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THE SPECTATOR

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EPIDEMIC
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caliphate's collapse*



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Labour's love lost

Just as it seems that Labour has reached the bottom of the abyss, Jeremy Corbyn and his party somehow manage to find a new low. The latest nationwide poll puts them at 24 per cent, trailing the Tories by 16 points. No wonder Labour MPs look so boot-faced around Parliament, and an increasing number are hunting for jobs elsewhere. If a general election were called now, the Conservatives would win a huge majority. Labour would be further than ever from power, arguably even finished as a major parliamentary force.

Polls are not rock-solid indicators of future electoral success or failure, but Labour's ratings are so abysmal as to suggest a party facing an existential crisis. Labour's support in Scotland is now as low as 14 per cent, which may lead to another humiliation in the coming council elections. Corbyn's approval ratings are extraordinarily bad. Any which way you cut the demographic — old and young, Leave and Remain, northern and southern, male and female, those who voted Labour at the last election and those who didn't — Labour's leader has a net negative rating, usually a big one. The polling company YouGov has found that for the first time in the party's history, Labour ranks behind Ukip and the Conservatives among lower-income voters — this in spite of Ukip's increasingly shambolic performance. Corbyn could fall lower still — no-one has attacked him in any significant way for his support of Hamas, the IRA or the disastrous experiment in socialism that is Venezuela (see p. 14).

For all his faults, however, Corbyn is a symptom rather than the cause of this malaise. Deeper shifts in politics are tearing

Labour apart. The party is bitterly divided over Brexit. Seven out of every ten Labour constituencies, particularly those in the north of England, voted to leave the European Union. Meanwhile the party's more metropolitan seats — in Cambridge, Norwich and London, for example — voted to remain. Labour voters in the former camp are fed up with mass immigration. Those in the latter keenly support the free movement of people in Europe. Any Labour leader, even one much more skilled than Corbyn, would find it difficult to bridge this ideological gap. Indeed, it was in some ways a triumph for

*Labour has become a political
bed-blocker: too weak to
succeed, too strong to die*

Corbyn that, after he ordered a three-line whip, only about 50 of his MPs rebelled in the vote on triggering Article 50 last week. The Tories, by contrast, for the first time in decades, are relatively united over Europe.

Next Thursday's by-elections in Stoke-on-Trent Central and Copeland, Cumbria, are vitally important for Corbyn — and yet in Stoke, the Labour candidate, Gareth Snell, is a Remainer who has had to apologise for having sent abusive and misogynistic tweets. Not the best candidate to field against Ukip's leader Paul Nuttall. In Copeland, where a major employer is the nearby Sellafield nuclear plant, Labour's prospects are hampered by Jeremy Corbyn's anti-nuclear stance. Both contests are taking place because the incumbent Labour MPs quit Parliament, imagining their prospects would be brighter outside politics. This has

not endeared the Labour party to the voters of Stoke and Copeland. No wonder both Ukip and the Tories scent victory.

Even if Labour does scrape through next week, the party's troubles are far from over. Nor would Jeremy Corbyn's departure solve the problem. Since both Blairite and Brownite factions within Labour have shown that they cannot remove him, it falls to the far left to come up with an answer to its own failure. Labour's most realistic hope now is to find a more appealing version of Corbyn, but there just isn't such a person. The fact that obscure MPs like Rebecca Long-Bailey and Angela Rayner are now mooted as possible successors to Corbyn only highlights the party's plight. John McDonnell is said to be on manoeuvres, but he is weighed down by the same baggage as the current leader.

Brexit, once it happens, will only intensify Labour's agony. Leaving the EU will bring domestic issues surrounding globalisation and immigration to the fore, and over these the two blocs of Labour's electoral coalition are on different sides. If the price of free-trade deals with countries outside the EU is to grant more visas to them, we can expect metropolitan Labour to cheer and northern Labour to protest.

Yet despite Ukip's growing strength in the north, the SNP's control of Scotland in Parliament and a Tory party united under Theresa May, it is not as if there is a single force that can obviously replace Labour as the opposition. It is a political bed-blocker: too weak to succeed, too strong to die. This might seem like good news for the Conservatives. It is not. They are prone to complacency without an effective opposition. Labour's troubles do the nation no good.



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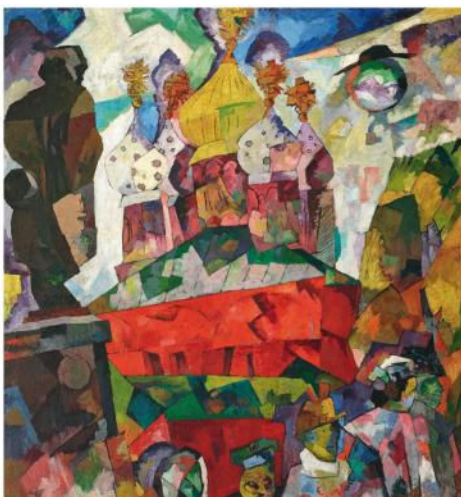
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CONTRIBUTORS

Angela Patmore's books include *Challenging Depression and Despair* and the authorised biography of Marjorie Proops. She writes about stress on p. 12.

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Craig Raine, who defends Ezra Pound on p. 33, is a poet and an emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford. His most recent book is *My Grandmother's Glass Eye: a Look at Poetry*.

Kate Womersley, who explains on p. 40 why doctors need to listen harder, is a graduate medical student at Cambridge.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



Home

The Queen opened a new National Cyber Security Centre in London. Britain's contribution to Nato has fallen below the promised 2 per cent to 1.98 per cent of gross domestic product, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, because GDP has grown. The annual rate of inflation measured by the Consumer Prices Index rose to 1.8 per cent in January, from 1.6 in December; by the new index to be used from March, called CPIH, which includes some housing costs, inflation had already reached 2 per cent. Unemployment fell by 7,000. Joe Root, aged 26, was made captain of England.

A YouGov poll for the *Times* put Labour in third place among working-class voters at 20 per cent with Ukip at 23 per cent and the Conservatives at 39. Paul Nuttall, the leader of Ukip, said that past claims on his website that he had lost 'close personal friends' in the Hillsborough disaster were incorrect, although it was true he had been at the match, aged 12. James Duddridge, a Tory backbencher, tabled a motion of no confidence in John Bercow as Speaker of the House of Commons. MPs had a week off after voting for the Second Reading of the Brexit Bill by 494 to 122. Travelling on the Underground exposes commuters to more than eight times as much air pollution as experienced by those who drive to work, according to a Surrey University study. The steam locomotive Tornado hauled timetabled services from Appleby to Skipton for three days, delighting 6,000 passengers.

An investigation by BBC *Panorama* found widespread drug use at HM Prison Northumberland. A life prisoner who calls himself Charles Bronson, aged 64, who has been in jail for 40 years, proposed in Wakefield prison to Paula Williamson, aged 36, who has appeared in *Coronation Street*. She said: 'He's so eccentric, but so am I. It's a perfect match.' A video on Facebook showed 100 people in a mass brawl at the Albany Palace pub in Trowbridge, Wilts, run by J.D. Wetherspoon. In 48 hours it was viewed more than half a million times. Lloyd's of London banned staff from drinking from nine to five.

Abroad

Michael Flynn resigned as the US national security adviser in the face of allegations that he had discussed American sanctions with the Russian ambassador before President Donald Trump's inauguration, contrary to the Logan Act of 1799, which prohibits diplomacy by private persons but has never been invoked. The 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals rejected Mr Trump's attempt to reinstate his executive order imposing a 90-day ban on citizens from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen from entering America, and a 120-day bar on all refugees from entering. Mr Trump told reporters he was considering a 'brand new order'. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, visited President Trump but said: 'The last thing Canadians expect is for me to come down and lecture another country.' Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan, raised his eyes to heaven when Mr Trump released his

hand after shaking it for 19 seconds, at one point strangely yanking it towards himself. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, met Mr Trump. Yale University renamed Calhoun College because John C. Calhoun (1782–1850), the seventh US vice-president, was blamed for supporting slavery; instead the college is to be named after Grace Murray Hopper (1906–1992), a naval computer scientist.

North Korea tested a solid-fuel land-based ballistic missile. Kim Jong-nam, the half-brother of Kim Jong-un, the North Korean dictator, was killed at Kuala Lumpur airport by two 'poison-wielding' North Korean woman agents. The government of Georgia claimed that a plot to poison a senior figure in the Orthodox Church, perhaps the patriarch, had been thwarted by the arrest of a priest. In the province of Idlib, Syria, dozens were killed in fighting between two Islamist movements: Tahrir al-Sham, formerly an al-Qaeda affiliate, and Jund al-Aqsa, regarded as close to the Islamic State.

