unionist Party deposed and the grisly Sinn Fein in the ascendant, making mischief. The excuse being milked by Sinn Fein is a massive scandal in which millions of pounds have been squandered on one of the Cameron coalition’s green schemes, the Renewable Heat Incentive.

The person being blamed is DUP leader and Northern Ireland First Minister Arlene Foster who, for her sins, was the province’s economy minister at the time the RHI scheme was brought in. For some reason which no one has been able to explain, her department forgot to include capping controls, which meant the amount claimable under the scheme was limitless.

And what a great deal it offered. For every pound spent on ‘renewable’ wood fuel, the Northern Ireland government would pay you back £1.60. Even allowing for the initial capital costs of installing your eco-friendly wood-burning boiler, the potential returns were huge: at least £25,000 per boiler, per year — guaranteed, inflation-indexed for 20 years. Few questions were asked about the purpose of these boilers, which meant that

If you pay people a Porsche a year to burn vast quantities of wood in disused buildings, that is what people will do

canny farmers and businessmen could install them in previously unheated outbuildings and rake in the cash. Northern Ireland’s main Porsche, Maserati and Jaguar dealer, it’s said, has never seen such happy times.

Meanwhile, Stormont is skint: an already straitened budget which might have been spent on healthcare or education is now having to be spent on RHI payment obligations of around £480 million. The full cost of the scheme is £1.3 billion over 20 years at current prices, the bulk being absorbed by Westminster taxpayers.

But while focusing on the local incompetence, corruption and malfeasance of the ‘cash for ash’ scandal, we’re in danger of ignoring the bigger picture. This wasn’t a random accident of hickish local government. It was the predictable result of a foolish scheme which incentivised precisely this kind of greedy and immoral behaviour.

‘Now, now, you know that’s your brother’s daddy. And he’s your sister’s daddy. Your daddy will visit us tomorrow.’

If you pay people a Porsche a year to burn vast quantities of wood in disused buildings, then that is what people will do. And there’s no point asking the Energy and Climate Change Secretary who introduced the RHI scheme what he now thinks of its merits . That’s because in his lucrative new life as an ex-MP, Chris Huhne is doing very nicely, thank you, raking it in as European chairman of Zilkha Biomass, a US company which ships wood pellets across the Atlantic for us to burn in our eco-friendly power stations and boilers.

Thanks to the surge in demand caused by RHI, more wood is being burned in Britain than at any time since the industrial revolution — resulting in swaths of woodland being cut down, such as Ryton Wood in Warwickshire, where 50 mature oaks, some 300 years old, were felled for ‘sustainable’ fuel. It has caused similar conservation issues in America, where deciduous forests are being felled to provide fuel for power stations such as Drax. Is that really eco-friendly?

And ‘cash for ash’ is just one renewables scandal among many. There’s also what journalist David Rose christened the ‘great green guzzler’ con, whereby farms have been paid £216 million in subsidies for anaerobic digesters responsible for a number of environmental disasters, including one incident last year which poisoned an eight-mile stretch of the River Teifi in Wales, killing more than 1,000 fish on a well-loved salmon and trout beat. Can you imagine the outcry if a fossil fuel power station had done that much damage?

Over the next six years, the blogger Paul Homewood has calculated, environmental levies are going to cost the UK £65 billion — nearly £10 billion more than we’ve earmarked for HS2. Yet because it’s ‘green’ — so obviously good — this outrageous waste of taxpayers’ money has almost never been subjected to proper scrutiny. Perhaps it’s time Theresa May showed that there’s more to her than just ‘Brexit means Brexit’ and set about undoing the damage part-created by her dismally useless husky-hugging predecessor.


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On Scottish independence

Sir: Alex Massie writes of the order permitting a second Scottish independence referendum: 'Having granted such an order in 2014, it will be difficult to refuse Mrs Sturgeon's demand for another' ('Back into battle', 4 March). Surely that is precisely why Mrs May should refuse another? It was the SNP who described the 2014 vote as a chance in a lifetime.

The only thing way in which Brexit could have changed matters is if it had been a fundamental and unforeseeable upset. Alex Massie, from this and his previous writings, clearly believes it was. But the Conservatives, at the time of the Scottish vote, had promised to hold a Brexit referendum if they won the 2015 general election, so Brexit was certainly on the cards. Furthermore, Mrs Sturgeon had been told that if Scotland left the UK, it would have to reapply if it wished to rejoin the EU and accept the single currency. It did not seem to trouble her then.

Tim Hedges
Panicale, Italy

Vote for continuity

Sir: In last week's piece on Sturgeon and Indyref 2, Alex Massie seems to have overlooked the fact that a million Scots opted for Brexit in the EU referendum. That is a quarter of the entire Scottish electorate. Nor should anyone assume that the 1.6 million who voted to remain in the EU were the foot soldiers in the van of a secessionist movement. On the contrary, most probably voted for reasons of continuity within both the UK and the EU. The two million Scottish voters who voted 'No' to independence in 2014 make that sufficiently clear.

Donald Thomson
Aberdeen

A Spectator reader writes…

Sir: I do wish Matthew Parris wouldn't address '*Spectator* readers' as if we were all Leave zealots (4 March). I voted to remain in the EU, and I think Brexit could be a disaster, but I still subscribe to and read your magazine because it provides different points of view. What makes me doubt my decision in the referendum is the throbbing apoplexy of others on my side. I have admired Parris's journalism for many years, but fear he is becoming unhinged on this matter. The gracious tone of your editorial in the same issue ('Carry on, Major') was a welcome contrast.

Perhaps Matthew is reading angry online comments below his articles and taking those commentators as his audience. If so, he's rash. Many of us *Spectator* readers can still read and write without foaming.

Daniel Moss
Kent

Invested in state schools

Sir: Charles Moore (Notes, 4 March) takes issue with Michael Gove for seeking to put VAT on school fees and accuses him of having 'a chip on his shoulder'.

Well let me share Mr Gove's chip. The UK has some of the best private schools in the world, appreciated by the 7 per cent of parents able to afford the vast fees. At the other end of the spectrum, we have 93 per cent who cannot afford the fees and suffer patchy 'free' education in the state sector.

This folly will continue as long as the most influential people who dominate the UK establishment, particularly those involved in commerce, politics, the law and the media, have no direct interest in improving standards in the state sector. Why? Because usually their children aren't involved. Only when those with influence and campaigning skills are involved in state education will standards rise. So it is in the national interest that everyone should be encouraged to send our children to state schools. This can best be done by making private education so costly that the fees can only be afforded by the really super-rich. VAT-exempt charitable status has to go.

Tom Benyon
Bladon, Oxfordshire

Rod's social history

Sir: I'm intrigued as to why Rod Liddle (4 March) thinks the now faltering elite has lasted 'since about 1985'. What made him alight on that particular year? Is it something to do with the rise of David Owen and the SDP? The beginning of *EastEnders*? The start of Aids in Britain? Or did he just pick a year in the middle of the 1980s?

Perhaps 1985 was the year when Rod Liddle himself, then working as a Labour speechwriter, first thought of himself as a voice to be reckoned with? We always confuse the ups and downs of establishments and insurgencies with our own highs and lows. For instance, I think Britain's social decay began in 1976, when I was turned away from a Rolling Stones concert.

Catherine Mannering
Oxfordshire

Yes to Queen Camilla

Sir: Melanie McDonagh's argument against the Duchess of Cornwall becoming queen is flawed on every level ('Against Queen Camilla', 25 February). Her attempt to cite Prince Albert and Prince Philip as precedents as consorts fails on the simple point that neither of them could be crowned king, whereas the wife of every king of England has been a queen. Under British law, wives take the rank and status of their husbands, which means when Prince Charles becomes king, the duchess should indeed become queen.

Furthermore, Melanie's argument that occupying a throne somehow validates adultery ignores the fact that the Duchess has been happily married to the Prince for 12 years now, whereas there have been literally dozens of adulterers who have sat on the throne over the centuries while actually committing the sin.

As a Roman Catholic, Melanie should believe in the power of redemption, and rejoice that in this case the institution of marriage has won out. When the sad but inevitable day dawns, we should be happy to cry 'God save Queen Camilla!'

Andrew Roberts
London SW1

Islamic retrogression

Sir: I enjoyed Christopher De Bellaigue's advocacy of an 'Islamic Enlightenment' during the 19th century ('Islam's lost Enlightenment', 25 February), yet remain unconvinced about the bigger picture. I agree that some westernised Muslims saw the value of buying in steamships, electric telegraphs, constitutional politics, and female education, but as none of these had any indigenous Islamic roots, they failed to find fertile soil.

Conversely, in the 18th century in the West, experimental science, libertarian politics, steam engines, Methodism and romantic poetry were homegrown products, and hence easily absorbed into an evolving cultural mainstream.

I would argue that since the Iranian revolution of 1979, Islam has been actively in the throes of a reformation, or a return to cultural roots. But unlike the European Reformation of the 16th century, this did not involve a return to figures like St Peter, St Paul and the Christian Gospel Evangelists. Rather, it meant a return to the Holy Wars of conversion unleashed by the Prophet Mohammed after AD 622.

Dr Allan Chapman
Wadham College, Oxford

Shoot the owners

Sir: Camilla Swift's otherwise excellent piece on clueless dog owners ('Flock horror', 4 March) omits to mention the scourge of the professional dog walker. Two or three of these descend on our neck of the woods most mornings with anything up to eight dogs each, and allow them to roam with impunity. One local sheep farmer has lost several lambs already this year due to his ewes self-aborting after being chased by dogs, causing distress to the sheep and financial loss to the farmer.

May I suggest the 1971 Animals Act be amended to allow farmers to shoot the owners as well as the dogs?

Martin Allen
Eastcombe, Gloucestershire

Trouble in Kenya

Sir: As a fellow farmer, albeit in the UK, I wonder how your 'Wild Life' correspondent Aidan Hartley is surviving the dangerous times in Kenya. I fear for his safety, being very aware that the current government appears neglectful of its white residents and that some native tribes are openly hostile, especially towards those who farm, help feed the local population and contribute to the country's economy.

I have read that the white settlers in East Africa, many of British descent who have devoted their lives to help African states emerge from their colonial past, are being forced off their holdings with no regard for the rule of law, nor for the support they give to their loyal workforces. Many of these settlers previously gave great service to our Commonwealth alongside native citizens and they do not deserve to be ignored in their hour of danger. One Zimbabwe is one too many — are we to condone what is happening in Kenya by looking the other way?

Marshall Taylor
Taunton, Somerset

Wetherspoons vs brewers

Sir: Henry Jeffreys (Notes On, 25 February) misses the point on Wetherspoons — or 'Spoons' as he affectionately calls it. The whole concept of the business is to screw the brewer down to almost unprofitable margins.

I have sympathy for the students and old men he describes as typical clientele, but not much with the pre-work Post Office drinkers, or girls guzzling cheap wine.

Of course, the depressing cheap hell of Wetherspoons is partly a result of excessively greedy alcohol taxation here the UK — 50p a pint, compared with only 4p in Germany. Mr Jeffreys obviously enjoys good beer. Yet his pursuit and glorification of Wetherspoons is damaging to the British brewing industry. Really good beer is worth paying for.

David Gladwin
Black Isle, Ross-shire

Serious fun

Sir: Henry Jeffreys is right to say Wetherspoons has 'colourful characters'. In the Railway in Putney on a recent Saturday, I think I overheard people having sex in the toilet cubicle next to me. That or they were ingesting large amounts of illegal substances — I can't be certain. On another occasion, a woman threw a pint glass at my head because I asked her group to be quiet.

I don't report this disapprovingly. I keep going back every weekend: the cheapness of the beer makes the Railway fun.

Matthew Salt
London SW15

Nature's soundtrack

Sir: It would be good if Tim Martin, the 'jovial boss' of the music-free pubs (Letters, 4 March), could take charge of the television productions in this country. We then might be free from the dreadful noise that masks bird and animal sounds in nature documentaries, which obscures speech in plays and frustrates the intelligence in TV dramas.

Martin Bloomfield
Kingston, Surrey

Fashionable mumbling

Sir: Peter Jones, as usual, is spot on when he writes of mumbling becoming fashionable (Ancient and Modern, 4 March). I've been complaining for years that the younger generation hasn't been taught to enunciate clearly. When I was in school (I'm 83 now), we had to read aloud in class and declaim poetry learnt by heart.

I searched Google for hearing aid sales and saw this headline: 'Hearing Aid Unit Sales Grow by 10% in Q2 of 2016'. Am I being ingenuous in seeing a connection?

Flora Selwyn
St Andrews, Fife

WRITE TO US

The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP
letters@spectator.co.uk

New European giants? Standard-Aberdeen looks a better bet than Peugeot-Vauxhall

Budget week also turned out to be a week of notable deals. PSA, French owner of Peugeot and Citroën, went ahead with its €2.2 billion takeover of Vauxhall and Opel from General Motors, creating 'a new European giant to challenge Volkswagen', according to the spin, and new fears for those who foresee post-Brexit attrition of the British motor industry. By way of reassurance, PSA boss Carlos Tavares said a hard Brexit is an 'opportunity' — to beef up the domestic supply chain while reducing component imports from the EU — and that 'I trust Vauxhall workers' to improve their productivity. That last bit sounded to me more like a threat to their jobs.

Then came the agreed merger of Aberdeen Asset Management and Edinburgh-based Standard Life to create what really will be a European giant of the investment sector, with £660 billion under management. Chaired by wily Whitehall veteran Sir Gerry Grimstone, Standard Life has moved a long way from its 19th-century origins but steered a steady course since its 2006 demutualisation. Emerging markets specialist Aberdeen, by contrast, is the mercurial creation of entrepreneur Martin Gilbert, and has had more downs than ups in recent years. Together, even after cost-saving job cuts, they will form the pre-eminent financial institution north of the border — but don't expect them to move into the space left by Scottish banks that formerly competed for that title. One of Standard Life's few strategic mishaps was to start a bank of its own in 1998; the unhappy venture was sold a decade later to Barclays, which demolished it.

Taxing the gig economy

As for the Budget, what caught my eye was the Chancellor's move to claw bigger National Insurance contributions from the growing multitude of self-employed, as a step towards catching the so-called 'gig economy' in the tax net. There's a big issue here: there are now five million of us self-employed (and almost a million using 'single-person companies') all paying less tax and NI than we might have done if we were employed to do much the same work in the old-fashioned way. Meanwhile, there's huge growth in Airbnb lettings, parking-space rentals and other ways of monetising personal assets and skills — largely outside the purview of HMRC.

You might argue that the self-employed enjoy less security than the employed, so it's fair they contribute less; you might argue that the 'sharing economy' is a nifty pocket-money source for hard-pressed families, and that tax grabs will swiftly kill it. But revenue-starved Chancellor Hammond will retort that all income and commerce, however novel in form, must be taxed unless specifically exempted, otherwise government can't make ends meet: tax should keep pace with changing patterns of life and technology. Thus Microsoft founder Bill Gates recently proposed that if robots are replacing humans in business, then companies operating robots should pay income tax on their behalf. Back in 1991, Chancellor Norman Lamont had an even better idea, though at the time it was scorned: a tax on mobile phones. Think what a massive revenue earner that would have been by now.

Set to self-destruct?

Overvalued dotcom stocks hardly make headlines these days. But the New York debut of Snap Inc — parent of Snapchat, the social media site designed to make embarrassing selfies self-destruct — really wins a coconut. Launched at $17, the shares traded up to $29, giving a valuation of $30 billion which, as one US commentator observed, made Facebook, Amazon and Google's parent Alphabet look like 'bargain-basement value stocks'. Snapchat has no obvious prospect of breaking into profit, but in dotcom la-la land, analysts look instead at the ratio of market value to sales: for Snapchat that ratio turns out to be six times higher than Facebook's. Another measure is market value per user, of which Snapchat claims 158 million; on that basis, the valuation is also six times what Facebook paid for the rival Instagram site in 2012.

Doubters say Snapchat could rapidly be overtaken by the next social media fad and that its potential growth in user numbers is limited by demographics: there just aren't enough 'millennials' out there with nothing better to do. Even if it endures, it may go the way of Twitter — which has priceless daily publicity from the White House but mounting losses and a share price stuck far below its 2013 flotation level. What's more, Snap Inc's public shares carry no voting rights, so investors have no say in its future. In fact the whole thing looks mad. But what do I know of the youth of today — two of whom, Snapchat founders Evan Spiegel, 26, and Bobby Murphy, 28, are now worth $4 billion each?

Picture that

Another eye-catcher, not least for the gratuitous picture opportunities it offered, was the sale of Agent Provocateur to a group led by Sports Direct tycoon Mike Ashley. But the terms of this one are 'preposterous', or so said the lingerie brand's founder, Joe Corré. Well, yes — if for a horrible moment you imagine portly Ashley wearing the Provocateur product, in the way that he likes to be seen wearing the Newcastle United strip he also sells.

Ashley's name is enough to taint any deal these days, whatever he's wearing, but in fact the villain of this one appears to be the seller, 3i, rather than the buyer, Four Marketing, of which Ashley holds 25 per cent. 3i is a private equity firm, formerly owned by the high-street banks, that has latterly acquired what I have called 'a shark-like reputation'. In this case it deployed a device called a 'pre-pack administration', an insolvency scheme that allows a failing business's assets to be sold while leaving unpaid its debts to suppliers, banks and the taxman. 'A phenomenal swath of litigation' is bound to follow, growls Corré. But Ashley and his pals are just snapping up 3i's bargain lingerie offer.