Shigenori Shiga resigned as the chairman of Toshiba, the Japanese multinational company, as it reported losses of £2.73 billion, much of it related to United States nuclear power provision. More than 180,000 people were ordered to leave the area below the 770ft-high Oroville Dam in California after an overflow channel was eaten away by water. Boris Johnson, the British Foreign Secretary, flew to The Gambia and said he was 'very pleased' that it intended to rejoin the Commonwealth.

CSH

DIARY

Nigel Planer



I'm boning up on conversational Spanish for a trip to the Primera Persona festival in Barcelona with Alexei Sayle. We're due to talk about *The Young Ones* — the comedy series we made together 35 years ago. For some reason the show is huge in Catalonia — perhaps it's scatological: one of their regional symbols is a pooping peasant. The Catalan-dubbed version is still playing on TV, so, as well as Spanish, I am refreshing my catchphrases in Catalan. When I visited Barcelona last year to make a travel programme called *Catalunya Experience* for Catalan TV3, people asked for selfies and threw peace signs at me in the street, because I played the hippie character, Neil, in *The Young Ones*. I found I could make the Catalans collapse with laughter by saying, 'Hey, tius, mol a,' which, roughly translated, means, 'Hey guys, this rocks.' I put on my glum Neil face and whined 'Mal karma' to their phone cameras. In order to have the desired effect, I had to do this, not in my own, nasal Neil voice — something I perfected long before *The Young Ones* — but in the voice of the Catalan man who dubbed me. My biggest laugh line was 'Baj mes calen que la moto d'un hippy.' Which literally means 'I feel hotter than the engine of a hippy's moped,' but apparently implies horniness.

In the past 30 years I have often been accosted in the street by people saying strange things to me such as '1172 is not a bit like John' or 'Oh no! I'm being hassled by a chick' or — one that is at least recognisable as a joke — 'What's the world record for stuffing marshmallows up a single nostril?' Sometimes the quotes are so obscure that it takes me a few seconds to clock that I am experiencing what we in the biz call 'rek', as in 'recognition'. So yes, I do still get stopped in the street and asked questions about *The Young Ones*. It's always the same three questions. And the answers are: 1) It was a wig; 2) Yes, he was a complete and utter, utter, utter; 3) No, we're not going to get back together to make *The Old Ones*, because it's a crap idea, and yes we have thought

of it, thank you. Getting back together would be impossible now anyway, since the death of our figurehead and chief inspiration, Rik Mayall. Although, I reckon *Three Men and a Funeral* would make a funny *Comic Strip* film — if his family didn't mind. I'm sure Rik would have liked a whole film about him.

I used to have a theory that people treat TV actors with more familiarity and less

respect than they do stage or screen actors, because we have been in their living rooms. But, in the digital celeb culture we now inhabit, everyone is familiar. It's wonderful, but also strange, creating and then being a character that seeps into the national consciousness. I realised the full power of telly when, at a family Sunday lunch in the 1990s, my mum served everyone but me a steak. When asked why, she said: 'Because you're a vegetarian, Nige.' No I'm not, I never have been. But Neil was.

At least Mum got my name right, which is more than most. To be Neilish for a moment: if I had a pound for every time someone's called me Neil and not Nigel, I'd have, er, £716 pounds by now. I've got so used to being misnamed, I sometimes think it is happening even when it isn't. The other day at a media do, when chatting to the *Spectator* writer Mark Mason, a man approached to join our conversation. 'Neil,' he said. 'No, Nigel,' I replied, with a charitable sigh. 'No, I'm Neil,' he said. I apologised, but more because he had such a terrible name. Neil is a terrible name; that's why I chose it for the character. Whenever I meet a Neil I apologise for my small part in making a nebbish name even worse.

In Barcelona last year we were promoting the Catalunya Experience programme at the Palau de la Música. Xavi Brichs, the producer of the programme, asked how many people in the audience were called the distinctly un-Catalan name 'Nil' after the comedy series. About 20 hands went up. One woman held up a baby. One person held up a two foot papier-mâché maquette of Neil, which was available in a Barcelona tourist shop. I apologised to all of them. Still, for me, it's all pretty cool. If you had to choose somewhere to be a bit of a sad has-been, then Barcelona is the place, I reckon. Poor old Norman Wisdom had to make do with Albania.

Nicholas Craig's 'I, an Actor', by Nigel Planer and Christopher Douglas, has been revised and reissued.



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For the sake of the constitution, please shut up

One of the striking features of Britain's unwritten constitution is how it relies on various people keeping their opinions to themselves. The monarch, the Speaker of the House of Commons and senior judges must all avoid expressing political views in public – or even in what one might call semi-private. It's not their right to remain silent; it's their responsibility.

The royal family is expected to stay out of politics from birth, the Speaker is an MP who puts aside partisanship when he or she is dragged to the chair, and judges must show that they are applying the law, not advancing their own agenda. Any appearance of partiality is toxic, calling into question either their own survival or that of the office they hold. Yet all three groups are currently struggling with this responsibility to remain silent.

It is a cliché to say that the Queen has successfully stayed above politics, but it is also true. The reason that reports of her views on the European Union caused such a frisson in the run-up to the referendum is that it is so rare to get even a hint of what she believes. But the heir to the throne is not so restrained. Prince Charles's views on global warming, the Chinese government and the refugee crisis are all well known. None of these subjects is free from political controversy.

Prince Charles looks like a model of restraint, though, in comparison with John Bercow, the Speaker of the House of Commons. Bercow has been a good Speaker in various ways. He has been keen to see the legislature hold the executive to account. But he has often been too eager to inject himself into the proceedings of the House (notably, he is the only Speaker whose official portrait shows him addressing the chamber). His decision to denounce the President of the United States for 'racism and sexism' from the Chair was spectacularly ill-judged.

Bercow had taken insufficient soundings from across the House to speak for the Commons on such a matter – and should have remembered William Lenthall's injunction, quoted by Charles Moore last week, that the Speaker of the Commons has 'neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place but as this House is pleased to direct me'. He had made no attempt to convey his concerns privately to the government before going public. And he has had to apologise for not having discussed the matter with the Lord Speaker beforehand. In short, his outburst

was premature and unnecessary. Adding to this controversy was the news that Bercow told a group of students that he had voted to Remain in the EU referendum. This is not the most troubling part of what he said, though: the referendum was, after all, an extra-parliamentary event. More problematic was that he then opined on which bits of EU law he would like to see Britain keep, post-Brexit. This means that the Speaker has directly expressed his view on a matter that he knows will soon come before the House.

It is hard to see how MPs involved in these debates can regard him as impartial. Who he chooses to speak, and which amendments are selected for debate, will now all be seen through the prism of Bercow's own

The country's institutional stability does require some people to maintain a judicious silence

views. A more self-aware individual would see how ill this fits with his role.

Another risk to the constitution in recent years has been the issue of how many more political cases are coming before the courts. This, as Jonathan Sumption – who now sits on the Supreme Court – has pointed out, is not an entirely healthy development. But it does make it all the more important that judges maintain not only impartiality, but the appearance of it.

The recent Supreme Court case on Article 50 showed the importance of this. Baroness Hale's decision to offer a commentary on the case, including the suggestion that the European Communities Act

might need to be repealed before Article 50 could be invoked, before it came before the court, was naive at best. It showed a failure to appreciate how her words would be seen, and the sheer level of media interest in the matter. However, the Supreme Court ended up handling the Article 50 case well. Its eventual verdict was balanced and correct.

Calls for confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court are misguided, precisely because they would require judges to give their opinions on matters that might well come before them. But those who sit on the court would do well to remember that commenting publicly on these questions has the same effect, and can undermine public confidence in the judiciary.

It is tempting to regard the troubles with Prince Charles and Bercow as simply questions of personality. We don't, for instance, know much about Princess Anne's politics. And if the Deputy Speaker Lindsay Hoyle were moved up one, there wouldn't be an issue: he wouldn't feel the need to grandstand in the way the current Speaker does. Indeed, even Bercow's allies admit that having someone who loves to be the centre of attention as Speaker is not ideal. One tells me that recent events have put the final nail in Chris Bryant's chances of becoming Speaker because he is 'seen as offering more of the same, and it is quite a rich confection'.

But the responsibility to remain silent is more demanding these days. There are fewer places that are truly private now, which means that discretion must be maintained for longer. And, in an era when people send pictures of their breakfast to virtual strangers, asking people to keep their opinions to themselves is more of a burden than it was.

The system, though, relies on discretion. A hereditary monarchy is acceptable to most people in this country because the monarch doesn't use power and position to influence politics. A monarch whose views are known on a whole series of questions would call that balance into question. Equally, acceptance of the Speaker's rulings in the House of Commons relies on MPs regarding the Chair as impartial. Any sense of bias makes it much harder to keep order in the chamber.

This country's institutional stability is one of its great strengths. But it does require some people to maintain a judicious silence. If they cannot, the constitution will be thrown out of kilter.



THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore



How does Vladimir Putin think about the world? It becomes dangerously important to know. I still have not seen a revealing speech by or discussion with him. I have found out a bit more, however, about the two-hour private interview conducted with him by several young Etonians last summer. One reason they got into the room, it seems, is that Mr Putin wanted to know about Eton and why it produced 19 prime ministers. The boys explained that one of the school's great advantages was its societies — Political, Literary, Cheese etc. — largely organised by them, not by masters. They said these brought them into contact with a wide range of visiting speakers, broadening their minds. It is interesting that Mr Putin did not understand what 'societies' were, and had to have them re-explained. In Russia, perhaps, there is no such thing as societies. The President was asked about leadership. He replied that when he worked in Soviet intelligence he had been advised that he should never take out his gun unless he intended to use it. If he merely threatened to use it, his adversary would snatch it and hit him on the head. Sensible advice about the need for a leader to mean what he says, but a chilling metaphor all the same.

The boys' meeting was arranged by Bishop Tikhon Shevkunov, who is sort of confessor to Mr Putin. The bishop delivered the Lyttelton lecture at Eton, and the boys met him there. He is interested in how a Christian foundation can be an enduring worldly success. In this changed world we are living in, the best channels to political leaders do not come through ordinary politics. There are similarities between Bishop Tikhon and Mr Trump's Steve Bannon, though I hope neither is pleased by the comparison.

James Fairfax, who died last month, was so modest that few know he was *The Spectator's* proprietor. In 1985, his family's Australian newspaper company, John Fairfax and Sons, of which he was chairman, bought the paper off Algy Cluff. For the first time, *The Spectator* became part of a media publishing group, and this greatly assisted its editorial and commercial success. James came to

our offices only once. I gave a lunch in his honour and invited Willie Whitelaw, then the deputy prime minister, and various journalistic luminaries. I remember it as a slightly embarrassing occasion because one of the guests, apropos of nothing much, suddenly exploded with the opinion that homosexuals 'though they often seem perfectly normal, suddenly EXPLODE'. James was what was then known as a 'confirmed bachelor', but he failed to live up to the proffered caricature, and remained perfectly composed. His benign interest in *The Spectator* continued unaffected. In 1987, however, James's half-brother, young Warwick Fairfax, took control from the rest of the family in a leveraged buyout. I could tell the tone of the ownership had changed when I was visited in our offices by Warwick's mother (James's stepmother) Mary, Lady Fairfax. The first thing she said was, 'They say I married my late husband for his money, but that's not true: I'm a very wealthy woman in my own right.' Shortly afterwards, Warwick's buyout collapsed, and the paper was bought by the Telegraph Group. James Fairfax was a quiet friend to *The Spectator*.

Twelfth Night launched at the National Theatre this week, with Malvolio turned into Malvolia. 'We've definitely upped the gender-bendiness of the play,' says Phoebe Fox, who is acting Olivia. Otiose, one might think, since the original is gender-bent to perfection. But Shakespeare did not have to wrestle with the strict controls now demanded in the subsidised theatre. In the same feature in which Phoebe Fox speaks, Ben Power, the deputy director of the National, tells the *Sunday Times*, 'There are agendas we are aware of now, and we have targets in terms of gender and ethnicity, because we want to be as diverse as possible,

speaking to our audiences, reflecting the nation to them.' Mr Power seems to be saying that more women and more non-white people must be crammed into the National's productions, regardless of what sex or colour was allotted to a character by the silly old playwright. Being 'diverse' means that everything must be the same. Tamsin Greig, who acts Malvolia, explains that staging a classic play is like working out what you should say at a dinner party: 'Is it of value for these words to be spoken now, at this time of the evening, with these people listening?' She is right that the moment and the audience matter. But the National's approach neglects the fact that the play itself has a content not defined by the audience, or the actors, or the present. Much of a classic play's impact lies in the way it is *different* from the way we live now. Thus it expands our minds: 'In the prison of his days/ Teach the free man how to praise,' W.H. Auden exhorted poets. No doubt Auden's lines are now blacklisted, for gender reasons.

Comparable thoughts occurred to me in the chapel of Lambeth Palace last week. We were gathered for a special Book of Common Prayer evensong to say goodbye to Richard Chartres, Bishop of London for the past 22 years. Canterbury Cathedral choir were singing the famous Psalm 42, 'Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks: so longeth my soul after thee, O God.' The psalm builds up a composite picture of disquiet, grief and fear. Verse 9 says 'One deep calleth another, because of the noise of the water-pipes: all thy waves and storms are gone over me.' Obviously, these lines, though inspiring awe, are also unintentionally comic, thanks to the word 'water-pipes'. Later, I looked up the modern version of the psalm, in *Common Worship*: 'Deep calls to deep in the thunder of your waterfalls: All your breakers and waves have gone over me.' I do not know which does greater justice to the original Hebrew, but the Prayer Book (essentially Coverdale) stretches the imagination more, partly because its use of language is unlike our own. If we really cared about diversity, we would honour the difference between past and present, not erode it.

'Isis? Bomb those suckers'

Trump is determined to crush the Islamic State. He should beware: what comes next could be worse

PAUL WOOD

These are the last days of the 'caliphate'. The place Isis made their capital, Raqqa, in Syria, is encircled and cut off. They have already lost half of Mosul in Iraq, their largest city. Really, what did they expect? This was inevitable from the moment Isis declared war on everyone not in Isis. Defeat was even foreseen by one of the group's leading thinkers, Abu al-Farouq al-Masri. 'Announcing enmity to the world will strangle the caliphate in its cradle,' he said last year. 'This will bury our project alive.' Al Masri (the 'Egyptian') is or was an elderly cleric and he was delivering a sermon in Raqqa meant as a warning to the leadership. Their strategy would achieve nothing but the 'immolation' of the Islamic State's warriors. 'Prison is more beloved to me than seeing them destroyed in battles of attrition we could avoid,' he said. He may have been taken at his word. He later disappeared, probably into one of the Islamic State's notorious jails.

Donald Trump would agree with al-Masri's prediction. He came into office impatient to finish off the jihadis. As the country star Toby Keith sang at the inauguration, the new President nodding along: 'You'll be sorry that you messed with the US of A. Cos we'll put a boot in your ass. It's the American way.' During the primaries, Trump repeatedly claimed to have a secret, 'absolutely foolproof' plan to defeat Isis. This, it turns out, consists of telling the Pentagon to come up with something. The Department of Defense has been given 30 days to fill in the blank space under the heading 'Secret Foolproof Plan'. The presidential order says: 'The Plan shall include a comprehensive strategy and plans for the defeat of Isis.'

It happens that President Obama left behind a detailed plan, one to take Raqqa. It has spawned a very Washington row. One of Obama's national security team told me they had prepared a 'four- or five-page memo' on the plan for Trump's staff, along with a 'voluminous bundle' of background material. 'When they looked at it, their reaction was, "This is too complicated. The President won't understand it."' Obama's people leaked to the *New York Times* that President Trump could read only short

documents 'with lots of pictures'. Trump's people leaked to the *Washington Post* that 'Obama's approach was so risk-averse it was almost certain to fail... Obama sweated the smallest details of US military operations, often to the point of inaction.'

The defense secretary, General Mattis, is examining the Obama plan. Its most important provision calls for the Kurdish forces besieging Raqqa to be armed by the United States. This would enrage Turkey, which fears the emergence of a Kurdish state more



than the survival of Isis. The Kurdish militia in Syria, the YPG, is close to the Kurdish militia in Turkey, the PKK (some would say they are the same thing). Turkey, the US (and Britain) all classify the PKK as a terrorist organisation. In fighting Isis, the US is backing two opposing sides in a regional conflict, the Turks and the Kurds. Obama's preferred solution was to let the Turkish army take Raqqa — but the Turkish army is still 120 miles away. Ankara's promises of troops have come to nothing so many times that US officials call these forces 'Turkish unicorns'. President Trump may have to arm the Kurds.