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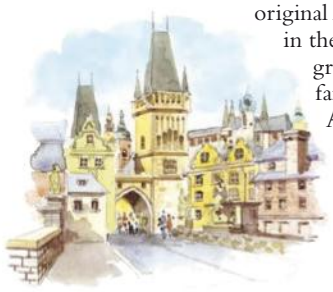

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FRENCH REVOLUTION: COULD IT BE PRESIDENT LE PEN?

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Is France on the brink of a political revolution? Marine Le Pen, leader of the Front National, is leading the polls for the first round of the French presidential election on 23 April. Another outsider, Emmanuel Macron, could be the only person standing between her and the Élysée Palace. A Le Pen victory, however unlikely, would be a political earthquake that could topple the European Union. Should we welcome a shake-up in the cradle of European revolutions?

MELISSA BELL
CNN Paris correspondent

DOMINIQUE MOÏSI
Political scientist and writer

ROBERT TOMBS
Professor of French history at Cambridge

ANNE-ÉLISABETH MOUTET
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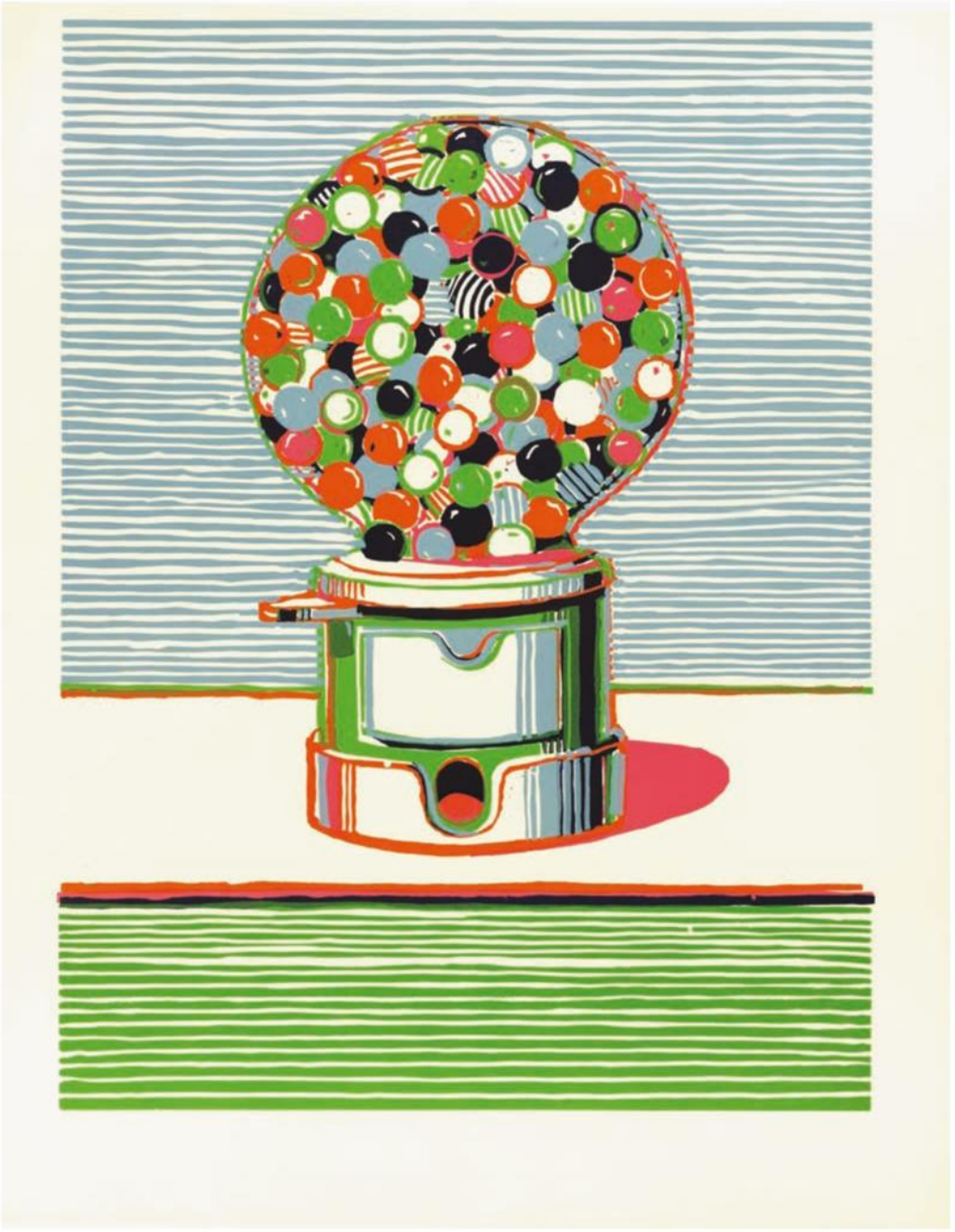
THE SPECTATOR

BOOKS & ARTS

Peter Carty is appalled by the barbarity of daily life in Raqqa
Clare Mulley salutes the lonely courage of female SOE agents in occupied France
Cressida Connolly feels a better person for reading Julia Samuel's book on grief
Richard Bratby wishes opera houses staged more Gilbert & Sullivan
Lloyd Evans is surprised to find Elsinore looking like a Travelodge
Rod Liddle used to love working-class nihilists Sleaford Mods – no longer



'Gumball Machine', 1970, by Wayne Thiebaud
Stephen Bayley — p42

BOOKS

Back with a vengeance

Jane Carlyle found comfort in her miserable marriage by 'splashing off' whatever was on her mind in letters to friends – which became famous in her own lifetime, says *Frances Wilson*

Jane Welsh Carlyle and Her Victorian World: A Story of Love, Work, Friendship and Marriage
by Kathy Chamberlain
Duckworth, £25, pp. 384

One hour in No. 5 Cheyne Row, Virginia Woolf observed, will tell you more about the Carlyles than all the biographies. The house lived in by Thomas and Jane Carlyle from 1834 until their respective deaths, and now owned by the National Trust, was one of the great battlegrounds of domestic history. Here Jane warred against bedbugs and coal dust and her husband's obsession with the vast and unstoppable Lady Harriet Ashburton (there were three people in her marriage), and Carlyle warred against the intrusions of the outside world. While next door's rooster kept him awake at night, by day, as Jane wrote in one of her peerless letters, he was disturbed by

> men, women, children, omnibuses, carriages, glass coaches, street coaches, wagons, carts, dog-carts, steeple bells, doorbells, gentleman raps, twopenny-post-raps and footmen-showers-of raps.

Not to mention the dutiful piano-practising of the girl in the adjacent house, the racket of hawkers, organ-grinders and washerwomen, and the hourly chiming of the old Chelsea clock. No man could write under these conditions, and soundproofing his study made little difference.

Thomas Carlyle is now more famous for his feisty wife than his life of Frederick the Great, and observers of their marriage disagree over who was the most long-suffering. For some, he was the victim of a shrew who mockingly recorded his every gesture; for others she was the victim of a brute who failed to see her brilliance. 'Being married to him', said Jane's friend Anna Jameson — having just braved the consequences of interrupting the sage in one of his monologues — must be 'something next worse to being married to Satan himself'. Samuel Butler refused to take sides. 'It was very good of God to let Carlyle and Mrs Carlyle marry one another,' he quipped, 'and so make only two people miserable and not four.' Their quarrels might have been spared, thought Woolf as she toured the house, had the Carlyles possessed hot and cold running water. Domestic tensions are

'Being married to Thomas Carlyle must be something next worse to being married to Satan himself'

inevitable when taking a bath requires the maid, supervised by her mistress, to pump water from the well, boil it on the range, and transport it — soundlessly, of course — in bucketloads up three flights of stairs.

Kathy Chamberlain, in this hugely satisifying new life, is firmly in Jane's camp, but she has no interest in making a martyr of her subject. Chamberlain's Jane is a complex heroine, caught between a fierce regard for convention and the high romance of rebellion. Her closest male friend, after all, was Guiseppe Mazzini, the father of modern Italy, who was in exile in London until 1848.

Trimming away the fat of the story, Chamberlain focuses on the years 1843–1849, when the Carlyes are nearly 20 years into their marriage. Jane is in her forties and Carlyle, now famous for his novel, *Sartor Resartus* and his history of the French Revolution is suffering agonies over his life of Cromwell, the first draft of which he has just thrown on the fire, watched by his notetaking wife. They are childless, but apparently not unhappily so; their marriage is probably sexless; they sleep, at least, in separate rooms, although this might be due to mutual insomnia. We get brief snapshots of their previous life in Craigenputtock, Dumfriesshire, of his background as the son of a Calvinist stonemason and hers as the daughter of a doctor, and we are occasionally reminded of the crippling remorse he will feel following her death in 1866, when he discovers, from her writing, how unhappy she had been. But for the moment the Carlyles are carrying on the business of their daily lives.

Drawing from the 44 volumes of their letters and journals, Chamberlain catches Jane on the wing: supervising the servant, stitching the curtains, nailing down the carpet, smoking in her bedroom, sitting up late with Tennyson and smoothing her skirts when Mazzini comes to call. Also included amongst her friends are a Sapphic German governess called Amely Bolte, another young German abroad called Richard Plattnauer, who suffers from severe manic depression, and the novelist Geraldine Jewsbury. At the centre of her life, however, is her rival Lady Ashburton, whose invitations for prolonged visits cause Jane agony.

'The story begins,' writes Chamberlain, 'inside a house', and for the most part, unless she is marooned in one of Lady Ashburton's mansions or visiting friends in the north in protest against the presence of Lady Ashburton, the story stays in Jane's Chelsea house, where she is sometimes miserable, often ill, always busy, and at her happiest when, as she puts it, 'splashing off whatever is on my mind' in missives to her circle.

Jane's letters, which have lost nothing of their freshness and mischief, take us immediately into her world, or rather into the world as she chose to construct it. She saw her letters as a *roman fleuve* — 'I must

Watercolour sketch of Jane Carlyle by Karl Hartmann (1850)
BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

go on', she writes to a friend, 'to the end of the chapter' — in which she recorded conversations, sketched what she called 'dramas in one scene' (such as Carlyle's throwing his Cromwell manuscript into the fire), and reshaped her days for comic effect. This is an example of a 'drama in one scene', in which Jane describes being cornered at a party by the rancid old gossip Samuel Rogers:

> SR (pointing to a chair beside him): Sit down, my dear — I want to ask you, is your husband as much infatuated as ever with Lady Ashburton?
> JC: Oh, of course (laughing). Why shouldn't he?
> SR: Now – do you like her her? – tell me honestly is she kind to you — as kind as she is to your husband?
> JC: Why you know it is impossible for me to know how kind she is to my husband…

While Carlyle, who told us that 'history was the biography of great men', wrestled with his marathons in his attic study, Jane, poised in her parlour, threw off mock epics in which she starred as a Herculean housewife. What Woolf failed to see, and what Chamberlain fully appreciates, is that Jane liked housework. She liked the business of pumping and boiling and carrying water. A proud and fastidious Scot, she approached domestic combat with vigour and gusto. Her comic companion throughout these years is her tiny, alcoholic Scottish servant, Helen Mitchell: 'I think, talk, and write about my own servant,' Jane noted, 'as much as Geraldine does about her lovers.' Helen, who observes Jane as closely as Jane observes Helen, possessed, when sober, what Carlyle called 'an intellectual insight almost of genius'.

Jane's letters, which were famous in her lifetime, constituted what Elizabeth Hardwick has called 'a private writing career', but they were not private objects. They were written to be read aloud, passed around, quoted. She wrote for entertainment. Opening a letter from Jane, said Mrs Gaskell, 'I begin speech with you.' Chamberlain likens Jane Carlyle to Jane Austen (there is a touch of Mr Collins in Carlyle and of Lady Catherine de Burgh in Lady Ashburton), but the Carlyes, who thought Austen's novels were 'washy watergruel', would not have appreciated the comparison.

It is Chamberlain's own style which makes this book such a happy read. Choosing Jane's free-associative 'splashing' over Carlyle's solid biographical template, Chamberlain speaks with us. Talking about Mazzini, for example, who is sitting in Jane's parlour looking tragic and handsome, Chamberlain tells us about the school he has set up for impoverished children, 'such as the organ-grinder boys, hawkers of plaster casts, and trinket sellers who were common figures on the London streets'. This leads her to note how very much Carlyle disliked the noise made by impoverished children such as these, and how Helen Mitchell would order them, through an opened window, to 'move on'. It reminds her of the story told by Henry Mayhew about an organ-grinder boy, which Chamberlain in turn then tells us, eventually returning to poor Mazzini in the parlour and his fondness for Jane, who he described as 'the woman I value most in England'.

Later, when Mazzini returns to Italy and the Roman Republic is being established, Jane, Chamberlain tells us, 'had to confront a very special crisis in her kitchen'. Helen Mitchell was drunk again — 'her mouth covered with blood', wrote Jane, 'her brown cheek and dark dress whitened with the chalk of the kitchen floor… her hair streaming wildly from under a crushed cap — and her face wearing the smile of idiotic self-complacency'.

I'm not going to say what happened next. You have to buy the book, which you'll then read aloud, pass around, and quote from. Jane Carlyle is back with a vengeance.

GETTY IMAGES

A mother and child, refugees from Raqqa, wait to cross into Turkey in September 2014

Descent into hell

Peter Carty

The Raqqa Diaries: Escape from Islamic State
by Samer, edited by Mike Thomson, translated by Nader Ibrahim, illustrated by Scott Coello
Hutchinson, £9.99, pp. 107

In my work as a reviewer, a small, steady proportion of all the books publishers send me concern the Holocaust. With middle age has come a curious foreshortening of my perspective on modern history so that, paradoxically, the Nazis' inhumanity has begun to seem less distant in time and, therefore, more horrible still. Fortunately I can reassure myself that, objectively, it happened long ago and that even the atrocities of eastern Europe and Rwanda are now a couple of decades safely in the past.

Such consolations vanish when confronted by *The Raqqa Diaries*, which is shockingly of the present. It is a terrible reminder that we are unwise to impute any kind of teleology to history. Raqqa is the capital of the so-called Islamic State and this is a portrait of daily life there by the pseudonymous author. He smuggled it out at the risk of beheading and it was first broadcast on Radio 4's *Today* programme. It has now been collected into this slim volume.

To begin with, Raqqa is wrested from the Assad regime by a coalition of the Free Syrian Army and two Islamist groups. Samer believes his city is free from oppression, but then Isis seizes control and a descent into hell begins. By now we know the broad lineaments of Isis's mistreatment of civilians, but Samer's straightforward account carries an intense, claustrophobic horror.

He witnesses sexual slavery: his girlfriend is blackmailed into marriage with an Isis fighter to gain her brother's release from captivity. There is financial extortion: he sees jihadists demand exorbitant sums of money from tradespeople, driving them to destitution. Yet it is compulsive, barbaric and pitiless murder that lends Isis notoriety. If the Nazis attempted to keep their atrocities hidden (as even Assad does), Isis has no such scruples. Repeatedly, Samer observes the public beheading of individuals suspected of opposition. Repeatedly, he sees the mutilated bodies of friends on prominent display. Day after day, he lives with the knowledge that his own execution could be next. Soon he learns he is on Isis's blacklist and that he must try to escape.

The arrested development of Isis's members becomes evident. It is cruelty of the kind disturbed adolescents dish out to hamsters and other defenceless pets. Its inassimilability into an adult morality means it can assume a cartoon flavour. It is regrettable, therefore, that stylised illustrations have been interpolated into the diaries, because they reinforce this egregious disorientation and diminish the trauma of Samer's testimony.

While Samer does not discuss international intervention at length, it is ironic that one of the agents who wishes to extirpate Isis from the Levant, in the form of President Trump, also carries connotations of the cartoon. Unfortunately we know that Isis will most likely resemble the spider that is squashed only for myriad baby spiders to scatter in all directions, here in the form of terrorists posing as refugees and perpetrating atrocities wherever they go.

When Samer's diary ends he is a refugee in Syrian territory controlled by the Free Syrian Army. Despite everything, he retains a positive view of history, holding onto the notion that good will prevail eventually in his country. Patently, if that happens at all, it could take decades. All the while his compatriots continue to flee abroad in their thousands. Their migration offers another promise of happy endings, though in truth many of them will fail in their efforts to integrate successfully into new cultures. These struggles are, in their own mundane ways, as heroic as Samer's fight against Isis but — perhaps regrettably — do not make such compelling reading. At the time of writing, meanwhile, Raqqa remains under Isis control.

Repeatedly, Samer witnesses public beheadings and the mutilated bodies of friends on prominent display

Nothing matters very much

Steven Poole

Void: The Strange Physics of Nothing
by James Owen Weatherall
Yale, £16.99, pp. 224

Nothing will come of nothing, said Lear, because he wasn't familiar with quantum physics. According to our current best theories, a region of space that contains nothing at all is still seething with pairs of virtual particles popping in and out of existence for no good reason. Meanwhile, it is possible to be mathematically sure that an entire universe contains nothing whatsoever, but then if you go looking for stuff in a particular part of this same universe you could find a wheelbarrow.

But what did I mean by 'a region of

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space'? It turns out that all sorts of assumptions are baked into such a phrase depending on what cosmology I have — and similarly with the ideas of 'stuff' and its alleged opposite, 'nothing'. What this entertainingly mind-expanding primer on physics accomplishes brilliantly is to demonstrate how much confusion, but also how much fruitful progress, arises from the tension between our folk concepts of what counts as 'nothing' (and, concomitantly, what counts as 'stuff'), and the way such concepts are retooled and stretched almost beyond comprehension for scientific purposes.