The alternative would be American ground forces. If that seems unthinkable, someone at the Department of Defense may be thinking it. A source — outside

the Pentagon but talking to the military planners — told me the use of American tanks and infantry was being considered to break Raqqa's defences. There is no official confirmation of that and, if true, it would be politically explosive. Far more likely is another option apparently under consideration: sending in more special forces and giving them more freedom to operate. There are currently some 200 Navy Seals and Army Delta Force troops helping the Kurds and a smaller Arab contingent.

During the election, candidate Trump promised: 'Isis will be gone... and they'll be gone quickly. Believe me.' President Trump, a senior civil servant told me, wants 'a big win over Isis within 90 days'. The official feared this meant 'carpet bombing' Raqqa and Mosul. Trump has given people reason to think this. 'Isis... I would bomb the shit out of 'em,' he told a rally in Fort Dodge, Iowa, during the primaries. 'I would just bomb those suckers.' This became a consistent Trump campaign theme. One result of the Mattis review might be to relax the rules of engagement governing airstrikes.

A retired US Air Force general, David Deptula, told me that the military would not want (and the laws of war would not allow) indiscriminate bombing. But he said Obama had authorised only 'anaemic' air strikes against Isis. 'The Islamic State could have been crushed in a matter of weeks in 2014,' he said. 'The biggest mistake and the greatest gift President Obama gave to Isis was two years' worth of time to carry on killing.' He hoped Trump would now order a 'comprehensive air campaign'. Operation Desert Storm, which liberated Kuwait in 1991, had taken only 43 days from start to finish. 'We can negate the Islamic State just as rapidly.'

Even before any change to the rules of engagement, the US-led coalition against Isis may now be killing more civilians than Russia. The British monitoring group Airwars says that last month at least 254 civilians and as many as 358 died in coalition attacks. During the same period, Russian bombing is said to have killed 65 non-combatants. The coalition is, however, fighting in

Iraq and Syria, while the Russians are only in Syria. At the same time, Isis continues to kill people. The underground opposition group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently said that while coalition bombs resulted in 16 'martyrs' in and around the town last month, Isis executed 14 people.

The bombing is having an effect on Isis. The bridges over the Euphrates in Raqqa have been destroyed by what locals say are B52s flying overhead. Isis fighters are hemmed in. If they want to leave, they may have to swim. Meanwhile, President Trump's staff have been drafting an order for Guantanamo Bay to be used for Isis prisoners. The main body of Isis fighters will no doubt still try to break out, heading to Palmyra or Deir Azzour to the south. They might eventually attempt to melt away into the Iraqi desert, hiding out there as al-Qaeda did during the American occupation. But many members of Isis in Raqqa are from Raqqa. People who know the place say it was enthusiastically for the Syrian regime when the regime was in charge — and loyal to Isis when it was on the rise. The local sheikhs and their followers change allegiances according to what suits their interests. They were more than happy with life in the 'Islamic State'.

Others paid the price. In a camp in Iraq, I once met a 50-year-old Yazidi woman who told me how she had been held in slavery by a member of Isis in Syria. She was decades too old to be a sex-slave, she told me, but the man and his wife were delighted to have a domestic servant. His family was poor. The man didn't even own a car, only a motorbike. Having their own slave was a wonderful lux-

The Department of Defense has 30 days to fill in the blank space under the heading 'Secret Foolproof Plan'

ury. When she fell ill with cancer, and became too sick to work, they rang her relatives and said she could be freed for \$50,000. Her relatives did not have even \$500, so the man and his wife turned her out of the house to die.

This story is important because what comes after Isis might be more Sunni militants and more terrorism. Other Salafi — or fundamentalist — groups are already mopping up Isis defectors. Sunnis think they are the victims. Rolf Holmboe, a former Danish ambassador to Syria, told me it was 'a big affront to the Sunni mentality' that the Shia, the Kurds, the Assad regime, Russia, and other foreign countries would emerge the beneficiaries of the Islamic State's downfall. 'It would have been preferable if moderate Sunni groups had defeated Isis,' he said. 'The sense of grievance in the Sunni populations in Syria and Iraq is not lessened by the fall of Isis — it's growing. The Sunni insurgency is not going away.'

What of the foreign fighters who came to join Isis in their thousands? Holmboe's

Sim Free

It was a shiny moulded beehive,
something of my mother's perhaps,
to do with knitting. In my sticky hands
it became a pretend camera

and in its green bakelite brain
from nineteen sixty-two or -three
all my childhood days are stored,
if only we could find the thing

and wake it. But the technology
of I'll be this and you be that
and here is there has gone away
somewhere, inaccessible, play-

time over. I've lost the knack
of clicking into that imaginary
zone, of being whatever I wanted
at shutter-speed. Sweet dreams.

—John Greening

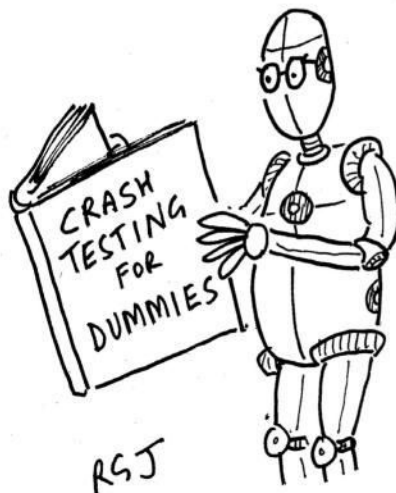
sources bring him news from the Danish citizens fighting for Isis, a mixture of ethnic Danes and immigrants. They all felt stuck in the shrinking caliphate because the way back to Europe was closed at the Turkish border. Nine of ten who did make it back to Denmark were no threat, he said. But some — the one in ten — were being instructed to smuggle themselves back 'for operations'. 'There could obviously be an upsurge in terror attacks in Europe and in the western world as revenge for the fall of the caliphate.' Hundreds of British Muslims joined Isis too.

When the caliphate is finally smashed to pieces, some of them will be coming home.

Though the physical caliphate might fall, Holmboe, said, the 'virtual caliphate' would remain. A document is circulating among Isis members through text messages and Twitter. Titled 'The caliphate will not perish,' it is a series of morale-boosting declarations by Isis leaders, living and dead. It was found by the researcher Aymenn al-Tamimi, who also obtained the sermon by the dissident cleric in Raqqa. 'They remain defiant,' he said of Isis. 'Their message is that Islamic State will always exist as long as there's the will to fight.'

In 'The caliphate will not perish' a member of the Isis Shura Council boasts that Muslims born in the US will become an army of conquest. 'They are getting ready for the battle in their homeland. Today the caliphate is in Iraq and Syria. Tomorrow, it will be in the White House.' The clash of civilisations is as important an idea to the Islamic State as to the Trump administration. Such boasting is absurd, but the fall of the Isis by the hand of America will be the 'just cause' for a new generation of jihadis. The end of the physical territory of the caliphate will not be the end of the idea of the 'Islamic State'. That might be just as dangerous.

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



Gaslighting the nation

We're being encouraged to see normal emotions as 'stress'. It's driving us crazy

ANGELA PATMORE

Arguably the cruellest thing you can do to human beings is to rob them of faith in their own sanity. People can endure physical torment, even torture, so long as their minds are clear. If they feel sane, they can still make sense of what is happening to them and work out how to survive. But if you undermine somebody's mental stability, they soon unravel. In the words of John Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, 'Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;/ And in the lowest deep a lower deep,/ Still threatening to devour me, opens wide.'

Chipping away at a person's mental health is known as 'gaslighting', after *Gas Light*, the Patrick Hamilton play that in 1944 became a classic Hollywood melodrama. In the film, Paula, played by Ingrid Bergman, has a husband called Gregory (Charles Boyer) who wants her 'sent to the mad-house' so he can get his hands on some family jewels. He accuses Paula of forgetting, losing and stealing things. He tells her she is too unwell to see visitors or go out. He gets into their attic from another building and when she sees the gas lamps dim and hears footsteps upstairs, he tells her she is deluded. His voice quietly unmoors her sanity: 'I hope you're not starting to imagine things again. It hurts me when you're ill and fanciful.' As Paula is about to be certified, rescue comes in the shape of detective Brian Cameron (Joseph Cotten), who sees the gas jets go down and tells her: 'You're not going out of your mind. You're slowly and systematically being driven out of your mind.'

This angst-ridden age is full of gaslighting. Generation Y spend their time writhing in anxiety, with which they infect their friends on social media. Elderly people whose relatives want rid of them are pushed towards a diagnosis of dementia (for which their GPs, until recently, got a £55 incentive). There are the victims of domestic abuse, told repeatedly that they're mad until they are (like Paula, and like Helen in *The Archers* by her undermining husband Rob). Then there are the great masses of the 'stressed', told by society to think of themselves as dangerously ill. Emotions such as fear, nervousness, anger, frustration and worry used to be accepted as normal, however unpleasant. Now they are being

pathologised by pseudoscience that uses the control term 'stress' for stimulus, response, interaction and transaction. In the clinical literature it can embrace the entire emotional spectrum, which is not only bogus but also deeply unsettling.

Gaslighting in wartime is a punishable offence ('spreading alarm and despondency') because left unchecked it destroys morale. Churchill's great rallying speeches strengthened Britain's sanity as well as our resolve. What has happened to his 'lion-hearted nation', the progeny of those who survived wars and workhouses? The answer, arguably, is that we have been destabilised by drip-fed suggestions that we are psy-

People reacting to real problems, instead of being given practical help or advice, are offered a chemical cosh

chologically unwell and cannot cope. An unregulated multimillion-pound industry marketing calm-down therapies on 15 million websites spreads 'stress awareness'. People reacting to real problems, instead of being given practical help and advice, are offered nostrums, symptom lists, potted endocrinology, the chemical cosh.

My work, which recommends traditional problem-solving skills and robustness training rather than soothing and drugs, has led to accusations that I am 'a heartless bitch'. But my books present evidence that 'stress management' has not just failed to halt



'If I wanted pain and humiliation I'd join the Labour party!'

spiralling mental health casualties and work absenteeism; it has itself helped to create the pandemic. Despite the Health and Safety Executive's new 'stress' standards and costly initiatives, the number of cases of work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2014/15 was unimproved at 440,000, with 234,000 new cases.

'Stress' medication, for the young and anxious, for the jaded at work, for the elderly, costs the NHS a fortune. It also costs lives. Professor Heather Ashton of Newcastle University, extrapolating from Home Office records between 1964 and 2004, found 17,000 deaths linked to benzodiazepines. Yet millions of patients still receive 'benzos' and many become hopelessly addicted. Prescriptions for antidepressants have doubled over the past decade. The drug manufacturers are well aware of a dangerous side effect, akathisia or violent mental agitation. The website AntiDepAware, run by a man whose son committed suicide days after being prescribed Citalopram, examines hundreds of coroners' reports and cases of suicide and homicide by patients whose antidepressant dosage was new, curtailed or interrupted.

The sociologist David Wainwright, a senior lecturer in the health department at Bath University, is an opponent of playground 'stress awareness' and 'safe spaces' on campuses: 'Over the past 40 years there has been an inversion of traditional values of courage, resilience and stoicism,' he says. 'A "stiff upper lip" is increasingly seen as a problem and encouraging people to confront their fears is viewed as grossly insensitive or damaging. The outcome is an amplified sense of emotional vulnerability and the widespread belief that the challenges and problems of everyday life cannot be managed without professional intervention.'

If we could only bring him back, Dr William Johnson, a hero of the Somme, would be the physician we need to reverse the gaslighting. Johnson was later put in charge of No. 62 Casualty Clearing Station behind the line at Passchendaele. He felt that the climate of belief in the newly coined 'shellshock' had convinced the troops that it was a 'definite disease and that the term meant some mysterious change in the nervous system'. Johnson felt that such beliefs inspired terror and a variety of scary but unnecessary physical conditions in soldiers under fire.

Many thousands of men passed through Johnson's tent at a rate of 60 a day, and the doctor provided what he called 'an atmosphere of cure'. The practical strategies he prescribed, such as massage, blowing into a paper bag and phonating words, were far less important than that the patient should trust his judgement that the symptoms were a normal reaction and not the sign of incipient madness. Each soldier was respected as *compos mentis*, exhausted and in need of rest, after which he would be fighting fit again.



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ANCIENT AND MODERN

From Tacitus to Justin Welby



Many are still questioning the enthusiasm with which newspapers have implicated Archbishop Justin Welby, as a young man, in the abusive activities of a Christian camp leader for whom he was working. This line from the *Daily Telegraph* is typical: 'Archbishop Welby is said to have gained much of his early grounding in Christian doctrine from the Iwerne holiday camps, where boys were recruited for John Smyth's sadomasochistic cult.'

The Roman historian Tacitus (d. c. AD 117) was a master of this sort of insinuation, in which 'is said' (as used above) exculpates the writer from responsibility for the statement, and the relative clause 'where...' associates the young Welby with a cult of sadomasochism as if 'recruitment' to that 'cult' (note the religious implication) were the camp's real purpose. Consider how Tacitus wrote about the death of Augustus, the first Roman emperor. All his previous choices for successor had died. That left only Tiberius, son of his wife Livia by her previous husband, to inherit — an outcome Livia would not want jeopardised...

'Augustus' health deteriorated. *Some suspected Livia of foul play, since rumour had it that* Augustus was making an approach to Postumus, a previously disfavoured adopted son. Postumus' grandfather Maximus told his (own) wife, who told Livia. 'When Maximus died soon afterwards, *perhaps* by his own hand', his widow blamed herself for his death. *Whatever the truth about this*, Tiberius was urgently summoned by Livia... but it is not known whether he found Augustus alive or dead, since Livia had the streets sealed off. Upbeat reports were published — *until the necessary steps had been taken*, and the news of Augustus' death and Tiberius' accession jointly announced.'

So Livia had Augustus murdered, did she? That is the overwhelming impression left by Tacitus (and wholly implausible). But he covers his back with rumours, disclaimers and knowing winks ('until the necessary steps...'). What we have here is, in fact, a treacherous form of 'post-truth'. The same can be said of the contemptible insinuations against Welby.

— Peter Jones

Corbyn's blueprint

If you want to know what Britain would be like under Labour, just take a look at brutalised, devastated Venezuela

JASON MITCHELL

Twenty years ago Venezuela was one of the richest countries in the world. Now it is one of the poorest. Venezuelans are starving. The farms that President Hugo Chavez expropriated, boasting about the great increase in production that would follow, have failed. Inexperienced management and corruption under both Chavez and the current president, Nicolas Maduro, mean that there is less of each crop each year. Across the country, supermarkets are empty and most ordinary people queue for hours every day just for flour. Many of the animals in Caracas zoo have starved to death, but even those who survive aren't safe — Venezuelans have taken to raiding the cages to butcher and eat whatever they can find: horses, sheep, pigs. In the wild, they hunt flamingos and anteaters for their meat. Inflation is expected to surpass a mind-blowing 2,200 per cent this year. Yet this is the country that, not so long ago, Jeremy Corbyn held up as a model of social justice.

When Chavez died of cancer on 5 March 2013, Corbyn proposed an early day motion in the House of Commons in which he offered his condolences to Venezuela and acknowledged 'the huge contribution he made to conquering poverty in his country... and the way he spoke for the poorest and most marginalised people in Latin America.'

The following day, Corbyn gave an interview to Al Jazeera in which he said: 'Chavez was a very important figure worldwide... because he was prepared to use his position to argue for a different world order.' Corbyn attended a vigil in London at which he gave a stirring speech about the great man: 'Chavez showed us that there is a different and a better way of doing things,' he said. 'It's called socialism, it's called social justice and it's something that Venezuela has made a big step towards.'

Corbyn has yet to acknowledge the terrible suffering that Chavez's 'social justice' has inflicted upon his people. He ignores the fact that if the people ate better in Chavez's day it was because of oil prices (which paid for the much-touted food programmes) and nothing to do with socialism. But then love

is blind, and the British hard left really did fall in love with Chavez.

In May 2006 Ken Livingstone played host to Chavez for two days in London. He was accompanied by Maduro, at the time president of the Venezuelan National Assembly. They met Corbyn and John McDonnell, and visited Tony Benn's home in Holland Park. 'We know where the Labour party has come from and its traditions,' said Chavez in a speech in the Palace of Westminster, 'and we fully identify with these traditions.' In a

Under socialism, Venezuela was meant to be the new Jerusalem. But Chavez's legacy is a pitiful disaster

clear reference to the ideas of Tony Blair, he added: 'My experience has convinced me that there is no Third Way between capitalism and socialism. The only way forward for humanity is socialism.'

Chavez embodied the 'new world order' that Corbyn wanted to see spread to the UK and everywhere. Under socialism, Venezuela was supposed to be the New Jerusalem, the great hope for the planet's poor and dispossessed. But Chavez's legacy in Venezuela is a pitiful disaster. Under the pressure of shortages the country has become a violent cesspit and Maduro a brutal dictator.

Venezuela shows quite clearly just how catastrophic socialism is. So you might then expect those well-meaning folk who held up Chavez as a paragon to admit their mistake. Naomi Campbell, Diane Abbott, Seumas Milne and Owen Jones in the UK; Sean Penn, Oliver Stone and Michael Moore in the US. Not a peep from any of them.