The story is told through refreshingly nuanced accounts of three revolutions in physics. First, Isaac Newton's account of gravity painted a picture of space as basically an empty container in which bodies could move. This void was 'absolute', Newton thought: effectively describable by a vast system of objective Cartesian coordinates given by God. Newton's great rival Leibniz disagreed: he thought that the relative space between actual objects (planets and the like) was all we could reasonably talk about. (Leibniz turned out to be right.)

The second revolution arrives with Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, bolstered by Hermann Minkowski's mathematics of spacetime. Among its surprising results is that the geometrical structure of 'empty' spacetime itself depends on the stuff that is zooming around in it. (Mass bends spacetime, and the bendiness results in what we loosely call the 'force' of gravity.) More peculiarly, it turns out that a universe obeying Einsteinian equations can be totally empty of anything we would normally call 'stuff' (particles, matter in general), but it can still contain a black hole, or gravity waves (which are ripples in the geometry of 'empty' spacetime itself). So that's not nothing either.

It turns out to be very difficult to get rid of everything, as aspirant declutterers know all too well.

The third revolution, quantum physics, hardly helped. Now what we loosely call 'particles' are widely understood in physics to be particular excitations of 'fields', like the electromagnetic field, that pervade the entire universe. (This, Weatherall notes, is very like the unfairly mocked old idea of the 'ether', a kind of omnipresent fluid medium through which light waves could propagate.) Mathematically, there are particular states of affairs, called 'vacuum states', in which 'it is absolutely certain that there are no particles in the whole universe'. Could this be the perfect nothing we have been searching for? Unfortunately, no. 'The whole world as we know it,' Weatherall explains shockingly, 'is consistent with the universe being in a vacuum state.' This kind of nothing, it turns out, is not the absence of matter; it's just one particular way in which matter can hang out.

So our best theories of nothing are not like the screen of a blank, switched-off TV set; they are like the static of an old-style analogue TV tuned to no channel. The author is always courteous enough to help the reader with such local colour. At other times he invites us to picture a bucket of water rotating in an otherwise empty universe, and celebrates the charming indifference to social niceties displayed by great geniuses. One time a journalist asked the British physicist Paul Dirac whether he could explain his research in layman's terms. Dirac's answer? 'No.' Chapeau!

In an action-packed epilogue, the author describes how the contested field of string theory posits a bogglingly large number of possible kinds of nothingness, and impresses upon the reader how much of physics still depends on intuition and battling 'interpretations'. The book is not an exhaustive typology of scientific nothings: not directly addressed, for example, is the nothingness that supposedly obtained before the Big Bang. But to regret this is just to emphasise the success of this stylishly written and admirably concise book, at the end of which you will be inclined to agree, along with the author and Freddie Mercury both, that 'Nothing really matters.'

Comfort the suffering

Cressida Connolly

Grief Works: Stories of Life, Death and Surviving
by Julia Samuel
Penguin, £14.99, pp. 292

If a single book could help you to be kinder and more compassionate, could expand and deepen your understanding of other people (and possibly yourself) and make you less afraid of dying in the process, you would surely be eager to acquire it at once. Well look no further, for *Grief Works* is that book. The King Lears among us — whose every third thought is the grave — will need no persuading that a collection of essays about surviving bereavement is an enthralling read. For those of a more timid or sunny disposition, ask yourself this: when someone you love dies, how will you manage?

The odds of avoiding grief are not in anyone's favour. In Britain half a million people die each year and it's estimated that each death affects at least five people. Julia Samuel is founder patron of Child Bereavement UK and has worked as a grief psychotherapist, helping grieving families, for 25 years. But there's nothing po-faced about her:

> I'm sure some would disapprove, but when I'm talking to someone who has had really bad news, I often swear a lot. 'It's really fucking terrible, isn't?'... somehow swearing goes straight to the heart of how awful it is.

Nor does she toe the line, so beloved of Macmillan nursing, that people in denial about their own impending death need constantly to be reminded of it. Instead she is gentle, warm, wise and unexpectedly funny.

The central message of the book is that grief takes time. There isn't a short cut round the back of it: you have to go through it to get out the other side. Samuel notes that at least 15 per cent of all psychological disorders have unresolved grief as their source. It's surely at the root of countless cases of insomnia and alcoholism besides. At the very least it is isolating: 'Grieving is lonely-making. All that missing, and wanting, and not finding can feel like excruciating loneliness.'

As with the essays of Oliver Sacks, much of *Grief Works* draws on case studies. Samuel looks at four kinds of bereavement: the death of a parent, a partner, a sibling and, most agonisingly, a child. There is a section, too, on facing your own death. Under each she describes the process of three clients, before concluding with reflections of her own. The book begins with a short piece on understanding grief and ends with a chapter under the loose heading 'What Helps'.

What seems to help the most is allowing the bereaved to talk. 'Really listening to someone is just as important as talking to them', she says. The overriding premise is

that, as she puts it, an examined death is as important as an examined life. 'It is beginning to be recognised that it takes courage for people to show their vulnerability in the face of death and bereavement,' she notes. Certainly the people whose stories she tells seem unbelievably brave. It is wonderful and miraculous to see how they change over the course of their meetings with her.

For friends of the grieving, Samuel advises patience and active support. Don't leave vague messages saying you're there for the person: take food round. Do simple things together, like going for a walk. Don't cry too much or they end up exhausted from having to comfort you. Grief can manifest as grumpiness, so you may need to persist. If you say the wrong thing, 'don't run for the hills. Take a breath, be brave and say, "I'm sorry. I can see that what I've said has upset you." That's all it takes.' What she calls promiscuous honesty is not a good idea; in other words, don't rabbit on about how great your life is. Above all, don't tell them to buck up and get over it.

Julia Samuel says she wants to

> reach those who cross to the other side of the street, those who don't look their bereaved friend in the eye, and do anything rather than mention the name of the person who has died. I'm not sure how to get to them, but if I could, I would say: acknowledge, listen and simply give them time.

This marvellous book shows how.

Carve their names with pride

Clare Mulley

Lonely Courage: The True Story of the SOE Heroines who Fought to Free Nazi-Occupied France
by Rick Stroud
Simon & Schuster, £20, pp. 295

'Women,' Captain Selwyn Jepson, SOE's senior recruiting officer, once wrote, 'have a far greater capacity for cool and lonely courage than men.' This questionable assumption is not actually the reason why the women were recruited. That was down to their ability to move around enemy-occupied territory carrying messages, arms or heavy wireless sets without arousing as much suspicion as able-bodied men. But lonely courage was an essential virtue for the female agents, who had to face long weeks of keeping a low profile, with very little support, in between hours of terrifying activity. Most of them only met each other during training or, in several cases, in detention after capture.

The great strength of Rick Stroud's book is that it does not further isolate the female agents by segregating each into her own chapter, as previous histories have tended to, but rather interweaves the women's narratives through the story of SOE-supported resistance in Nazi-occupied France. What emerges is something rather greater than the sum of its parts: a fascinating story that shows just how much each agent depended on the judgments, courage and actions of their colleagues, French counterparts and London HQ, and how their individual contributions combined to great effect.

REX FEATURES

Paris-born Pearl Witherington led a force of over 1,500 maquisards in the summer of 1944

There were 39 women among the 400-plus agents in SOE's French section. A third of them would not survive the war. Stroud focuses on six, whose diverse stories, achievements and fates provide a very personal and poignant way into this history.

The Brixton-born shop assistant Violette Szabo, although operational for just a few weeks, is perhaps the best known. Less familiar but increasingly remembered are Noor Inayat Khan, the Muslim Sufi princess who became the first radio operator infiltrated into France; Paris-born Pearl Witherington, who led a force of over 1,500 Maquis resisters in the summer of 1944; and the Polish Countess Krystyna Skarbek, a.k.a. Christine Granville, who secured the defection of a strategic Nazi garrison on an Alpine pass and single-handedly rescued three officers from imminent execution, among other achievements. Just as impressive were the one-legged American Virginia Hall, the only person to work for both SOE and its US equivalent; and the irrepressible Nancy Wake, who supported an escape route before having to flee on it herself, and was later parachuted back into France to organise arms, training and liaison with London for 7,000 maquisards.

Among the many stories here, one speaks volumes about the experiences of women in war. Learning that three female spies had been captured by the Maquis and were being beaten and raped, Wake had the women brought to her for interrogation. The first, just 17, denied all charges against her. Wake had her released and disciplined the men involved. The second, who had slept with a collaborator, was also released. The third, however, just as abused as the others, admitted to being a spy. Unable either to release or detain her, Wake told her she would be shot. She then provided her with clean clothes until the sentence could be carried out. When the same maquisards who had abused the three prisoners said they could not shoot a woman in cold blood, even if guilty, Wake called them cowards and said she would do it herself. The next day the spy was shot, standing against a tree, as her male equivalent would have been. Wake went on to kill several of the enemy in action.

As well as the female SOE agents' stories, Stroud manages to explore some important supporting narratives. Among others, we learn fleetingly about the brave Agnès Humbert, who established an early Parisienne resistance network; and Mathilde Carré, 'La Chatte', a Resistance agent, turned double-agent, whose lover was sent to England as a spy and, ironically, also turned double-agent, but for the British. Key male traitors, such as the French priest and Nazi informer Robert Alesch and the double-agent Henri Déricourt, are also exposed, although much mystery still surrounds Déricourt. But it is the inadequacy of Maurice Buckmaster, SOE's head of F-Section based in London, repeatedly dismissing evidence that his agents had been captured, that is the most shocking.

With so much impressive material, this is a whistle-stop tour, packed with anecdotes but dizzying in pace. Occasionally Stroud zooms in and we see 'the pennants fluttering from whipping aerials' as panzer tanks enter Paris, or the hooves of wounded horses 'slipping on the bloody remains of the dead' as the Nazis retreat. A longer book would have allowed for more attention to detail throughout; nevertheless this is a hugely engaging account, that weaves the women's stories together with increasing momentum towards its poignant conclusion.

Father, son and holy ghost

D.J. Taylor

Fathers
by Sam Miller
Cape, £14.99, pp. 243

No disrespect to any of the present incumbents, but Karl Miller (1931–2014) was a literary editor in an age when such jobs mattered. Between the late 1950s and the early 1970s he not only ran the books pages of two weekly magazines — *The Spectator*, and the Paul Johnson-era *New Statesman* — before moving on to edit the *Listener*, but did so with a conviction that their cultural stance was quite as important as the political material that crowded out the front end. The virus that had propelled him into literary journalism burned away for nearly 60 years, and his last book review appeared in these pages four days before his death.

Not everyone liked or approved of Miller, or thought that the considerable power he wielded either in Grub Street or in his subsequent incarnations as Lord Northcliffe Professor at UCL and founding editor of the *London Review of Books* was a good thing. The Bloomsbury diarist Frances Partridge left a caustic account of 'an intelligent, autointoxicated Scot; doesn't want to hear anything from anyone else, but just to do his own turn ad lib'; while even his son Sam, in this notably loyal and affectionate memoir, diagnoses an odd sense of entitlement, a hint that the 1950s Cambridge generation, of which his father was a part, 'sometimes behaved as if the world had been created with their future success in mind'.

The sexual sub-world of the 1950s was full of secret assignations, false names and fake wedding rings

There is not very much in *Fathers* about Miller the books page trusty, although Sam does offer tantalising glimpses of teen-era notebooks in which the apprentice critic doles out marks out of a hundred to the great works of English literature (*Hamlet* comes out top with 95; *The Turn of the Screw*, alas, trails at 65). What we do get, on the other hand, are some sharp glances at Miller's difficult early life — he was brought up by his grandparents — in working-class Edinburgh before the winds of upward social mobility that picked up so many talented grammar-school boys of the postwar era safely deposited him at Downing College, Cambridge, under the vigilant eye of F.R. Leavis.

'You have been most unfortunate in the family you were born into,' Karl's dutyevading father once informed him — 'That includes myself, of course.' If Sam has his own family problems, then the 'secret' that hangs over his upbringing is pretty much a red herring. From the moment that Karl's great Cambridge friend Tony White appears in the text, is introduced to Karl's wife Jane and starts going on holiday with them, it is clear that Tony will eventually be revealed as Sam's father. Sam himself was told shortly after Tony's premature death in 1976. Karl, having been assured that the teenage boy 'knew', kept his lip buttoned for the next three and a half decades.

Given the story's grounding in that late Fifties sexual sub-world of secret assignations, fake wedding rings and false names offered up to hotel receptionists, what follows might easily have opened up a gloomy landscape of inference, evasion and concealment. That it doesn't is a testimony to the matter-of-factness — occasional rueful moments notwithstanding — with which all those involved seemed to have treated the situation. Sam has warm feelings towards both parent and surrogate, and the only real twitch on the thread comes when, discovering an entry in Tony's diary that reads 'a long-drawn out affair with Jane ended when she found out she was pregnant, possibly by me', he adds the codicil: 'I think I would have been pleased if there was more than that.'

Forty years gone, ex-actor, Connemara lobster-farm tenant and occasional author Tony, who turns out to have written a book called *How to Run a Pub: Advice to Would-Be Publicans*, is impossible to reconstitute. Adoring friends can only supply bromides: that he was blessed, that he was the life and soul of the party. Karl, on the other hand, cruises valiantly on into his eighties, pawky humour disguising, or sometimes failing to disguise, a fair amount of internal disquiet.

Tactfully composed and sensitively written, *Fathers* leaves an abiding impression of decent people doing their best in difficult circumstances. Meanwhile, a full-length biography of Karl is an absolute must.

Starlings

in the lone evening: flooding, falling, flocking,
with locked-out wings, flasher's black macs,
stretched to the tip. Taut batman capes.
They glide and weave, cutting chutes,

curves, into cloudy city skies. One favourite tree
across the street; there they roost seasonally.
My trilling friends. My loyal morning roof callers.
Pulled me through winter to spring.

My early evening railing spirits. My tall
tree trumpeters. My end of work signallers.
Boy, they know how to sing. The why of starling?
Continually in receipt of life's good news.

What is it they say? Absolutely it's no secret.
Each day is match day.

— *Paul Deaton*

Night of the living dead

Sam Byers

Lincoln in the Bardo
by George Saunders
Bloomsbury, £18.99, pp. 343

On 5 February 1862, the night Abraham Lincoln and his wife gave a lavish reception in the White House, with the civil war swelling outside and their 11-year-old son Willie dying of typhoid fever upstairs, what was the state of the moon? Was it a 'fat green crescent'? Or was it 'yellow-red, as if reflecting the light of some earthly fire'?

According to George Saunders's hugely ambitious *Lincoln in the Bardo*, his first novel after four peerless collections of short stories, neither of the above descriptions might be true, but when read in their tragic context, either can impart symbolic meaning. And meaning, as this novel so

cleverly demonstrates, is not the same as truth.

Lincoln takes place on a single night, 17 days after the party. Little Willie, now dead, is laid to rest in the local cemetery. His grieving father visits him one last time. It is an acutely private moment, but, like all moments in the life of a president, it is also a public spectacle. Abraham believes himself to be alone, but the cemetery is crowded with ghosts. Their reality is delusional. The coffins in which they reside are not, they believe, coffins at all, but 'sick boxes'. Unable, or unwilling, to accept death's truth, they remain trapped in a liminal state — the bardo to which the title refers.

Saunders's great feat here is the novel's libretto-like narration. Two voices dominate: Hans Vollman, who died just as he was about to consummate his relationship with his young wife, and Roger Bevins III, who killed himself, having struggled with a different kind of acceptance — that of his sexuality. Others, however, continually and spectacularly intrude. Almost all of the ghosts get a chance to speak, and the tales of their individual deaths cohere into a violent collective history — an exhumation of America's oppressive past.

Saunders provides earthly context for the events of the afterlife by augmenting his deathly chorus with a collage of historical accounts. Some of these, such as those in the short chapter collating conflicting descriptions of the moon, are fictional, if brilliantly ventriloquistic, but others are real and accredited, meaning parts of this novel are not so much written as assembled. We, as readers and as presences in the 'real' world, therefore inhabit a similar limbo to the death-shy ghosts: that between truth and meaning, historical accuracy and emotional veracity — a void, Saunders suggests, that only fiction can fill.

Saunders's stories have always been as notable for their unexpected kindness as for the sharpness of their satire, and at times it has felt as if he were in conflict with his own instincts. Here, he crosses over completely, abandoning irony in favour of a disarming and distinctly unfashionable warmth.

The result is revelatory. In structure, execution and emotional force, *Lincoln* is a masterpiece — a tapestry of fact, counterfact and wild, hallucinatory invention. It never congeals into mere technical exercise, but instead swells into a symphonic and deeply humanistic vision — a mapping of the bardo between truth and fiction that has, perhaps more than Saunders ever could have imagined as he was crafting this book, become our contemporary reality.

Light in the East

Andrew Lycett

The Islamic Enlightenment
by Christopher de Bellaigue
Bodley Head, £25, pp. 398

Christopher de Bellaigue, a journalist who has spent much of his working life in the Middle East, has grown tired of people throwing up their hands in horror at Isis, Erdogan and Islamic terror, and declaring that the region is backward and in need of a thorough western-style reformation.

As he argues in this timely book, the Islamic world has been coming to terms with modernity in its own often turbulent way for more than two centuries. And we'd better understand it, because it's an interesting story, and often a positive one — the way vast crowds streamed onto the streets of Cairo, Istanbul and Tehran in demonstrations against authoritarian rule over the past decade, for example. Western-style participatory democracy remains the dream of the man and woman in the souk. Globalisation means that technical innovation and modern ideas cannot help seeping across borders. And Islam is a notably broad church, by no means totally uncompromising: witness the popularity of the

Turkish cleric Fethullah Gulen who, from American exile, preaches inter-religious accord while being accused of trying to overthrow the Turkish state.

De Bellaigue approaches his subject largely through those three cities — Cairo, Islam's intellectual centre with its famous though often sclerotic Al Azhar university; Istanbul, once capital of the vast inter-denominational Ottoman empire which straddled Europe and Asia; and Tehran, the furthest from the West, with its powerful Shia tradition.

Back in our own Dark Ages, Abbasid openness to science and philosophy provided a bridge between ancient Greece and Renaissance Europe. However, these advances were reversed as *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning, gave way to *taqlid*, or emulation of authority. The razing of the Galata Observatory in Istanbul in 1580 epitomised a waning intellectual curiosity.

The Islamic world was forced to deal with the post-Enlightenment West after Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798. His ambitious *Description of Egypt* signalled purpose, which bore lasting fruit in developments such as a medical college in Cairo, run by the French surgeon Antoine Barthélemy Clot.

Stung by a sense of cultural inadequacy, the cleric Hassan al-Attar was one of several Egyptians who travelled in search of knowledge to Europe, where he concluded that the Quranic ban on body dissection was wrong. The scholar Rifaa al-Tahtawi oversaw the translation of over 2,000 European and Turkish books. Rulers like the Khedive Ismail Pasha underpinned such initiatives with infrastructural projects, including hospitals, railways and the Suez Canal. But he also copied the West's baser habits in his profligacy. The country's parlous finances allowed Britain and France to extend control, sparking incipient nationalism which led to Colonel Ahmed Urabi's revolt in 1879. Opposition to western intellectual and economic hegemony has played a significant part in the Islamic revival ever since.

It was a similar story with the Tanzimat reforms in Turkey and the progressive teachings of Babi and his successor Bahaullah, the founder of Bahaism, in Iran, which enjoyed a constitutional revolution in 1905.

The first world war boosted national awareness across the region, confirming, from an Islamic perspective, the West's appetite for territorial and economic gain at the expense of the rights of the populations involved.

The convulsions of 1914–18 proved particularly important in Turkey, which, shorn of an empire, underwent a secular nationalist catharsis under Ataturk. Leaders such as Reza Shah in Iran and Colonel Nasser in Egypt followed similar paths: western-style development was still the aim. But as de Bellaigue points out, the aspirations of potentates were not always shared by the masses.

Portrait of Persia's Prince Abbas Mirza, c.1820. From his bailiwick near the Russian border he dispatched educational missions to Europe, sponsored translations of key European works and imported metal casting techniques and the printing press

GETTY IMAGES

In charting the emergence of an alternative Muslim approach to the world, he summons up intriguing characters such the canny Iranian born Jamal al-Din Afghani, who travelled the world developing a spirit of pan-Islamism. Out of Egypt came Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Conan Doyle-loving Sayyid Qutb, whose studies in innocuous sounding Greeley, Colorado, left him frothing about American permissiveness while developing incisive ideas about the lack of spirituality at the heart of western civilisation.

In Iran a different spin came from Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, a former communist whose 1962 book *Gharbzadegi* (variously translated as *Westoxication*, *Westernstruck* and *Occidentosis*) has, de Bellaigue says, taken its place with Qutb's *Milestones* and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as one of the three most influential anti-western political tracts. Al-e-Ahmad argued that the West's cult of the machine had undermined traditional village-based Quranic values.

Add to this a strong Shia sense of resistance to injustice, articulated by the sociologist Ali Shariati, and you have the wellsprings of Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution in 1979. Meanwhile, Qutb's ideas were steeled by the concept of *takfir*, which held that a state or individual could be declared apostate and deserving of death. This disputed theory was adopted by al-Jihad, the group responsible for the assassination of President Sadat in 1981, and, more recently, by Isis.

De Bellaigue is happy to describe this as Counter-Enlightenment. But he is convinced there is a parallel story, and developments such as the moderate Hassan Rouhani becoming President of Iran show an underlying respect for democracy and the individual. He skilfully conveys the curious game – part confrontation, part balancing act — which has been played out between western dominion and Islamic Renaissance. While generally critical of the former, he has written a sweeping and hugely engaging book that throws much-needed light on modern Islam.

ARTS

Paradise lost

How art chronicled the birth – and death – of the American dream, by *Stephen Bayley*

© ED RUSCHA MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK/SCALA, FLORENCE

The American dream was a consumerist idyll: all of life was to be packaged, stylised, affordable and improvable. Three bedrooms, two-point-five children, two cars and one mortgage. The sense was first caught by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835–40), where he talks about a people more excited by success than fearful of failure.

We all know when the dream died: on 9 November 2016. People in Brooklyn were crying. In Manhattan they couldn't breathe. A national angst had been revealed: the land of plenty had become the land of the plenty cross.

But when did the dream start? There was the Jeffersonian trinity of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, which was diverted into frontier mysticism, but by the mid-20th century this had evolved into an almost religiose belief in the enhancement of life by ever-increasing consumption of manufactured goods. Chevrolet ergo sum.

Consider this sequence: 1926, 'mass production' is mentioned in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; 1927, Raymond Loewy opens the first design consultancy in New York; 1931, the phrase 'American dream' is coined by James Truslow Adams, a journalist:

> The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognised by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.

This dream will one day deliver a streamlined electric kitchen. In the same year, one Neil McElroy of Procter & Gamble invented 'brand management' and imagery became the most valuable part of commerce.

There is something of an American season in London. The British Museum's astonishing new exhibition of prints, *The American Dream: pop to the present*, neatly complements, and frankly upstages, the Royal Academy's oil-painting show, *America after the Fall*, although its curator Stephen Coppel denies the intention. And in May the Design Museum will examine *California* and what the Sunshine State has done for personal liberty, from LSD to the various iFads.

One aspect of the American dream was born here in the Gold Rush of 1849 and the sense of accident bringing great riches.

We all know when the dream died: on 9 November 2016

Experimental lifestyles flourished in Cali because it was the end of the world. Even now, driving through the rich wastes of Culver City or the San Fernando Valley, you think of Gertrude Stein's 'when you get there, there's no there there'. Materiality was not essential: the world's biggest hotel company, San Francisco's Airbnb, owns no hotels.

The American dream took many forms, however, several of them absurd. The loopy techno-utopian Buckminster Fuller wanted Americans living in his round 'Dymaxion' houses. In 1952 the *New York Times* had a headline: 'Architect offers bubble for house. Says plastic "Space Container" with sleeping tents may replace present structure'. Meanwhile, Fuller's Dymaxion car was so under-engineered that it took off and killed its test driver.

Still, the dream continued to influence real life. And often its coordinates were best understood by grateful immigrants: by the mid-Fifties, a US citizen could lead his entire life surrounded by cars, shavers, toothpaste, razors and cigarette packs designed by Loewy, a Frenchman. The sheer maximal gorgeousness of it all made contemporary gallery art look introverted, so artists began to employ industrial methods in pursuit of their own version of the dream.

In 1962 Andy Warhol started to use silkscreen printing, or serigraphy, precisely because he wanted 'an assembly-line effect'. He started as a hack commercial artist, drawing shoes for advertisements, then became the most commercial artist of them all.

His mass-produced prints were the result of a baroque collision between brand consciousness and witty self-effacement. At about the same time, Roy Lichtenstein aped the four-colour commercial print process of pulp comics, known as Ben-Day dots. In this dream, mass-produced art was not diminished by multiplicity, but enhanced by it: a movie seen by one person is not much of a movie.

In the British Museum's spacious new Sainsbury Galleries the exhibition gives exhilarating light and air not just to Warhol and Lichtenstein, but also to every great name in pop art: Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Jim Dine, Richard Estes, Tom Wesselmann and Ed Ruscha.

But there are abstractionists and minimalists too, so different in mood from noisy pop. When they took to print, these were not furtive atelier experiments, but, echoing the dream, aesthetic campaigns of great ambition and high purpose. The aim was no less than to establish an international American

American beauty: 'Standard Station', 1966, by Ed Ruscha

monopoly on high art, rather as Procter & Gamble had done with soap.

The best work here is contemporaneous with the creative revolution in advertising: artists enjoyed words with their images, as advertisers did. But it was at about this time that the first cracks began to appear, letting harsh daylight into the dreamworld with the publication of critiques about the environment, media and auto industry from Rachel Carson, Daniel Boorstin and Ralph Nader.

Art revelled in the cracks. In Bruce Nauman's 'Malice' of 1980, the dream's favoured messenger, the neon sign, turns coolly bilious and almost illegible. In Walasse Ting's poem, accompanying a print of a gun-toting Puerto Rican, America has a 'brain made by IBM & FBI/ stomach supported by A&P/…love supported by Time & Life/ tongue supported by/ American Telephone & Telegraph/ soul made by 7up…'. Nearly the first thing you see? A print by James Rosenquist, a former billboard painter, his never-before-assembled 'F-111' (1974), at 86ft a little longer than the bomber that inspired it.

There is a diminution of artistic and intellectual quality at the end of the show. Wesselmann's deliciously objectified and cartoonishly ridiculous nipples, as luscious as ice cream, and Estes's mesmerising hyper-realist diners, so superior to their architectural original, are, in the end, more moving than campaigns about Aids, minority rights and feminism. Artists of the American dream were at their best worshipping trash, ironising the military-industrial complex, enjoying cars, teasing celebrities and mocking death: pleasure, sex and beauty being better inspirations than anguish or blame. Consumerism bests activism.

Artists of the American dream were at their best worshipping trash, enjoying cars and mocking death

Can the dream be salvaged in a dismayed, deindustrialised, ethnonationalist America? Maybe, because Trump has a crude apprehension of its magic allure. Meanwhile, if you wanted an example of American exceptionalism, here it is — in the artistic variety and ingenuity on display. And if there is still anyone who doubts the power or beauty of high modernism, a visit to the British Museum is urgently indicated. Pop imagery and minimalist shape-making have acquired the magnificent, aged lustre and enduring value of the Old Masters.

The American Dream: pop to the present *is at the British Museum until 18 June.* America after the Fall *is at the Royal Academy until 4 June.* California *is at the Design Museum from 24 May until 15 October.*

Opera
Scottish power
Richard Bratby

Pelléas and Mélisande
Scottish Opera

The Yeomen of the Guard
Symphony Hall, Birmingham

'Perhaps in this world nothing ever happens without purpose,' sings old, blind King Arkel in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and that at least is something to hold on to. God knows, you need it. Peel away the fairy-tale trappings of Maeterlinck's original play, and the world of this opera is profoundly cruel. Its characters are often passive observers of their own fate (Pelléas admits before his final scene that he's never yet returned his beloved Mélisande's gaze). And yet Debussy pretty much compels you to feel for them, in a score of all-but-unbearable tenderness and beauty. It's only once you've left the theatre that, wrestling with the pieces of this ravishing, troubling puzzle, you realise that it's either insoluble — or that it offers a message bleaker than any *Gotterdämmerung*.

Wisely, David McVicar's new production for Scottish Opera leaves its options open. The cast wears Edwardian costume of the operatic variety — the sort where

If our operatic taste-makers were less philistine, major companies would stage G&S every season

men in frock-coats carry huge medieval swords. Advance publicity suggested that the production would be inspired by the paintings of Vilhelm Hammershoi and the programme duly reproduces a couple of chilly Nordic interiors. Someone clearly got the memo about Scandi chic being over, though, because the sets looked nothing like that. Tree trunks poke through the floors of designer Rae Smith's decaying mansion; floorboards lift to reveal stagnant pools and the walls shimmer with gold and silver. McVicar and his lighting designer Paule Constable respond with moments of visual wonder to match Maeterlinck and Debussy's imagery of light and water: doves become ominous, fluttering black forms, and a vengeful Golaud quietly appears, just as Mélisande predicts, at the end of her shadow. McVicar is sometimes dismissed as a safe pair of hands. But here he demonstrates that a staging can illuminate the story without being clunkingly literal, while leaving generous scope for the performers to give of themselves.

That, compellingly, is what Carolyn Sampson did as Mélisande. Dressed in white, with a voice that (like Debussy's score) seemed lit from within, she trod a remarkably controlled line between impassive and impulsive; the unignorable focus of every scene in which she appeared. Andrei Bondarenko, as Pelléas, sang with a tremulous ardour that was fascinatingly at odds with his pale stage presence — and markedly different from the handsome baritone of Roland Wood's Golaud, a piece of vocal characterisation that pointed up the gulf between the character's motives and actions, at least until his smooth tone curdled and broke in the quietly devastating final scene.

At moments like that — when superficial beauty disintegrated under extreme emotion — this performance showed its teeth. Mélisande's sobs and Arkel's anguished rasp of 'Golaud!' felt brutally real. Add to that Stuart Stratford's conducting — rich and passionate, Debussy in oils rather than watercolours — and this felt like a particularly physical, even raw *Pelléas et Mélisande*. But McVicar's productions have a habit of maturing. This one deserves a long life, and will surely continue to yield new insights with successive conductors and casts. Before that, though, a final word for Cedric Amamoo, as Yniold: a boy soprano whose musicality and alertness to the text would shame many adult singers. He's a former chorister of the Chapel Royal, and it's meant as a compliment to say that I wouldn't have guessed.

In Birmingham, meanwhile, the only real disappointment in the CBSO's concert performance of *The Yeomen of the Guard* was that it was a one-off. This was a semi-staging, with colourful costumes, rudimentary direction and a huge (and superb) student chorus. But it proved in heroic style a truth that we apparently keep having to relearn about Gilbert and Sullivan — namely, that if you cast these operas with first-rate artists, G&S's supposedly stereotyped characters will suddenly flood with humanity. Catherine Wyn-Rogers, in majestic voice, was Dame Carruthers; Sarah Fox's luminous Elsie played heartbreakingly off Simon Butteriss's birdlike, increasingly frantic Jack Point, and Bozidar Smijanic's sunny bass-baritone transformed the jailer Shadbolt from comic grotesque to a credible (if doltish) love interest. Presiding over it all, compassionate and grizzled, was Sir Thomas Allen as Sergeant Meryll.

John Wilson conducted. If you've heard him with his own orchestra (and if you haven't, you've lived only half a life) you'll be able to imagine the vitality and colour he finds in Sullivan's music — how naturally he shapes its phrases, warms the inner voices and generally makes *The Yeomen of the Guard* sound exactly what it is: a masterpiece, glaringly overdue for a full professional staging from a director who's alert to its pain as well as its humour. The capacity audience, meanwhile, spoke for itself. If the UK's operatic taste-makers were less philistine, our major companies would be staging G&S every season. And they'd be queuing up to get John Wilson to conduct it.

Television
On the money
James Walton

Fans of tough investigative journalism should probably avoid Channel 4's *How'd You Get So Rich?* Presenter Katherine Ryan's main tactic is to ask wealthy people how much they paid for something and, when they tell her, to repeat their answer in a tone of wondering admiration. Yet, despite her best efforts to keep it shallow, the programme does end up shedding some light on our peculiar attitudes to the very rich — and in particular our capacity to feel superior and inferior to them at the same time.

Ryan, a Canadian comedian who'll be familiar to anybody who's watched virtually any panel show, began Monday's opening episode at the Shropshire pile owned by Steve Smith, the founder of Poundland. At

To be properly rich you need to spend your life breaking models' noses

first, the gratifying vulgarity of the décor seemed to offer us the promising chance for a good sneer. Sadly, though, Steve and his wife Tracey proved so unselfconsciously chuffed about how their lives had panned out that it was impossible not to warm to them. They also appeared to have changed little since the young Steve worked on his dad's market stall. Having cheerfully declared that he painted all the grapes on the ballroom ceiling himself, he and Tracey then packed for a forthcoming trip to Majorca, making sure not to forget the teabags. After that, they flew by helicopter for a date night in a curry house.

Not so appealing, mind you, was Ryan's next magnate, Danny Lambo, a former pop star — of the big-in-Japan kind — who now owns a London hotel. 'I'm actually known as Britain's flashiest playboy,' Danny explained matter-of-factly (and, just as annoyingly, a quick Google of the tabloids confirmed that he actually is). What this means in practice is that he drives around the streets of Chelsea in a Lamborghini, and when he spots an attractive woman, waves signs at her reading either, 'You're cute' or less romantically, 'Nice arse.' Even so, he confessed in a voice of puzzled disappointment, most of his girlfriends turn out to be 'gold-digger types'.

But to be properly rich, it seems, you need to spend your life — as Ryan put it with a welcome touch of asperity — breaking models' noses. By far her wealthiest interviewee was Dr Raj Kanodia, an LA plastic surgeon, who, among other things, carries out

GUY TAPLIN

Guy has an astonishing eye for what Gilbert White called the "air" of birds, just as he has for the unrealised potential of his bits of found wood.

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250 nose jobs a year at $20,000 a pop. The programme filmed him reassuring an anxious young knockout that he could indeed fix the unsightly, if almost imperceptible, bump on her nose. Ryan then observed, without apparent irony (or evidence), that he's motivated not by money but by 'a passion for beauty'.

For lovers of *plus ça change* moments, going from *How'd You Get So Rich?* to a three-part history of British photography on BBC4 mightn't sound an obvious choice. Nonetheless, one thing we learned from *Britain in Focus* (Monday) is that Victorians having their portraits taken by commercial photographers would often ask for their nose bumps to be magically smoothed away in the darkroom.