Corbyn's ability to turn a blind eye has been astounding. He must have known, because everybody did, that Chavez allowed left-wing paramilitary groups to terrorise the middle class. He must have seen that after Chavez forcefully nationalised industries their productivity duly crashed.

Yet he is still not prepared to condemn a regime which has presided over an economic disaster that hurts the poor the most. Maduro has turned out to be an economic

incompetent of the highest order. Last year imports collapsed by more than 50 per cent and the economy nosedived by 19 per cent. The budget deficit is around 20 per cent of GDP. The minimum wage is now the equivalent of £25 a month. After a Central Bank estimate that suggested that the Venezuelan economy had contracted by 19 per cent last year was leaked to the press, Maduro fired the bank's president and replaced him with a Marxist loyalist.

Up to £640 billion of oil money was lavished on the country's poor during the oil boom years, creating a gargantuan dependency culture. The country quintupled its national debt and hundreds of thousands of homes (of questionable construction quality) were handed to the poor. Chavez created a massive and unsustainable bubble which is now beginning its slow, painful collapse.

At the heart of Venezuela's economic chaos lie market distortions. Petrol is sold locally for less than one penny per litre and it receives £12 billion of state subsidies a year. The country has a complex monetary arrangement that makes use of three different exchange rates simultaneously.

This feeds rampant corruption: the president's cronies can buy dollars from the state at ten bolivars a dollar but sell them at



'You'll have to excuse David... he's making himself great again.'

3,300 bolivars a dollar on the black market. Price controls have made it unprofitable for small businesses to sell staple goods, leading to widespread shortages. Carjackings and kidnappings are now epidemic. Caracas's murder rate is 80 times higher than London's.

One of the reasons that Corbyn was prepared to turn a blind eye to the growing signs of authoritarianism under Chavez was because he liked the anti-American rhetoric.

Also, terrifyingly, because he believed in the whole project. The imagined utopian end must have seemed, to Corbyn, to justify the brutal means.

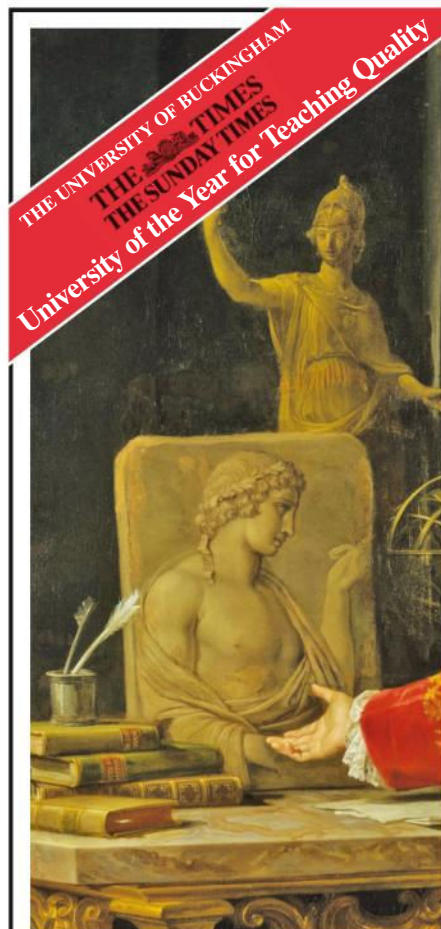
But the end for Venezuela has been not a socialist utopia but Maduro, who has locked up political opponents and ignored the people's constitutional right to a recall referendum. Commentators fear he will rig next year's presidential elections. He has destroyed the country's civic culture.

Corbyn and the hard left have a broad definition of human rights. In their view, these include a right to housing, healthcare and education. Corbynistas are prepared to let these rights trump others, including the freedom of expression and thought.

That is a dangerous course. It's more revolutionary than parliamentary socialism.

It's possible that Corbyn believes Maduro's line that Venezuela is being undermined by capitalist 'mafias'. But we don't know because the Labour leader has fallen silent on the subject. The paeans to chavismo he wrote in the 2000s have been removed from his website.

What we can say is that Corbyn has stood by the disastrous hard-left ideology that he has always espoused. So anybody who wants to know what Britain might be like under Corbyn would do well to study the recent history of Venezuela.



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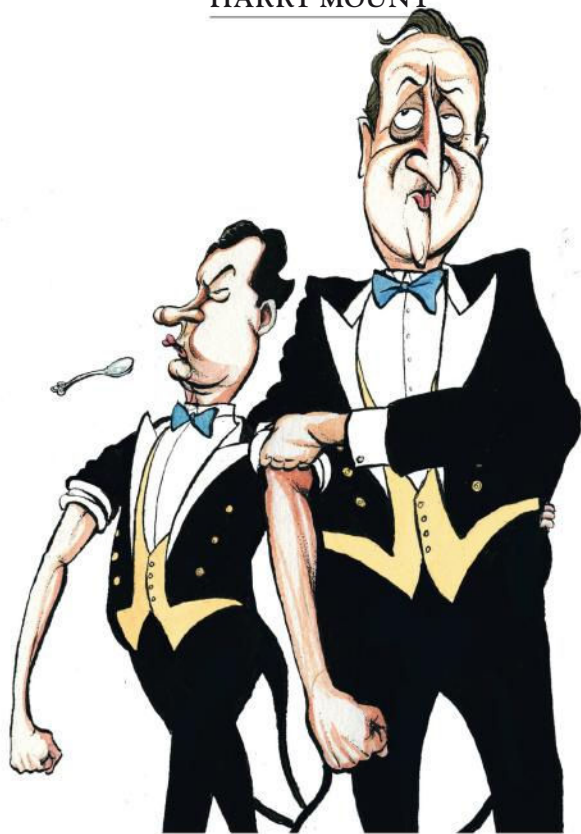
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Bye bye, Buller

Cameron and Osborne made my old university club famous.
Now it has died of overexposure

HARRY MOUNT



RIP the Bullingdon Club, 1780–2017. It isn't quite dead — but it is down to its last two members. That's barely enough people to trash each other's bedrooms, let alone a whole restaurant, as the Bullingdon was wont to do, according to legend — not that we ever did that sort of thing in my time in the club, from 1991 to 1993.

The Bullingdon, or Buller, as it is sometimes known, just couldn't survive 11 years of bad headlines — from 2005 to 2016, when three of its former members, David Cameron, George Osborne and Boris Johnson, were the most powerful Conservatives in the country. For more than a decade the Bullingdon exerted a totemic power so mighty that it spawned several conspiracy theories. One website, 'Abel Danger', claims Bullingdon members are placed 'in positions of power and influence throughout the world and controlled and blackmailed into executing the plans of the power behind the club — the House of Rothschild'. Twenty years on, I'm still awaiting that call placing me in a position of power and influence throughout the world.

The journalist Peter Hitchens was convinced the famous Bullingdon photo was airbrushed to edit out a high-powered mem-

ber. In fact the photo, badly reproduced in a magazine, just showed the ghost of a member's white shirt accidentally transplanted to the opposite side of the picture.

'Remember, I saw this sort of doctoring the whole time in communist Russia,' Hitchens told me gravely.

Before those 11 years in the limelight, the Bullingdon was rather obscure. I can understand why. The club wasn't secret — but it was cloaked in a veil of mild embarrassment. Even at the time, I felt somewhat ashamed of having joined it.

I remember walking from my college for the annual Bullingdon photograph. I skulked along Merton Street, hugging the rough limestone wall beside the pavement, my navy blue tailcoat and English-mustard-coloured waistcoat bundled under my arm to avoid ridicule.

So the club's virtual disappearance is no great loss but, before it goes the way of the dodo, it deserves a brief obituary.

The Bullingdon began life as a hunting and cricket club in 1780; the club badge still shows a cricket bat, stumps and a man on a horse. The Bullingdon cricket team even played against the MCC several times. In their first fixture, in 1795, the Bullingdon lost

by eight wickets to the MCC at their ground on Bullingdon Green.

Until 1879, Bullingdon Green — now built over — was a cricket pitch on the south-eastern outskirts of Oxford, between Horspath and Cowley. Bullingdon Green in turn takes its name from the old Bullingdon Hundred, a chunk of Oxfordshire south-east of Oxford where the Bullingdon point-to-point used to be held.

The only other major institution to take its name from the Bullingdon Hundred is — appropriately enough, given the antics of some club members, such as the former jailbird Darius Guppy — Bullingdon Prison, a category B/C prison in Arcott, Oxfordshire. Recent inmates include Rolf Harris.

Over the centuries, the sporting interests of the club morphed into heavy drinking interests. By 1894, the heavy drinking turned to bad behaviour — Bullingdon members smashed all 468 windows in Christ Church's Peckwater Quad.