Otherwise, this was much as you'd expect from a three-part history of British photography on BBC4 — i.e., richly informative and heroically unafraid of getting too technical. The presenter is Eamonn McCabe, a former *Guardian* picture editor, who gamely went a bit Lucy Worsley for the commercial-

In its third series Catastrophe remains something approaching a work of genius

portrait section by donning a top hat and frock-coat. (To his credit, his heart never really seemed in it.) Fortunately, for the rest of the time, he stuck to being a middle-aged bloke who knows an awful lot about his subject, combining the wider historical developments with close readings of the most important 19th-century pictures.

Above all, he provided a startling reminder of how quickly photography evolved: from Henry Fox Talbot's first tiny pictures of windows in 1835 to Roger Fenton's images of the Crimean war just 20 years later. No other medium in history, McCabe persuasively argued, had ever gone from a standing start to a fully realised art form so quickly.

Finally, I'm happy to report that in its third series *Catastrophe* (Channel 4, Tuesday) — Sharon Horgan and Rob Delaney's endlessly sharp comedy about the strange business of marriage and parenthood — remains something approaching a work of genius. Almost every line is still a perfect encapsulation of, if not what people say, then what they would say if only they were cleverer, funnier and more fearless. There's the same immaculate intertwining of filth and tenderness, and the same ability to treat its characters in a way that's both unsparing and sympathetic.

As a teenager discovering the joys of reading reviews (no, really), I remember being highly impressed by someone or other praising Chekhov's gift for 'finding the pain in comedy and the comedy in pain'. Now I'm older, I can't quite decide whether that remark was pretentious or not — but I am pretty certain that it also applies to *Catastrophe*.

MANUEL HARLAN

Nympho with a bus pass: Juliet Stevenson as Gertrude

Theatre

Changing of the Bard

Lloyd Evans

Hamlet
Almeida, until 15 April

Ugly Lies the Bone
Lyttelton, in rep until 6 June

Hamlet was probably written sometime between 1599 and 1602. The Almeida's new version opens with a couple of security guards watching surveillance footage taken in a corridor. Well, of course it does. Nothing says 'late medieval Denmark' like closed-circuit television. Hamlet (Andrew Scott) appears. His black shirt and matching trousers suggest a snooker pro at the Crucible or a steward on a Virgin train. Scott is known as a 'character actor' (code for 'baddie') rather than a leading man. His petulant, squelched-up face and his Ronnie Corbett physique make him perfect casting for Third Crackhead in a squat melodrama

Andrew Scott gives Hamlet everything he's got, which isn't much

but he hasn't a chance of capturing Hamlet's lordly despair, his scathing humour, his meditative isolation, his rebellious grandeur, his personal affability, and so on. Scott gives it everything he's got, which isn't much. Gruff, sarky, cynical, bad-tempered, ever prone to the full-on hissy fit, he stomps around in his waiter's costume bawling out the text as if he were an angry nun or a fed-

up driving instructor about to retrain as a cage fighter. He does the soliloquys like a signing exercise for the deaf. Up goes a finger to indicate heaven, down goes a finger to indicate hell. When balancing an antithesis he spreads one arm wide, and then the other. To suggest faltering courage he wiggles his hands next to his ears. For passion he punches his breastbone. For determination he pumps his fists. He seems to be posing for a series of woodcuts entitled 'Rhetorical Attitudes'. Too often his delivery spills into the falsetto range that makes for painful listening.

Blame the director, Robin Icke, who likes his actors to lose control of their voices, even if their seagull honking becomes unintelligible, because he seems to equate high emotion with high volume. Claudius (Angus Wright) is portrayed as a bloodless technocrat. Juliet

The textual omissions and misreadings in this production could fill a small book

Stevenson plays Gertrude as a nympho with a bus pass. They're always snogging, like naughty virgins in the playground, which is embarrassing at first, then tedious, finally irrelevant. The company simply can't rise to Shakespeare's level. And the production can barely reach Alan Ayckbourn's. Elsinore is presented as a sort of Travelodge with sliding glass doors, swivel chairs and squishy round-the-corner sofa units.

The textual omissions and misreadings could fill a small book. Some examples. Shakespeare wrote the temptation scene ('now might I do it, pat') as a pair of monologues for Claudius and the prince, but here it's done as a two-handed conversation. Jessica Brown Findlay has been encouraged to play Ophelia's tragic farewell ('goodnight, sweet ladies') without tenderness or true sentiment, as if she were Diana Ross firing her PR team. The short scene with Osric fails because no one seems to realise that Osric is an overeducated show-off, and the facetious aside intended for Horatio ('What imports the nomination of this gentleman?') is delivered, incorrectly, to Osric himself.

These are pretty basic misunderstandings of a script which, I have to say, is fairly well known in theatre circles. Icke finishes on a happy note with all the dead people getting up off the lino and dancing together in the Travelodge bar. Which is lovely. It lasts four hours.

Ugly Lies the Bone studies the human aftermath of Bush's botched invasions. Kate Fleetwood plays Jess, an American servicewoman severely injured in Iraq. Half her body has been blown to bits, she walks with extreme difficulty, she can barely raise her right hand, and she wears a headscarf to hide her hairless scalp. Once she was a happy, confident graduate with a bright future and a handsome boyfriend. Now she's human landfill but she has the spirit of a survivor.

The play starts out as a triumph-over-adversity weepie but its complications are unpredictable and intriguing. Jess's geeky ex-boyfriend (Ralf Little, exquisitely charming and awkward) is still half in love with her but can't express his confused adoration. Her sister Kacie reveals flashes of astonishing bitterness over her sister's fate. And Kacie's sponger boyfriend, a dimwit with a fake disability, turns out to be far nobler than he seems.

This is a marvellous and often very moving drama, which properly belongs in an intimate black-box theatre. Director Indhu Rubasingham has added complex lighting and sound effects to help her production fill the massive Lyttelton. Just occasionally, they feel like padding. Kate Fleetwood puts in a thrilling display as Jess. Is there a more versatile actress alive? How she suggests the raw horror of physical pain is sensational. How she suggests the determination to defeat that pain is miraculous.

In a short and unobtrusive scene she strips away her sexless outer layers, while singing obsessively to silence her screaming nerves, and she dons her sister's blue dress and completes a twirl to recapture her lost femininity. The scene lasts a few minutes. Its emotional imprint feels permanent.

Cinema

Victim mentality

Deborah Ross

Elle

18, Key Cities

Elle has been described as 'a rape revenge comedy', which seems unlikely, and also as 'post-feminist', which is likely as, in my experience, that simply means anything goes so long as you acknowledge that feminism has happened. The film stars Isabelle Huppert, who was Oscar-nominated for her performance, and who has repeatedly said that her character, Michèle, is not 'a victim' although, as you have to watch Michèle being raped or near-raped several times, I don't know how we can be so sure about that. Perhaps I'm just not sufficiently in touch with my 'post-feminist' side to fully comprehend.

Directed by Paul Verhoeven (*Basic Instinct*, *RoboCop*, *Total Recall*, *Showgirls*) and written by David Birke from a novel by Philippe Djian — correct me if I am wrong, seriously, but have any women ever made a 'rape revenge' film, comic or otherwise? — it opens with a black screen, a scream, then the sound of sexual congress. The camera then enters a doorway and we see a woman being

raped by a man in a ski mask. He is grunting and rutting. Her shirt is torn and her skirt is pulled up to her waist. He wipes himself down with her knickers before escaping through the French window. Meanwhile, her cat, with its unblinking eyes, watches with the sort of icy feline detachment that makes me, has always made me, and will continue to make me, very much a dog person.

This is Michèle, who lives in a grand Parisian house, which at least makes a change from a cabin in the woods. Michèle shares her cat's icy detachment. She coolly clears up, and takes a bath where she dispassionately observes the blood from her vagina rising up through the bubbles. She orders sushi. She does not call the police. Instead, she goes to bed holding a hammer.

Michèle, we learn, runs a successful video-games company that itself seems to specialise in sexual violence against women. Harder, faster, louder, she says, on being shown the latest game, which involves a monster with phallic tentacles taking a princess from behind. No one in *Elle* behaves as you would expect anyone to behave. Out to dinner with friends, she announces that she has been raped, detailing the circumstances, and there is a brief hiatus in the conversation, admittedly, but no one ever asks her about it again. You'd think they might. But no.

Michèle replays the rape in her mind, so we have to watch it repeatedly. The rapist returns, until she has sex with him consensually, which means what exactly? She was up for it all along? If there is comedy, it is mostly in the form of social satire and mostly it is cruel. Michèle's mother, for instance, is

Perhaps I'm just not sufficiently in touch with my 'post-feminist' side to fully comprehend

a Botox-ed grotesque who appears to exist solely so that we can laugh at her.

The compelling Huppert is, indeed, compelling. That is, compellingly composed. But she is also every single negative female stereotype: controlling mother, bitchy ex-wife, selfish daughter, seducer of husbands. We don't know what motivates her except in one instance. She didn't call the police due to a horrific act once committed by her father. (And she's not a victim?) This has also been described as a 'psychological thriller' but it is hardly that. For example, when the rapist's identity is revealed, she simply pulls his mask off and voilà, there he is. I would also put it to you that the revenge, when it arrives, is not enacted by Michèle. It is enacted by a man. Perhaps this is 'post-feminist' revenge?

This film is beautiful to look at, but if it has anything to say about sex, violence, desire, it all passed me by. Rape should be shown on screen, if only to challenge it, but if this does any of that challenging, that too passed me by. Ultimately, you will have to make up your own mind. I have made up mine. But maybe 'post-chauvinists' will like it?

Adagio

The last log's glow subsides. It's time
to bundle blankets on this borrowed sofa
and unplug the Christmas tree.
Beyond thin curtains
cold slides down outside the window

where tattered mist an hour ago
moved up the path ahead of us
to drape the trees and blend with woodsmoke
into incense for the secular,
augmenting shreds of choral anthem

clinging to us since those closing echoes
hovered over vestry chatter
and big plates of fruit cake for small boys
who swapped white robes for anoraks
to lead us over midnight water meadows.

A make-do bed; a tree already shedding
needles; drifting smoke and chilly mist
unzipping breath; those ringing wineglass voices
which will break: it's still a mystery
the way in which these things all hold together.

— Michael Bartholomew-Biggs

Exhibitions

Home help

Martin Gayford

Madonnas and Miracles: The Holy Home in Renaissance Italy
Fitzwilliam Museum, until 4 June

There have been many explanations for what happened in the Italian Renaissance. Some stress the revival of classical antiquity, others the rise of individualism. A pioneering exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, *Madonnas and Miracles: The Holy Home in Renaissance Italy*, takes a different line. It's all about the 15th- and 16th-century household — and the religious furnishings and fittings it contained.

To a 21st-century eye some of these are distinctly bizarre. Early on, there is a painting of the 'Madonna and Child' by a follower of Filippo Lippi — just the kind of thing one expects to find in an art gallery. Underneath it is a brightly painted wooden figure of the infant Christ, very similar to the one in the picture. But this was not so much a sculpture as a doll for a fervent adult. A mystic named Camilla Battista da Varano received visions while kissing, holding and nursing just such a replica baby Jesus 'with great tenderness'.

Other items in the exhibition touchingly reveal the anxieties of their owners, such as a crude woodcut of the crucifixion with a prayer asking for protection from sudden earthquakes beneath (in that respect, life in central Italy hasn't changed). In the category one could label 'for the Renaissance home that has everything' there is a set of dinner knives. Each has engraved on the blade a Latin grace and benediction plus musical notes. The idea was that before and after eating, everyone in the household could give thanks, singing from the score on their cutlery. Like so many ingenious gadgets, these never caught on.

Madonnas and Miracles makes the case that Renaissance Italy was a much more devout civilisation than has often been assumed. The nudity and bodily beauty of Botticelli's 'Venus' or Michelangelo's 'David' might suggest that this was an era of sensuality and secularism. But it was also a time when religion was taken very seri-

© MUSEO DEGLI EX VOTO DEL SANTUARIO DI MADONNA DELL'ARCO

'Boy falling from a window', 1592, Italy, Naples (possibly)

ously, so much so that in the mid-16th century Europe fragmented and descended into savage warfare because of disagreement on points of theology.

Piety also permeated the average home, whether those living in it were super-rich financiers such as the Medici or the Renaissance equivalents of Mrs May's just-about-managing class. The exhibition mixes up what we would normally think of as high art with much more downmarket objects. And it brings home how often even those works we now think of as masterpieces of art originally had a religious purpose.

Certain areas of a tender, and very rare, drawing of 'The Dead Christ' (*c.* 1432–4) by Fra Angelico are softly blurred. It looks as if they have been touched and kissed by the owner (perhaps a member of the wealthy Strozzi family). So this wasn't a study made by Fra Angelico as a preliminary to painting his 'Descent from the Cross'. It was a reproduction of the central figure intended for someone to contemplate and venerate in private. Its purpose was not appreciation of the marvellous draughtsmanship; this was an aid to the spiritual imagination.

Sometimes, however, it's hard to know how a picture appeared to a 16th-century viewer. Annibale Carracci's 'Mary Magdalene in a Landscape' (*c.*1599) is both tearful and voluptuously bare-breasted, and to the modern gaze it seems mildly erotic. The justification, according to Federico Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, was that depicting the Magdalene thus, as a young woman of 'vibrant freshness', emphasised her love of Christ all the more. Perhaps, though, even in the counter-reformation not everybody looked at the painting in quite such a virtuous way.

After eating, everyone in the household could give thanks, singing from the score on their cutlery

A lot of the exhibits in *Madonnas and Miracles* are aids to domestic devotion: rosaries, terracotta decorated with Biblical scenes, jewellery with pious inscriptions. There is a section devoted to the Jewish home, a reminder that Christians — though hugely in the majority — were not the only religious group in Titian's Venice or Botticelli's Florence. This, too, is full of devotional ornaments and accessories.

A spectacular display of ex-voto panels at the end of the display is an index of Renaissance anxieties — or looking at it another way, an anthology of contemporary accidents. In one a boy has given himself a nasty cut on the throat with a pair of shears, in another a diner is attacked by a bandit while still at the table.

In every case, supernatural aid is at hand: St Nicholas of Tolentino appears in the sky above to retrieve a victim who has tumbled into an enormous barrel of vino. The image marked a thanks-offering — 'ex voto' means 'from a vow'. No doubt as the foaming vintage closed over her head, the unfortunate woman had implored the saint to save her from drowning.

This beautifully conceived and installed exhibition makes you think freshly about all manner of objects, from cheap and cheerful pieces of folk art such as those ex-voto panels to paintings of the highest quality. All of them were intended to affect the behaviour of the people who owned and used them. As the 15th-century architect and theorist Leon Battista Alberti put it, 'The images of things impress themselves in our minds.' In other words, pictures are powerful. That's still true.

THE LISTENER

Sleaford Mods: English Tapas

It's all beginning to wear very thin indeed. Ten years ago this already addled Nottinghamshire duo captured the attention with bellowed, caustic and often astute observations delivered in an ur-rap monotone above cheapo punky laptop beats. The message then, humorously enough, was: everything is shit. Total shit. You're shit, I'm shit, the country's shit.

This briefly entertaining and frequently obscene working-class nihilism was gratefully received by a music press that, desperately looking for something 'edgy', found itself confronted by the mimsy and anodyne public-school folk of Mumford & Sons and Stornoway and Laura Marling. Fair enough: it was, for a while, enlivening and a certain kind of antidote. But, you have to say, with a rapidly diminishing sense of return over the following eight albums.

On their latest, *English Tapas*, the message is the same as it was in 2009: everything's shit. And so indeed it is, not least this album, which sounds tired, uninspiring, boring and curiously child-like, even as its progenitors approach their fifties. The beats have not got any more inventive and musically one of the few highlights is the bassline ripped off Cameo's 'Word Up' on 'Just Like We Do'.

There are, of course, no tunes, just that incessant monotone barking, but the nastiness of the lyrics now seems targeted more at their own fanbase, for daring to get drunk or to smoke, for being 'dead in the head'. When the best track on the album is called 'Dull', you know you've got a dog on your hands. A fairly shit dog.

— Rod Liddle

Radio

Keeping the faith

Kate Chisholm

Perhaps surprisingly, in these secular times, Radio 4 keeps up its annual (and very Reithian) tradition of holding a series of esoteric talks about faith and belief to mark the Christian season of Lent, those 40 days of preparation and penitence leading up to the events of Holy Week. In the first of this year's *Lent Talks* (produced by Christine Morgan), the psychotherapist Anouchka Grose talked about the role of the unconscious in our behaviour and the peculiar tendency of human beings to repeat experiences they claim not to enjoy. You could say that unconsciously we influence our own fate, and that however hard we might try to tame our own impulses we are always liable to be thrown off-course.

We are pushed at times to act, says Grose, by forces inside us that can at times appear to go against who we consciously think we are. This behaviour is coded into us by the stories we grow up with, those early experiences of expectation and judgment. Our 'cunning unconscious minds' bring about certain situations without our being consciously aware of ever having taken action. Free will becomes illusory. 'Where we think we are in control we're not, and where we think we're not in control, we are.'

In the ungraspable, the unknowable, lies buried some strange comfort

Grose spoke for only 15 minutes but in that time took us through so many huge questions. What do we mean by destiny? How much can we control what happens to us? Are there bigger forces at work within us? This was a pure audio experience. No intrusive backing music needed. Just the human voice, speaking one-on-one about those discomfiting questions, those fears and insecurities which usually we keep hidden even from ourselves, dreading what answers we might find. Yet, says Grose, it's precisely within such doubt we may find a kind of certainty. In the ungraspable, the unknowable, lies buried some strange comfort.