In 1927, they did it again — leading to them being banned from meeting within 15 miles of Oxford. That incident must have inspired the opening scene of Evelyn

In my day, the club wasn't secret — but it was cloaked in a veil of mild embarrassment

Waugh's *Decline and Fall* — published only a year later, in 1928, and due to be revived this spring in a BBC2 adaptation.

The book begins with the dons of Scone College longing for the Bollinger Club to smash up the quad, so the college can make a fortune in fines. The dons are thrilled to hear that distinctive noise, 'the sound of the English county families baying for broken glass'.

It is Waugh's magnificent lampoon that still defines the Bullingdon today — and, indirectly, led to the club's own decline and fall. The Bullingdon crops up again in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), where 'cretinous, porcine' members try to dunk Anthony Blanche in Mercury, the fountain in Christ Church's Tom Quad.

After the war, the Bullingdon kept ticking along in a champagne-fuelled slumber, forgotten by everyone but its members. And then — like some rare, tragic flower at Kew Gardens — the club had that brief, blooming moment from 2005 to 2016, before expiring through overexposure.

There is, though, another Bullingdon Club that's thriving. The Bullingdon Craft and Social Club, an over-sixties' group, still meets every month in the Bullingdon Community Centre in Headington, on the outskirts of Oxford. It specialises in table tennis, darts, giant Jenga, cards, dominoes and jigsaws. No tailcoats; no heavy drinking; no broken glass.

The old Bullingdon Club is dead; long live the new one.

I went to Florida to see Disney World. What I found looked like a dying country



I've always sensed a whiff of sadness in Florida, perhaps because so many people go there to die. Although not us, obviously, because we went for Disney World. Still, terminality is in the air. In Mafia films, Florida is always, literally, the last resort: the place the wheezing hood heads after he's failed in the Bronx and Vegas and is now unwittingly destined for a one-way trip on a fishing boat.

Somehow, I reckon, they're feeling the same mystical embalming lure as those Jewish New York retirees who come to trundle their last-ever mobility scooters into their last-ever condominiums. One day, this dangling American dogleg will fall into the sea under the weight of their coastal apartment blocks, as the whole damn country opts to end its days in the sun. Go south, and by the time you're bouncing over the narrow archipelago towards the Keys where Ernest Hemingway perhaps first thought of shooting himself in the face, it is hard to escape the sensation that America itself is running out of road.

I was there last week and so was Donald Trump, although we did not hook up. He was in Mar-a-Lago, his resort on Palm Beach, where he met the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe. That evening, as the pair chillaxed on the terrace, paying guests got to watch them react in real time to news of a North Korean missile launch. One, a retired investor who joined the club three months ago, posted pictures on Facebook. It used to cost \$100,000 to join Mar-a-Lago, but since January the fee has doubled. Trump is expected there this weekend, for the third weekend on the trot. So I suppose, if you have \$200,000 and an inclination to meet the 45th President of the United States, that's where you go.

Having neither, I was on the sand an hour's drive south. As I looked to the sea, the vast Trump International Beach Resort was a few hundred metres to my left, while the equally vast Trump Towers II apartment complex was about the same distance to my right. London snowflake that I am, the real,

tangible presence of both frankly came as rather a shock. If I said it was like seeing a swastika banner on the Arc de Triomphe, I would of course be exaggerating ridiculously; but I find on reflection that I am totally going to say it anyway. Wealth is a surreptitious business in Britain, particularly when it is dynastic, scuttling around in Mayfair or Chelsea. Whereas the Trumps, at least in Florida, are so rich that they blot out the sun.

The big question is whether they're about to get richer. It would be conspiratorial, I think, to suggest that Trump sought the presidency for material gain. But now that

*The more his critics scream
about conflicts of interest, the
less Trump seems to care*

he has it, he does seem keen it shouldn't go to waste. Melania, his haunted wife, is in the process of suing the *Daily Mail* for £120 million, after the paper foolishly reported false rumours that she had worked as an escort. As the lawsuit puts it, the First Lady 'had the unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity... to launch a broad-based commercial brand in multiple product categories', which could now be jeopardised. Brazen.

It's not clear, though, precisely who the Trump brand's demographic are these days. Mar-a-Lago may lure the millionaire crawlers and arse-lickers, but you run out of those before long. All this week, CNN has been

reporting that a whole swath of American retail outlets — Nordstrom, Sears, Neiman Marcus, Kmart, QVC — have stopped stocking the fashion products sold by Ivanka Trump, apparently because nobody wants to buy them any more. Trump himself has been tweeting furiously about this — 'Treated so unfairly', 'Terrible!' etc — but if consumers simply don't fancy opening their wallets, then there's a limited amount his tantrums can achieve. Nobody seems sure whether bookings at Trump hotels are down or not (there are fierce claims in both directions) but last summer, data from Foursquare, a location-tracking app, suggested some Americans had such antipathy towards all things Trump that they were literally avoiding walking past his properties.

Which may be why there have been suggestions of expansion into Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Taiwan, India, maybe Uruguay instead — making one think a little of those rock bands that become so embarrassing at home that they have to go on tour in Germany or Japan. Technically of course, his properties are in the control of his two eldest, shiniest sons, both of whom were opening a golf course in Dubai this week. Yet Trump still profits directly from all of it, and the more his critics scream about conflicts of interest, the less he seems to care.

Which is, surely, the bit you worry about. A few short months ago, we lived in a world where it was considered sleazy that figures formerly in government could make a mint on the after-dinner speaking circuit, or in consultancy. Now the President attacks companies for not selling his daughter's blouses, worries about how his wife is going to leverage her official roles and spends his weekends in what might as well be a medieval court, owned by him, where courtiers pay him for access to the great USP, which is him. Say what you like about a drift towards totalitarianism, but at least it's still politics. Whereas this? This is the stench of death. This is broken. This is America running out of road.

Hugo Rifkind is a writer for the Times.



'Welcome to solitary.'

Bad publicity

Why do the famous pay people to make them even more famous?

CAROL SARLER

Whatever calamitous infelicities David Beckham did or did not email to his publicist, few will doubt that he has lived to rue the day. Nevertheless, I'll bet teeth that he is pointing his ruining in the wrong direction: that he is tormented by the moment he pressed 'send' — but not similarly kicking himself for hiring a publicist in the first place. It will be left to thee and me to wonder what was the point. When you are already richer than God, you are one of the sporting legends of your generation and your face would be recognised by a yeti in the wastes of Siberia — why might you ever want to fork out gazillions to a man who describes himself as 'managing David Beckham's global communications strategy', which translates as 'making him even more famous'?

The stricken footballer is not alone. Practitioners of these dark arts are now a *sine qua non* for everyone from the wannabe to the more established twinkles in the galaxy. One editor of a magazine that specialises in entertainment and celebrities estimates that 85 per cent of those who grace his pages dance to the tune of their personal publicist. He is incredulous when I promise him that it is not always so; that it is, in fact, a very recent phenomenon.

Twenty years ago, at the behest of the *Sunday Times*, I went to interview Carrie Fisher, armed only with her home address and telephone number, in case I got lost. I found her in her garden, pushing her daughter Billie on a swing. I then joined them for Billie's bedtime songs before Fisher and I sat on the floor by a big log fire, drank far too much wine and talked until midnight. Just before I toppled into a taxi, we agreed which bits I would not print. The next day I wrote a warm piece about a remarkable woman, without mentioning the... well, never you mind... and it was job done, exactly as it was after several days spent with Arianna Stassinopoulos and Sonny Bono.

Only two decades on, could it happen now? 'Inconceivable,' says my younger editor friend. Today, the personal publicist will allow a maximum of 45 minutes and choose the anonymous venue — probably a hotel room. He or she might stipulate limits on the questions, demand to approve the finished piece and will probably sit in on the interview to

ward off conversational intimacy. Should it be a TV talk show, the grip will be even tighter.

Make no mistake: the personal publicist has nothing in common with the traditional PR machine that has always played midwife to the launch of a book, play, film or sporting event. The machine concentrates on the project before the person; an interview with, say, the leading actor is only part and parcel of the wider aim to nudge interest and consequently ticket sales. Few, indeed, hold the personal publicist in greater contempt than the more experienced public relations

Max Clifford's discovery and exploitation of the niche was perniciously brilliant

expert. 'We don't share the same DNA,' sniffs one such. The personal publicist gives small damn for the bigger picture. Unlike an agent or manager, who works for a percentage of earnings and thus is invested in the long-term success of the collective project, the personal publicist is paid a fee to concentrate on the individual, even at a cost to the rest.