Believers and doubters were also the theme of the first programme in the new series of the *TED Radio Hour* on Radio 4 Extra. Guy Raz, of America's NPR (the national syndicate of 900 publicly funded radio stations), threaded together talks given at events organised by TED (the 'non-profit, non-partisan' outfit dedicated to Technology, Entertainment and Design). The session began with a talk given by the evangelist Billy Graham in 1998, decades after the height of his fame when he toured the world on a mission to bring Christianity to the masses while at the same time offering spiritual counselling to a string of American presidents. We heard him talking on the phone to Lyndon Johnson, for example, in October 1964 about wanting to ask God how to deal with the Russians and the Chinese.

Intriguingly, Graham, by then aged 80, knew that he was 'a fish out of water' at such a trendy collection of TED aficionados and began his talk by acknowledging this. 'You can imagine how out of place I feel.' Then, with a masterly understanding of how to gather the crowd into the palm of his hand, he told them that he knew they were also feeling 'awkward' at finding themselves listening to a man who was always popular but never fashionable. 'I hope you won't feel that these few moments are an anti-climax,' he said, brilliantly disarming any potential criticism, before launching into his analysis of the difference between belief and faith. 'Belief is easy,' he said, 'but faith is a feeling. Something you can't easily explain.'

Lesley Hazleton's TED talk was based on her book about the life of Mohammed. She's Jewish but was intrigued by what exactly happened on the night in 610 when the Prophet received the first revelation of the Quran on a mountain outside Mecca. She researched the events of that night and discovered that Mohammed was horrified by the revelation, terrified for his life, overwhelmed not by conviction but by doubt. He ran down the mountain, 'trembling not with joy, but with stark primordial fear'. That he could doubt, she said, makes him human, adding, 'What exactly is imperfect about doubt?'

The most interesting image from all the celebrations surrounding International Women's Day on Wednesday came from the interview on *Sunday* on Radio 4 with Sally Axworthy, Britain's ambassador to the Vatican. A female diplomat let loose on the college of Catholic cardinals. Edward Stourton asked her what it was like to walk into a room of male priests, the only woman among them. You quickly adjust, she replied. 'There are areas which would benefit from women being involved in decision-making,' she told Stourton, diplomatically not adding what they might be.

While in Rome, and at the Vatican, she has been looking at the world through the prism of religion. It's very helpful, she said, to focus on that religious dimension (rather than the political, social or economic) when thinking about people-trafficking, for instance, and the wars in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She also insisted that what has struck her most while in Rome are the numbers of religious women who are 'very active' in the Church. We shouldn't underestimate their importance, she continued. Soft power can be real power.

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NOTES ON …

The Suffolk-Essex border

By *Mark Mason*

You've already seen a picture of the Essex-Suffolk border. Assuming you've seen Constable's 'The Haywain', that is: the Stour (the river into which the farmer has cleverly driven his cart) forms the county boundary, meaning the land on the left is Suffolk, that on the right, Essex. Years of David Beckham and jokes about girls in white stilettos had rather inclined me against Essex, so when I moved to Suffolk it was galling to discover I had a Colchester postcode. Only gradually did I realise how well the two counties work together.

This part of the world is beautifully untrendy — it's on the way to nowhere other than the North Sea, so, unlike the Cotswolds, we are spared invasion by tourist coaches. Flatford Mill (home of 'The Haywain') is at the eastern end of the boundary. Further inland are the villages of Nayland and Polstead, both of which feature in Ruth Rendell stories. The author was born in Essex — an early job on the *Chigwell Times* ended when she filed a story about an event she hadn't attended, failing to mention that the after-dinner speaker had died in the middle of the speech. But she finished up as Baroness Rendell of Babergh, a Suffolk area whose name goes back to the Domesday Book. Her grave is there, admirably modest (just her name and dates).

The Suffolk side of the Stour

The town of Sudbury is where the dogs in *101 Dalmatians* pause during their journey from London, on a mission to rescue the kidnapped colleagues who have been brought to Suffolk for skinning. Dodie Smith owned several dogs of that breed herself, and got the idea for the story when a friend said they 'would make a lovely fur coat'. Sudbury also does a good job of keeping up the area's artistic credentials — it was Gainsborough's home town. His house survives as a museum, which runs excellent workshops for children. Meanwhile, St Gregory's church contains the skull of Simon of Sudbury, separated from his body in 1381 during the Peasants' Revolt; the peasants objected to his role (as Archbishop of Canterbury) in the introduction of the poll tax. The church's website advises those wishing to view the skull to contact Barbara, Margaret or Colin.

Many of the houses in the area are painted the traditional Suffolk pink, originally made by mixing whitewash with berries and/or pig's blood. In 2013 the Angel Hotel in Lavenham, then owned by Marco Pierre White, was daubed a shade that the local council likened to the colour of blancmange. Mr White had to find a darker pink.

The area's most poignant square yard is to be found in Gestingthorpe, just over the boundary from Sudbury in Essex. Specifically the village's church, and even more specifically its plaque to local boy Captain Lawrence Oates. 'When all were beset by hardship,' reads the message from his army colleagues, 'he being gravely injured went out into the blizzard to die.' What it doesn't record is that he did so in his socks, realising as he left the tent that there was no point putting his boots on. Oates's mother still lived in Over Hall across the road, and every week for the rest of her life (25 years) she came to the church and polished the plaque.

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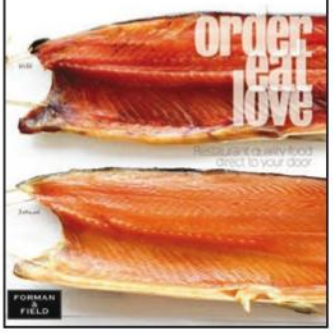

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'How about omitting a place setting for the special infant and putting a dog bowl in the corner of the room?'
— Dear Mary, p61

LIFE

High life
Taki

A lousy fortnight if ever there was one. Two great friends, Lord Belhaven and Stenton and Aleko Goulandris, had their 90th birthday celebrations, and I missed both shindigs because of this damn bug.

Lord Belhaven's was in London, at the Polish Club, but flying there was verboten. Robin Belhaven is an old Etonian, served as an officer in Northern Ireland, farmed in Scotland, and has four children, eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild. He spent 35 years in the House of Lords when that institution was a responsible arm of the government and not a cesspool full of smarmy lawyers. His wife Malgosia is Polish-born and never fails to stand up for that country by reminding everyone how courageously the Poles fought against both the Axis powers and the commies, and how their Catholic faith has helped the people survive both evils.

The Belhavens I met recently, 15 or so years ago, but I feel we are very close friends. Their beautiful daughter, Olenka Hamilton, is a journalist who quit her EU job in Brussels in disgust, as rare a happening as Diogenes finding an honest person with his lamp. Poland is doing fine, despite the EU's meddling and the media's campaign against its conservative government. Poland and Hungary are doing well because of a lack of ethnomasochism (hatred of one's own skin colour) and the self-loathing so prevalent in western societies today. Keeping Africans out has raised the temperature of the European élite to boiling point, but they can go and reproduce themselves. Poland for Christian Poles and Hungary for Christian Hungarians, says Taki. No matter how much money George Soros pours into those two countries in order to subvert them, Catholicism and nationalism come first. Yippee!

My oldest friend Aleko is no stranger to these pages. We met and became friends 72 years ago, and for me to miss his 90th was misery indeed. But the bug I've had kept getting worse and the doc finally ordered me to bed: so no Athens, no reunion with very old friends, no nothing. I spoke with Aleko over the telephone and also to his butler, who is called Plutarch. Anyone whose personal man is called Plutarch has to be a great man, and Aleko is definitely that. Mind you, whenever I'm in Athens nowadays I get a bit sad seeing a once warm, wonderful place turned into one big begging bowl. Those madmen who accepted the criminal terms of the EU bailout are driving around in government-issued limos, while the country's middle class disappears. Austerity measures have driven even law-abiding Greeks to go

I was always against tax-avoiding Greeks, but no longer

off the books and get involved in the black market. No Greek will pay 70 per cent tax, as the new measures require, and many people have stopped reporting their income to avoid paying such taxes. Unpaid taxes have now soared to €95 billion, and businesses simply do not have the financial resources to meet their tax obligations.

What gets me is that there are still people who regret Brexit, the best move Britain has made since Trafalgar. I was always against tax-avoiding Greeks, but no longer. Not one penny should go into that black hole. After all the misery of the past seven years, the debt has risen exponentially, something a know-nothing like me knew would happen when the crisis began. The EU is the most evil institution in the world, enslaving people with red tape and regulation. We should have left a long time ago, but Tsipras likes to go to Brussels and serve drinks to the mega crooks, and to hell with the Greeks. His days are numbered, of course, but the damage has been done.

And now for the really bad news: a loyal *Spectator* reader whom I have on tape reading High life and laughing about my political incorrectness has just been murdered by African thugs, namely Samburu and Pokot cattle herders. Tristan Voorspuy was a Guards officer who settled in Kenya's farm heartland and, like our own Aidan Hartley (who writes about his friend on p57), farmed the land and protected the animals. He rode his horse out to inspect ranch houses torched by the murderers, who are protected by the politicians in Nairobi, and a cowardly invader shot him and his horse.

My friend Lara Livanos told me about Tristan, how much fun he was and what a brave man those thugs killed in cold blood. Local politicians have taken advantage of the movement of cattle herders due to drought conditions, inciting them to invade ranches and drive white farmers out, and what are the Brits doing? Sending more aid so that the African élite can travel first-class to Europe and enjoy first-class hotels and hookers.

Ring your local MP and tell him or her that the next time they vote for one penny of aid for Africa they can forget your vote. It is the least one can do to avenge this cowardly murder.

Low life
Jeremy Clarke

In Spain, I stayed in youth hostels in Barcelona, Alicante, Almeria and Seville. But that first hostel in Barcelona, where the manager got me totally stoned as part of the check-in process, then took me out to a huge dancehall, where about 2,000 Catalans were throwing shapes to a fantastic reggae band, remains the most memorable.

I was stoned still when I woke the next morning. I rose — I'd slept face-down in my clothes — and bimbled into the communal living area. Lit by sunshine and seated contemplatively at the dining table was a man of about my age with blond and grey dreadlocks hanging down to his backside. I sat down opposite this preternaturally relaxed and accepting individual and introduced myself. Whether or not because I was still stoned, and he was stoned already, I couldn't say, but we quickly found the wavelength.

I forget his name. He was Dutch but spoke good English with a Rotterdam accent. Maybe it was a flash of intuition that made him mention right away that he used to be a Feyenoord hooligan. I became interested in Dutch football hooligans after being caught in the middle of a surprisingly determined showing by ADO Den Haag hooligans when West Ham were there in 1976. And who can forget that Uefa Cup final between Feyenoord and Spurs in 1974? Also, I was quite up-to-date having recently viewed the celebrated YouTube video of the prearranged toe-to-toe in a wood between Feyenoord's

finest and a coalition of the Nancy and Strasbourg élite. (Feyenoord wholly prevailed.) So I knew a bit about it and what he implied by the name Feyenoord.

But nowadays he was a Rastafarian, he said, a vegetarian, and the great Jah was his heavenly father. And to prove it, he switched to an astoundingly authentic Jamaican patois. I was so surprised by the seamlessness of the transition that I laughed in his face, which he accepted with poker-faced equanimity, perhaps because the derision of the world merely sanctified his truth. When he spoke to me from then on, he switched randomly between the two accents, and I always laughed, in spite of trying not to.

He had resided in Barcelona for three weeks now and was a regular customer at a nearby coffee shop. Would I like to come with him this afternoon to smoke something? He usually went at around five. So we agreed to do that. And then a sleepy black woman, whom he introduced as his wife, emerged from his room. Originally from Guyana, she had lived in Holland for ten years. Before they came to Barcelona, they were in Alicante. She was wandering alone in Alicante, he said, when she was picked up by the police simply because she was black. Because the Alicante coppers had never seen a Guyanan passport before, they assumed it was a fake document and locked her up. She had to promise to pay a lawyer €600 to have her freed. 'Did the experience upset you?' I asked her. She shrugged. 'Not really. Some white people don't like black people and some black people don't like white people. What can you do?' 'Gyal fyah cyaah quench!' approved her husband.

My open-top city bus tour finished later than anticipated and sadly I missed our five o'clock rendezvous. Around seven, he shuffled into the hostel's communal room with his head down, went straight into his room, collapsed on his bed with his face to the wall, and mumbled a refusal to the can of lager I was offering.

That was in Barcelona, but in lovely Seville I was suddenly tired of it all: tired of youth hostels, youth, bunk beds and of securing my worldly possessions in a locker with a little brass padlock. I was tired of picturesque medieval streets and stupendous cathedrals; tired of street maps decorated by smiling tourist-information ladies with flamboyant Biro circles and crosses; tired of tapas; tired of my clothes; tired of dragging my wheeled bag across striated or cobbled pavements; tired of being largely mute and confined in my pedestrian mind; tired of trains, train stations, train-station toilets, and standing around in station booking offices waiting for my number to come up, while blanking the impassioned entreaties of a surprisingly wide variety of opportunistic beggars, then paying €10, €20, €30 or even €50 to reserve my seat for the onward journey despite presenting a pass supposedly valid for free rail travel in 30 countries for 30 days. My fresh, extroverted, best self had relished many of these things. My tired, introverted, worst self, not so much. I surrendered. From Seville I took a train to Madrid, and from there a train direct to Aix-en-Provence, where I cadged a lift back to our hillside shack to bless up, wul ah fresh, see mi boonoonoonoos, yeah mun.

Real life
Melissa Kite

If it takes any longer to find a buyer for my London flat I am going to start coming to the conclusion that it is perfect for me in my old age. Forget moving to a cottage with a vertiginous staircase in the inhospitable countryside, this two-bedroom apartment minutes from the hustle and bustle is just the thing for an aging couple like the builder boyfriend and me.

'Think about it,' said the BB the other evening, as we sat in my cosy living room, he nursing the usual aches and pains he brings home after a hard day on a roof. 'This is just what we need. It's handy for shops and services and it's all on one level so I can limp around as my dodgy hip gives out.'

He's right. If we didn't own a flat in London at this point in our middle age we really ought to be buying one for convenience sake. Certainly, I can't be bothered selling one for much longer, given the sort of shenanigans that are going on in this weird climate.

The agent, panic-stricken since I smelt a rat with the last buyer they persuaded me to entertain for three months, is putting all manner of insane propositions to me and claiming they are 'offers'.

'Good news!' they emailed a few days ago. Someone wanted to buy my flat, but on the condition that they will be able to extend over the side return into my small back garden.

I pointed out that this was not, in my humble opinion, the dictionary definition of good news. The flat is leasehold and in a conservation area. Extending it would ruin life for three sets of neighbours, obscuring their light and peace. It would concrete over a little oasis of green space, setting a precedent for more gardens in the area to be built on.

I told the agent that even if this so-called buyer could get planning permission, and the agreement of the freeholder, I would not allow development of my back garden on moral grounds.

This blew the agent's mind, I suppose. But in truth she ought to be rejecting all offers based on lunatic development plans.

One of the stipulations of the buyer I broke up with was that the flat must be able to have a bifold door fitted in the kitchen, ripping away half the party wall jointly demised to and I suppose ultimately owned by the freeholder.

Why would he allow that? I asked the agent. Well, he might want the money, she said. Yes, and there again, he might not. He might want his supporting wall left alone and quiet enjoyment of his property. Had she considered that? Had she considered the possibility that not everyone is susceptible to cash bribery?

More pertinently, is some jiggery-pokery going on designed to lock me in to my contract even though there are no suitable buyers around?

To wit, when is an offer not an offer? For the agent surely can't claim to be fulfilling the terms of their contract to me if they are only obtaining 'offers' that stretch the bounds of credulity and logic.

What next? 'Dear Melissa, one of our registered buyers who viewed your property recently has made an offer very close to the asking price! This is very exciting and we hope you will be in a position to accept. PS. The offer is conditional on them getting full planning permission to knock the building down and erect a luxury development complex of 15 flats, gym, swimming pool and underground car park. What do you think? Could you ask the guy who lives upstairs if he would mind his flat being demolished? Please let us know!'

Is that an offer? Am I in breach of contract if I continue to reject such propositions? Let's look at it this way: if I had instructed an agent to sell a banana I owned, would I not be entitled to vacate my contract if the agent continually came to me with offers to buy the banana so long as I proved that it was possible to convert it into a mango?

On top of everything else, and notwithstanding the crazy development plans of the clueless and disreputable, the comments from potential buyers who don't want the flat at all have been nothing short of deranged.

Last week a series of viewings resulted in the following feedback sent to my email: 24 Feb 2017, 6 p.m.: applicant loves the location. Unfortunately didn't feel this flat was spacious enough for him.

23 February 2017, 10.30 a.m.: unfortunately she decided the flat was slightly too big for her. She would prefer a smaller flat with a bigger garden.

Presumably, this one wanted a smaller flat with a bigger garden so she could extend into the garden to make the flat bigger.

Wild life

Aidan Hartley

Laikipia

On Tristan Voorspuy's hell-for-leather riding safaris across Kenya's savannah, he cracked a bullwhip at predators that tried to eat his guests. One time a lion chased American actress Glenn Close on her horse and Tristan said, 'We nearly lost her.' They all joked about it that night around the campfire. Tristan was among the last of the stylishly mad people in Kenya. He once rode his horse into the bar at the Muthaiga Club during a stag party. From the saddle, he toasted the groom, his steed defecated on the parquet and off he trotted between astonished drinkers into Africa's night. Tristan was a gentleman and well read. He walked with the stiff, bow-legged gait of a man who has fallen off a polo pony too many times, he had a wild temper and he threw unbelievable parties with his wife Cindy at Deloraine, their tumbledown pile in the Rift Valley. He was a conservationist who loved birds and animals. His best years were devoted to Sosian, a ranch on Kenya's Laikipia plateau — and the farm next to us — which he bought when it was a derelict dustbowl. He turned it into a very successful tourism and ranching enterprise, full of game, employing hundreds, paying lashings of tax.

A few days ago, when Tristan Voorspuy rode out on his grey gelding Loita on the ranch, his farm manager said, 'Don't go.' Across Laikipia hordes of armed Samburu and Pokot invaders are running amok, killing people, vandalising, looting and massacring elephant and other game. Sosian's tourist lodge closed a month ago after raiders torched another safari camp on a neighbouring conservancy. More than 100,000 cattle and well over 1,000 armed youths have invaded our immediate area — an extraordinary sight when you fly over this multitude.

Before the weekend they had burned down three ranch houses on Sosian. Anybody venturing into the area was ambushed. Tristan declared that this was his farm and he wanted to see what was happening for himself. He rode off, unarmed, heading to one of the ruined houses. Hours passed. His distraught son Archie and staff down the hill could not get close in soft-skinned vehicles. A circling helicopter spotted Loita standing saddleless and alone. Later a scout was able to reach the site unscathed. Loita had been shot twice and had a broken leg. Nearby was Tristan, shot three times execution-style. Tristan's people could not retrieve the body under the hails of gunfire. Overnight Loita vanished, perhaps eaten by hyenas, and it was not until noon the next day that a senior policeman reached the place in an armoured vehicle to retrieve poor Tristan. His daughter Imogen said, 'When Tristan set out on his horse, he was doing it for what he loved and believed in most… his honourable dedication to the welfare of wildlife and the safety of us in Kenya…'.

On the bush telegraph we have heard that when Tristan arrived at the burned house site he encountered a Pokot and two Samburus. One of them was carrying an AK-47. Tristan said calmly to them, 'I come unarmed and I am not here to cause you any problems.' The Samburu grapevine claims that the Pokot, an illiterate youth named Kachartat, shot the horse and then killed Tristan. The Pokot grapevine, meanwhile, blames one of the Samburus for pulling the trigger. It appears that Tristan held his head high at the instant of his death and was not fleeing, because they shot him in the face.

Tristan held his head high at the instant of his death. He was not fleeing, because they shot him in the face

I knew Tristan on and off for 27 years and I never imagined that he would become a symbol of our despair or hope in this way. He was not the only person to suffer violence in Laikipia: in recent months a frightening number of Kenyans have been murdered and wounded across the plateau. This week Samburu raiders shot a woman who was seven months pregnant in her legs and also shot her children aged four and 12. They poured bullets into these poor people's mud hut as they slept. The attackers were not there to steal — it was pure malice. The mother and children are down-page news, but Tristan's killing has made headlines around the world. We pray that this will encourage Kenya's government to finally wake up and tackle the spreading chaos a few months ahead of national elections. If it does not, then we will have all lost tragically. In Laikipia we have to hope that Tristan's appalling death and the sad tale of his white horse Loita will signal our lowest point.

Bridge

Susanna Gross

There are plenty of bridge professionals who believe in flattering lesser players (whether they're clients, friends or spouses) by exaggerating how well they play, or claiming their mistakes are perfectly understandable. Not so Espen Erichsen. Espen is a great player and I like him enormously, but he's also the most blunt-talking man I've ever met. More than ten years ago we used to play together a bit, and I've never forgotten the time I mistakenly ducked a trick in defence. 'Let me give you some advice,' he said sternly. 'Never try to do anything clever. It will always backfire.'

Last week, I played against him at the Young Chelsea. I had a difficult hand to bid, but my partner and I fumbled our way to a good slam. Afterwards, I asked Espen how I should have bid it. 'There were various options,' he replied. 'But one thing's for sure: what you did made me want to puke.' Ah well. I wonder whether he felt equally queasy with the way East-West (Alex Hydes-Jason Hackett) bid this hand against him at the NEC Cup in Japan a few weeks ago:

Dealer South **Both vulnerable**

	♠ 10 3 ♥ K Q J 9 2 ♦ A 4 2 ♣ 10 3 2	
♠ K 2 ♥ 6 4 2 ♦ Q 8 5 3 ♣ A Q 6 5	N W E S	♠ A Q 9 8 6 5 4 ♥ A ♦ K J 10 ♣ 7 4
	♠ J 7 ♥ 10 8 7 5 ♦ 9 7 6 ♣ K J 9 8	

West	North	East	South
			Pass
pass	1♥	Dble	3♥
Dble	pass	4♠	Pass
5NT	pass	6♦	All pass

Hackett meant 5NT as 'pick a slam'; Hydes thought it showed both minors, which is why they ended up in 6♦ instead of 6♠. South (David Bakhshi) led a heart to the ace. Hydes played the ♦K and Espen (North) ducked. He then played ♦J and Espen ducked again. It's rare to have to duck your trump ace twice from Axx to beat a contract — superb defence. Hydes switched to spades. On the third round, Bakhshi ruffed, dummy overruffed and Espen still didn't overruff. Hydes ruffed a heart to hand and played another spade. This time Espen ruffed and played a heart — down 3.

Chess

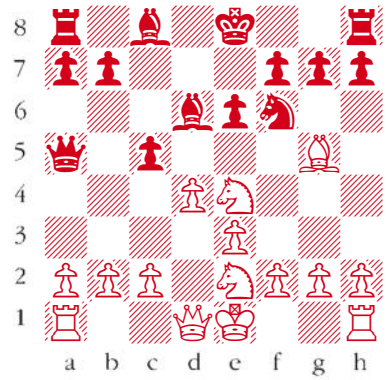
Mutkin's masterpiece

Raymond Keene

This Saturday, 11 March, the annual Oxford v Cambridge Varsity match is being hosted by The Royal Automobile Club Pall Mall. Cambridge lead the series with 59 wins to Oxford's 53 in a contest which goes back to the 1870s. *Primum mobile* at the RAC is Henry Mutkin, who himself led the Oxford team in the mid-1950s. This week's game sees Mutkin felling not one but two former British champions, both grandmasters, with a series of mighty blows. Thanks to Henry for providing variations.

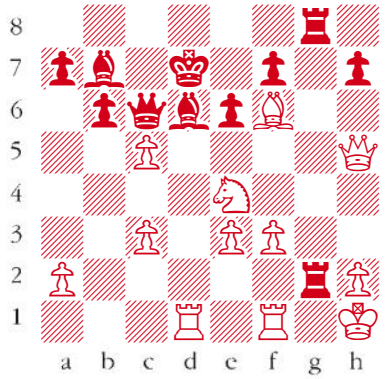
Hodgson/Sadler-Mutkin: London 2016, Trompovsky Attack

1 d4 Nf6 2 Bg5 Ne4 3 Bf4 d5 4 e3 e6 5 Bd3 Bd6 6 Ne2 Nd7 7 Bxe4 dxe4 8 Nd2 Nf6 9 Bg5 c5 This leads to complicated play. White wins a pawn but Black gains practical counterchances. **10 Nxe4 Qa5+**

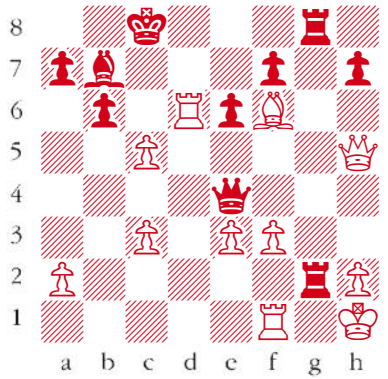


11 b4 11 Qd2 Qxd2+ 12 Nxd2 cxd4 13 Nxd4 Be7 gives Black some chances based on the bishop pair. **11 ... Qxb4+ 12 c3 Qb6 13 Nxf6+ gxf6 14 Bxf6 Rg8 15 0-0 Qc6** White is a fairly safe pawn up but Black has play against g2. **16 Ng3 b6 17 Qh5 Bb7 18 f3 Rg6 19 Ne4 Kd7 20 Rad1** This is an inaccuracy, granting Black chances. 20 dxc5 is very strong. **20 ... Rag8 21 dxc5** White threatens to capture on d6 and it does not look as if the black counterattack is sufficient. However **21 ... Rxg2+ 22 Kh1** (see diagram 2) **22 ... Qxe4**! This must have

Diagram 2



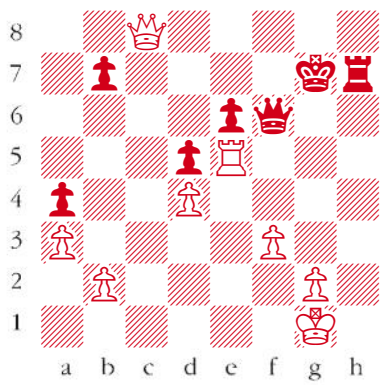
come as a shock to the grandmasters. **23 Rxd6+ Kc8**



Now there is only one way for White. 24 Rd8+! Rxd8 25 fxe4 Bxe4 26 Qe5 Rg4+ 27 Qxe4 Rxe4 28 Bxd8 Kxd8 29 cxb6 axb6 leads to a drawn endgame. If instead the grandmasters had accepted the queen then after 24 fxe4 Bxe4 it looks as though 25 Rd8+ will still draw but, in fact, Black can play 25 ... Kb7! 26 Qf3 Rg1+ 27 Rxg1 Bxf3+ 28 Rg2 Rxg2 and now the threat of Black playing a discovered check with the rook forces 29 h3 when 29 ... Rg6+ 30 Kh2 Rxf6 is a winning endgame for Black. Note also that after 24 fxe4 Bxe4 25 Rd8+ Kb7 26 Rxg8, Black plays 26 ... Rg4+ mating. **24 h4 Rh2+**! White was quickly mated. **25 Kxh2 Qc2+ 26 Kh3 Qg2 mate**

PUZZLE NO. 447

Black to play. This position is from Kozera-Wang, Varsity Match 2016. White has powerful threats and Black has only one way to stay in the game. Can you see it? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 14 March or via email to victoria@spectator.co.uk. There is a prize of £20 for the first correct answer out of a hat. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.



Last week's solution 1 Rf7
Last week's winner Bernard Golding, Newcastle upon Tyne

Competition

Mark making

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 2988 you were invited to compose a poem making the case for a national commemoration day for a person or thing of your choice.

While Alanna Blake championed the dandelion, there were also impassioned calls for days that high-five Thomas Crapper, Doris Day and the tent. I, for one, would happily celebrate a Tom Waits day with Adrian Fry. The winners below take £25 each. Bill Greenwell pockets £30.

Bring us the day of the dodo,
The day of the passenger pigeon,
That their memories never corrode, oh
Let's cheer them, and more than a smidgen:

Let's praise those whose very long luck
Receded to zilch and to zippo:
The quagga, the Amsterdam duck,
The bluebuck, the tiny dwarf hippo,

The great auk they killed on St Kilda,
The red rail, and slim Wimmer's shrew,
All dead for a ducat, a guilder,
Like the broad-faced and pale potoroo.

Though the gracile opossum's extinct,
Let us sift our remembrance's urn:
All creatures' misfortunes are linked —
Don't forget. It could soon be our turn.
Bill Greenwell

Please let there be just once a year
A day when gods have vanished,
When things are seen as they appear
And heaven has been banished.
And on that day let every bell
Be tolled for US alone,
A day we wish each other well
And ghosts of gods have gone.
Then let us praise the minds of those
Who burned in cause of science,
The heretics whose conscience chose
A statement of defiance.
And if they must let people pray
That in the years to be
Not one, but every single day,
Will come as heaven free.
Frank McDonald

We burn Guy Fawkes on bonfire night
Because he hatched a plot.
Yet many think that he was right
(Though many others not.)

So let us choose to burn instead
A chap, we won't say who,
That everyone thinks better dead,
Except his motley crew.

A scarecrow we will stuff with straw
To represent this person,
Since nobody, in peace or war,
Could prove to be a worse 'un,

And we will execrate the same,
Who sold his soul for cash,

Giving his body to the flame,
Till it be turned to ash.
John Whitworth

Two centuries ago the birth occurred
Of one whom we must really not forget.
London would be a single steaming word
But for Sir Joseph William Bazalgette.

Kings, politicians, matter not a bit,
Nor all celebrities of newer age.
London would be up to its neck in it
But for Joe's great Victorian sewerage.

On Bazal-Day, then, each convenience
Must make their services completely free,
And save a grateful populace expense,
Where one pee can cost up to 50p.

So here's the declaration of intent:
We need a special day for Bazalgette,
Who did his best to shift the excrement
Through sewage systems which are working yet.
Brian Murdoch

This day is called the Feast of Tony Blair.
He that outlives this day and holds his seat
Will stand a-blushing when this day is named
And blench him at the name of Tony Blair.
He that shall vote this day and live t'old age
Will yearly on the vigil dodge his neighbours
And say, 'Tomorrow is not Tony Blair's?'
Then will he duck the Press and hide his part
And say, 'These deeds I did on Blair's orders.'
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember, with apologies,
What flights he fled that day. Then shall these
names,
As soft soap in his mouth as household brands —
Tony the Mad, Bradshaw of Exeter,
Jack Straw and Amos, Hoon and Reid the cur —
Be in their guilty cups, rarely remembered.
Nigel Stuart

Let's remember the 'bigoted woman';
who put Gordon Brown in his place,
harangued him on policy issues
and left him with egg on his face.

We'll treasure that unguarded moment
when Gordon, revealing his views,
was broadcast in full to the nation
in time for the six o'clock news.

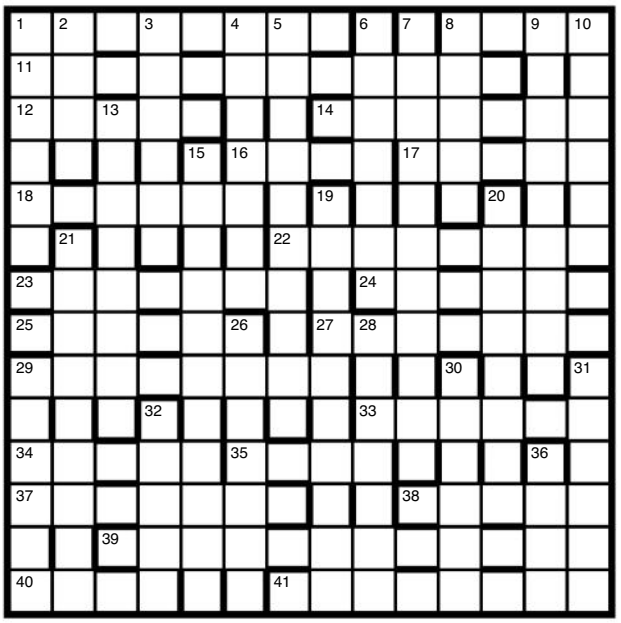
And the woman from Rochdale declaring
the man in the street has a voice
and that no one's immune from a roasting —
an occasion for all to rejoice!

So let's mark the encounter with bunting,
hold rallies and sing a reprise
to honour the 'bigoted woman'
who brought the PM to his knees.
Sylvia Fairley

NO. 2991: THESE FOOLISH THINGS

The BBC once marked April Fool's Day with a report on the *Today* programme that evidence had emerged that Shakespeare was French. You are invited to submit an April Fool disguised as a serious news feature that contains a startling revelation about a well-known literary figure, alive or dead. Please email entries of up to 150 words to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 22 March.

Crossword
2300: The law
by Columba



Each of ten clues comprises a definition part and a hidden consecutive jumble of the answer including one extra letter. Extras in Across clues spell a definition of three unclued lights, and extras in Down clues spell a definition of three unclued lights; these definitions combine to spell a definition of three unclued lights.

Across

1 Provided police report, quite emollient (8, hyphened)
8 My mistake, very big, about work (4)
11 Deprecators doubted nuclear survival (12)
14 Nervous man among drunkards returning jar (7)
17 Study odd parts of test for negative effects (5)
22 Tasted cabbage, mostly acceptable with wine (8)
23 Sailor has worked in Cornish town (7)
24 Hemingway? Keen storyteller (6)
25 Cattle follow a course south (6)
27 Harry's band unbeaten in old battle (7)
29 Tax rye, sadly sparse (8)
33 Commander securing aim in programme (6)
34 Hapless, idiotic stake (5)
35 Left enthralled by cool disc (4)
37 See women's quiet assistance poorly rewarded (7, hyphened)
38 Snares around in grass (5)
40 Salmon in time eaten by parrot (4)
41 Buildings with colonnades, special variable kinds (8)

Down

1 Provinces thus stabilised (6)
2 Extra payment, not British responsibility (4)
3 Church in move upset ancient people (6)
4 Debates at sea over birds (7)
5 Note anger about new money in county (10)
6 Go faster than offensive mob to Utopia (7)
8 Shell, old, not fine (5)
10 Well-informed material mostly about saints (6)
13 Unusual feel on smooth part of bat (8, hyphened)
15 Relieve tension about retreat, keeping connection with base (11, three words)
19 Feeble column, maybe, by apologist (10, hyphened)
26 Phosphorescence in view around a tree (7, hyphened)
28 Sole crumpled covering insect sheds (7, hyphened)
29 Rodent, thin, not mobile in marketplace (6)
31 Grass throughout courtyards (6)
32 Beginning in hard area below mountain (5)
36 Old-fashioned practice receiving good press (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 27 March. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the *Chambers* dictionary instead of cash — ring the word 'dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2300, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name .....

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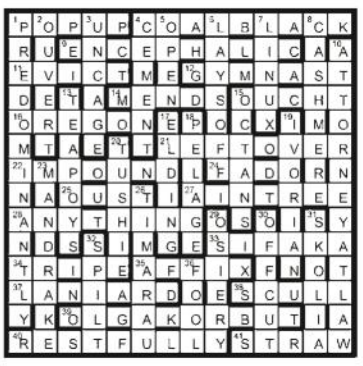


SOLUTION TO 2297: THOROUGHLY

Corrections of misprints in clues give INSIDE OUT. Thematic entries at 2, 15A, 25, 30 and 39 are defined by 5, 28, 11, 21 and 12.

First prize Belinda Bridgen, London NW8
Runners-up S.J.J. Tiffin, Cockermouth, Cumbria; Tim Hanks, Douglas, Isle of Man

Status Anxiety

Victory in sight for the free schools revolution

Toby Young

I'm not surprised the Chancellor allocated more money for the free schools policy in the Budget. It's not an exaggeration to say it's the most successful education policy of the last 25 years.

To begin with, free schools have proved to be a cost-effective way of meeting the need for additional places. This was underlined in the National Audit Office's recent report on school capital, which said that on a like-for-like basis, they cost 29 per cent less than new schools built under Labour's 'Building Schools for the Future' programme. Given that the Department for Education has estimated that we will need 420,000 additional places between 2016 and 2021, it makes sense for as many of these as possible to be in new free schools.

Then there's the fact that they're generally of a high quality. Free schools for 16-to-19-year-olds are particularly good, like the London Academy of Excellence in Newham, where eight students received offers from Oxford and Cambridge this year. They've also proved to be a hit with parents. In 2015, secondary free schools attracted an average of 3.5 applicants per place, compared with an average of 2.3 applicants per place in local authority schools.

Some critics claim that too many free schools are built in areas where they are not needed. However, the Department for Education estimates that 83 per cent of those approved to open since 2013 will provide places that meet demographic need. While it's true that a small minority of free-school places don't do this, parents wouldn't be able to exercise any choice without some spare capacity.

Hundreds of thousands of children will soon have the same opportunities as mine

It was the lack of choice in Acton that prompted me to help set up the West London Free School. I wanted my four children to have the kind of education I'd had in the last grammar school year of a state school in north London. Looking around my neighbourhood, there were some good comprehensives, but they were either faith schools or had such tiny catchment areas that you practically had to live within the school gates to get a place. So, as readers of this column will know, I got together with a group of local parents and teachers and we set up the first free school to sign a funding agreement with Michael Gove. Today, it's one of the most popular schools in the country, with 11 applicants for every place, and its GCSE results put it in the top 5 per cent of England's secular co-educational comprehensives.

Thanks to the extra £320 million for free schools announced yesterday, a further 110 can now be set up, in addition to 500 already budgeted for, which means that hundreds of thousands of children will soon have the same opportunities as mine. If you add those to the 429 that have already opened, 1,000 free schools will have been set up just ten years after my little platoon first secured its bridgehead in 2011. The war isn't over, but victory is in sight.

It looks as if some of these new free schools will be grammars, assuming Theresa May can get the ban lifted. My view on selective schools is that there really isn't any need for them in areas already well served by good comprehensives. The evidence shows that high-ability children do no better at grammars than they do in the top 25 per cent of comps, and that remains true if they come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

But in areas with mediocre or poor state secondaries, I think there's a strong case. It doesn't seem right that a bright child in one of these areas should be denied the opportunities available to a bright child living near a good school. You could argue that it would be better to end the injustice by improving the local sink comprehensive, but it's hard to fob parents off with 'jam tomorrow', particularly when their own children will be too old to benefit. I didn't buy that argument in Acton, so it would be hypocritical of me to make it now that my children are OK.

What a journey it's been. I'm now the head of a charity that helps groups set up free schools, and I want to see more of them established in cities like Birmingham and Manchester, as well as 'Opportunity Areas' like Stoke and Doncaster. Extending parental choice to all parts of the country is essential if we're going to heal the divisions laid bare by the EU referendum.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH

The Wiki Man

Technology and the winner-takes-all effect

Rory Sutherland

I was exchanging emails with someone the other day and signed off with the sentence 'let me know when you are next in London' or words to that effect. It then occurred to me that I had absolutely no idea where in the world my correspondent lived. This interested me. Because it occurred to me that I could write the sentence 'next time you are in London' to more or less anyone in the world without it sounding ridiculous. Of how many other cities is that true? New York, certainly. But then it gets difficult. Paris or Singapore? Well, at a pinch. It wouldn't work for Perpignan, say, or Bourton-on-the-Water.

This thought experiment helps explain why the many people (including me) who once naively assumed that the internet would make geographical location irrelevant have seen ourselves proved diametrically wrong. (In the late 1990s a shrewd friend of mine in Palo Alto even bought a secluded lakeside plot in the Rockies on the assumption that in ten years' time he could live there more or less permanently: no such luck.)

In an era of live performance, there was a good living to be made as the fifth best tenor in Denmark

In fact digital connectivity increases rather than reduces the drive towards urban concentration. By greatly extending the range, ease and frequency with which people can form networks, it increases the number of people who need to meet each other in person: such meetings increasingly concentrate in the world's few mega-hub cities. So the draw of London is magnified still further.

This distortion happens at a smaller scale everywhere, of course. If you have two offices, with ten employees in Liverpool and six in Preston, you will find that over 90 per cent of all meetings take place in Liverpool. But at a larger scale things get more extreme.

When technology and globalisation break down the buffer of geography entirely, the winner-takes-all effect intensifies. An early manifestation of this came with the invention of the gramophone: in an era of live performance, there was a good living to be made as the fifth best tenor in Denmark; when the gramophone appeared, one man, Caruso, earned the lion's share of worldwide royalties.

If you ever wondered why so many of the world's packaged goods brands have their origins in the American Midwest of the late 19th century, it's the same effect at work. Before the advent of the railways, the United States was home to thousands of smaller regional brands. The railways killed this diversity, with the winners overwhelmingly being manufacturers close to the rail hub in Chicago.

Such power laws are sometimes described as the Pareto Principle or the 80:20 rule, — the maxim being that, say, 20 per cent of a company's customers account for 80 per cent of its sales, or that 20 per cent of a country's citizens typically own 80 per cent of the land. But this understates reality. In reality the three most successful tenors might earn 95 per cent of recording fees. Or, as happens now, two or three European cities might attract the majority of overseas property investment. What's wrong with Lisbon or Rome?

Likewise, the mean salary of an author hasn't changed much since the 1950s. That sounds reassuring — until you remove J.K. Rowling and Dan Brown from the total. Every other author is poorer in adjusted terms than their 1950s equivalent.

If the world seems increasingly mad to you, spare a nod for Vilfredo Pareto, after whom the effect was named. Unusually for an economist, he did at least live in accordance with his theories: his final years were spent secluded in an Alpine chalet with a mistress and 20 Persian cats. My guess is that he started off with five mistresses and 100 cats before deciding that 20 per cent of these would give him 80 per cent of the pleasure.

Rory Sutherland is vice-chairman of Ogilvy Group UK.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED

Q. Most of my friends have small children and being mostly media types in west London, have given them silly names: Zedechiah, Tiger etc. I'm used to that. What is driving me up the wall is that some of them have begun to use the definite article before referring to their offspring. As in: 'I'll bring The Zed to tea, shall I?' Or 'I'm taking The Wolf to swimming.' What irritates me is the implication that we're all expected to join in with the parents' (understandable) assumption that their child is special and unique. I see that my irritation is mean-spirited, Mary, and I know that to mention it straight out would be unnecessarily upsetting to the doting parents. Is there anything I can do or should I just lump it?
— Name withheld, west London

A. It's quite normal to refer to pets with a definite article, as in 'We'll bring the Puggles with us.' How about omitting a place setting for the special infant and putting a dog bowl in the corner of the room? You can express apologies on the grounds that your daily help obviously mistook the name for a four-footed guest. Additionally, prime one of your small children/guests to express dismay that it isn't the real wolf or tiger they were expecting. And you can mutter sympathetically that you suppose this must often happen.

Q. Following Defra regulations, I have dutifully shut my free-range hens into a shed to prevent them from catching flu. The shed is now disgusting from accumulated faeces, and I am obliged to spend time mucking out. Furthermore, it is no longer a pleasure to eat the eggs: the yolks are pale and they taste no better than eggs from the supermarket. None of this is what I had in mind when I became a poultry keeper. What shall I do?
— Name and address withheld

A. Why not let them go on ahead early? Then get a new lot when the restrictions are lifted.

Q. My daughter is being confirmed this weekend. One of her godmothers, apart from a token christening present, has not taken any interest in her in the intervening years, and not remembered her at Christmas or her birthday — but has frequently said to us, 'Sorry I've been so hopeless but I've got too many godchildren.' I decided to punish her by not inviting her to the service but am now getting cold feet. What should I do?
— Name and address withheld

A. Of course you must invite her. Not least because forgiveness is one of the central tenets of Christianity. Also you don't know what fate has in store. At the age of 25, a well-known one-time pauper whose godmother had been similarly negligent became the surprise joint beneficiary of that godmother's will. The sum was enough to buy a flat in London. The godmother had been too busy to have children herself and, faute de mieux, had divided her estate between her godchildren.

Drink

A vintage that tastes of Old Possum

Bruce Anderson

Eliot. After 50 years trying to make sense of his verse, and at the risk of admitting to rampant philistinism, I propose three conclusions. At his best, he is one of the finest poets in the language. Partly because he is straining language and thought to the uttermost — an analogy with the final Beethoven piano sonatas — he is sometimes incomprehensible: sometimes, indeed, falls into arrant pseudery. Finally, his anti-Semitism before the war, his rejection of *Animal Farm* after it: this great man and devout Christian was not exempt from original sin.

Gerontion. 'The Jew squats on the window sill, spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp.' We turn our eye from the page in revulsion and pity. Even before Auschwitz, how could one of the finest sensibilities of our era have written that? A few lines later: 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?' Truly, this was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Much can be forgiven to such a tortured soul.

England. Eliot may have moved to England and embraced Englishness: 'History is now and England.' But he could never immerse himself in the clod-hopping stolidity of the England deep-down things: the pint of beer in the country pub, the discreet cleverness of an Englishman who pretends to be anti-intellectual and turns out to have read a lot of books — the 'Dearly Beloved' in church on Sunday. In England at its best and wisest, there is a eupeptic stoicism, an understanding that life is far too important to be taken seriously. Poor Eliot: he could never escape for long from seriousness.

Macavity. All that said, there are the cat poems. Necessary light relief after you have been trying to fight your way across *The Waste Land*, they must also have been light relief for him: his version of Dearly Beloved. 'In my beginning is my end.' I started to read Eliot as a pretentious schoolboy who thought that it would be easy to understand the human condition. Half a century later, in sight, I suppose, of 'In my end is my beginning', it is more a matter of 'These fragments I have stored against my ruins.' But I shall grapple with Eliot as long as my wits endure.

In 2015, the sun burst forth over Burgundy with its benefactions

'Voluptuary sweetness.' Those thoughts, welcome, self-indulgent, unwelcome, forced themselves upon me after a tasting of white 2015s from Bernard Vallet and the house of Pierre Bourrée. In 2015, the sun burst forth over Burgundy with its benefactions. The result was a Ceres, a Proserpine of a hugely ripe vintage, like a voluptuous girl painted by Titian or Rubens, with the obvious risk of blowsiness. But there is an advantage. The lesser wines are ready for early drinking. Thus it was with Bernard's bottles.

'Midwinter spring is its own season.' On a filthy evening in February, while one might be fighting down envy of better-organised friends who always evade the final phase of winter by decamping to the Caribbean, Bernard's Auxey-Duresses and Pernand-Vergelesses were wonderfully restorative. Happy in their own skin, these are village wines with no pretensions to a higher status. Yet they have the promise and the charm of a gentler season: an almost Apollonian serenity. Winter shall have no dominion. These are the harbingers of summer.

Other village wines can aspire further. Bernard's Meursault was thoroughly sound, his Puligny-Montrachet as good as many a Premier Cru. At that level, the palm went to another Meursault, a Premier Cru Les Perrières, absolutely not a wine for early drinking. As to how long the '15s will last, everything will depend on the grower. We should not underestimate the alchemical power of the best Burgundians. In two millennia, their ability to blend the heat of the sun and the minerality of the terroir has not failed them. Their right arms have not lost their cunning.

New presidential limo

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Kippah

What, asks the columnist Philologus in the online magazine *Mosaic*, is the difference between a *kippah* and a *yarmulke*? I'm glad he supplied an answer, for I know no Yiddish and less Hebrew, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* is reticent.

Kippah first appeared in the *OED* in 1997, with the bare etymology 'from Hebrew'. Philologus observes that it denotes 'any skullcap worn by a Jew for religious reasons'. He suggests that *kippah* derives from a word in early rabbinic Hebrew (from the time of the compilation of the Mishnah, the first century in AD-dating). That Hebrew word meant 'dome' or 'vault', either of a building or of the heavens. This sounds a satisfying derivation.

But Philologus introduces the possibility that *kippah* in the sense 'cap' comes from the Latin *cappa*, which gave us the English *cap*, once meaning 'hood' or 'cloak with a hood', until it settled down in the Middle Ages to mean 'brimless male head-dress'.

As for *yarmulke*, a Yiddish word, Philologus notes that it 'generally refers only to the sewn satin or felt cap, commonly with a cotton lining, of Ashkenazi Eastern Europe'. He mentions that it is often traced back to a Polish word — as the *OED* does, deriving it from *jarmulka*, 'cap'. But Philologus thinks the borrowing is in the other direction, from Yiddish to Polish.

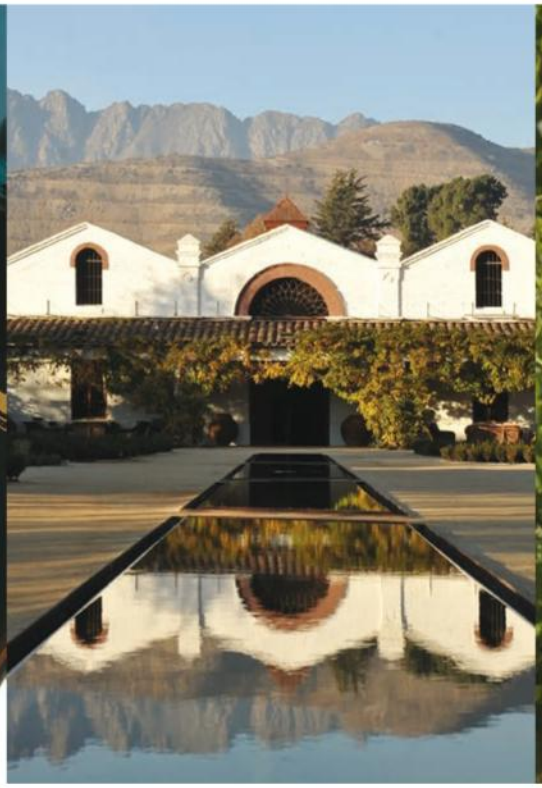
He favours instead an origin put forward by W. Gunther Plaut (1912–2012), who suggested the medieval Latin *almucia*. In English, *amice* is a confusing word, since the liturgical vestment that covers the shoulders and sometimes the head comes from a different Latin word, *amictus*, while the word we're interested in, *almucia*, meant a fur hood. It seems that the latter word, which shares an origin with the Scottish word *mutch*, 'cap', had acquired the prefix *al-*, the Arabic definite article, even though it was not an Arabic word. Anyway, Philologus is convinced by an origin of *yarmulke* from *almucella*, a diminutive of *almucia*.

So if you see a round Jewish head-covering being worn, it is not wrong to call it a kippah. Philologus has one piece of advice: if you don't want to sound mocking, pronounce *kippah* with the stress on the second syllable. I shall do so gratefully.

— *Dot Wordsworth*

SPECTATOR
WINE CLUB

Winemaker's lunch with Eduardo Chadwick




Join us in the *Spectator* boardroom on Monday 27 March for the next in this year's series of *Spectator* Winemaker's Lunches, with Eduardo Chadwick, arguably Chilean wine's greatest pioneer and most eloquent advocate.

Eduardo's family has been making wine in the Aconcagua, Casablanca and Curicó Valleys for almost 150 years and readers will no doubt be familiar with his famously accessible and much-admired Viña Errazuriz wines.

There are other strings to Eduardo's bow, though, and over a four-course cold lunch provided by our partners Forman & Field, we will enjoy the latest vintages of his Aconcagua Costa Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Syrah; his new Las Pizarras Chardonnay and Pinot Noir; the 2007 vintage of his hugely sought-after Don Maximiano Cabernet, and his 2015 Errazuriz Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc. Book now to avoid disappointment.

The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP
Monday 27 March | 12.30 p.m. | £75

For further information and to book
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“Every morning I drive past the Chinooks in the hangars and it makes me feel proud. They’re the backbone of the UK military. They provide emergency response, carry troops, and if ever I needed to be rescued, I would want to hear one of those in the background. My team is responsible for making sure the Chinooks are maintained, modified and upgraded. Being even just a small part of this bigger picture is really rewarding.”

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PARTNERS YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW.

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