The first personal publicist in Britain was probably the now-disgraced Max Clifford, whose discovery and exploitation of the niche was perniciously brilliant. Whether it was with Bienvenida Buck, a courtesan who ached for what she always called 'respect', Antonia de Sancha, a spurned mistress who ached for revenge, or little Jade Goody, who ached for some abstract notion of Fame, his method was the same: he would arrange for them to be seen, constantly, on his avuncular arm. He escorted each of them with the



'Let's face it, the world is getting to be a more dangerous place.'

same self-righteous look of protective outrage that anybody *might* start nosing around his client — and in the process ensured that they would.

What was even cleverer, and has been emulated with varying degrees of success since, is that Max realised the importance of having the client develop an emotional dependence on him. (Would you wish to have Max Clifford announce your death to the world? Such was her dependence that Jade Goody, poor child, apparently did.) His timing was perfect: just as the previous must-have accessory — the psychotherapist — fell from vogue, along came the personal publicist, who used the exact opposite technique to reach the same goal of continuing reliance.

The therapist's trick was to assure the 'talent' that they were truly messed up — but don't worry: stick with me and I'll fix it. The personal publicist assures that same, self-centred, insecure talent that they are brilliant. The best in the team. The star in the cast. The immortality for which you yearn is just out of reach — but don't worry; stick with me and I'll fix it. You deserve top billing. You deserve recognition. You deserve a knighthood. Because you're worth it.

Of course, others are alienated along the way: the rest of the team, fellow cast members, the constrained journalist. But that only draws the talent closer to the person who promises to protect them from hostility. Now, as is the way of celebrity, bauble envy has set in — 'He's got one so I want one' — and thus the personal publicist becomes the accoutrement *de nos jours*.

Although older, wiser heads eschew him (Dames Maggie Smith and Judi Dench and Sir Anthony Hopkins do not boast a publicist among their professional entourages; did you think they would?), the younger and more gullible fall like ninepins to pay the most to people they need the least. Given that Andy Murray is the world's No. 1 tennis player and current Olympic champion — not to mention so free of scandal that there is not even a need for 'crisis management' — one might imagine that sponsorship from makers of plimsolls would follow without any assistance beyond that of a competent agent. Yet Murray has a personal publicist; heavens, Mum should know better.

In the scheme of things, it probably doesn't much matter. Certainly the public is lied to a bit more often as a result of the stunts — but we are used to that, and the lies pertain largely to those of little consequence. All the same, I do feel rather sorry for the none-too-bright fame junkies who, like as not, end badly from the deal.

After all, where is Bienvenida now? Or Antonia? And David Beckham might yet reflect that had he not hired someone with whom he believed he could so enthusiastically conspire to get a gong, he might actually have got one.

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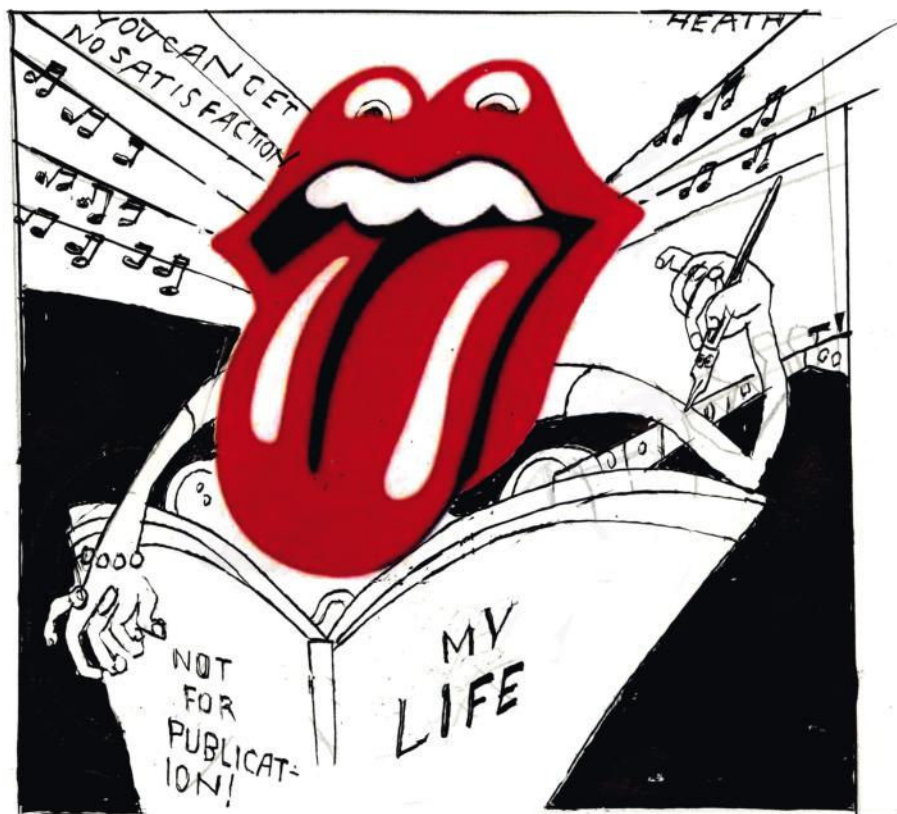
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Mick Jagger's lost memoir

I've got it. But you may never see it

JOHN BLAKE



Ask any publisher of popular non-fiction anywhere in the world which book they would most like to sign, and it is an odds-on bet that they would eventually, mostly, come up with the same title. Obviously the Queen does not plan to reveal all any time soon. Tom Cruise would certainly be interesting if he desired to talk about the crazy, outer-space cult which rules his women and his life. But for sheer history, global presence, intelligence and insight, there really is only one chap — the guy Ben Schott recently described in this magazine as ‘the most seen person on the planet’. Yes, the old prince of darkness himself, Sir Michael Philip Jagger.

Of course he'd never do it. He has said again and again, in countless interviews, that he never will. Except what virtually nobody knows is that he already has. Stuck in a secret hiding place right now I have Mick's 75,000-word manuscript. It is an extraordinary insight into one of the three most influential rock stars of all time. (The other two, of course, are Elvis Presley and John Lennon.)

Leaving aside the historical importance of the story, the financial potential is almost J.K. Rowlingesque. Mick could start by sign-

ing and numbering 1,000 copies of the manuscript. I think, worldwide, there are enough rich fans to sell these at \$1,000 a pop, especially if Mick were to put aside an hour to meet and greet the purchasers in a small theatre. That's a million dollars, and we haven't even got around to typesetting the thing yet.

Then would come the real party. The book could be published simultaneously in hardback in 50 languages — at £20 a pop. Keith Richards's autobiography, *Life*, went to the top of bestseller lists in almost every country in the world. Keith is, of course, the human riff, on every level the real deal. But Mick is the embodiment of something bigger.

Mick helped to change Britain from a grey, authoritarian, post-war misery-fest into a glittering, sunny place. He argued on television with the Archbishop of Canterbury about the new morality. He was so feared by the establishment that they carted him off to prison for possession of four pep pills he had legally purchased in Italy, thus inspiring the *Times's* ‘Who breaks a butterfly on a wheel?’ editorial. That is why politicians from Blair to Obama go starry-eyed in his presence. Even that famed rocker Donald

Trump hijacked ‘Start Me Up’ as a theme song for his campaign.

So, how do I have this manuscript? Why does nobody know about it? And why will Mick not let anyone read it? It is a long story.

By the late 1970s Mick, who stays sane by staying private, was weary of people writing books about him and the Stones. I co-wrote one myself called *Up and Down With The Rolling Stones*. I am told that Mick did not dislike it. Keith hated it. The only time that Keith deigned to discuss it with me, he simply asked: ‘Would you like a .38 or a .45?’

It was this kind of thing that inspired Mick's song ‘It's Only Rock 'n' Roll’, with those self-pitying lines about fans wanting him to stick his pen in his heart and to commit suicide right on stage. At this point the great Lord Weidenfeld persuaded Mick that the time had come to write his own book. This, he said, would close the floodgates for ever on all the unauthorised ones.

Mick was reputedly paid an advance of £1 million, an extraordinary figure for the time. A ghost was appointed and publication scheduled. Only it didn't work out quite like that.

The popular, often-repeated version of events is that Mick approached Bill Wyman,

It is a little masterpiece, written when the Stones had produced their greatest music but still burned with passion

the Rolling Stones' self-appointed archivist, to help him with research. Wyman, legend has it, told Mick to go forth and multiply. He was going to write his own book.

Then, so the story goes, Mick floundered. All the years of drugs and debauchery had addled his brain so badly that he could not remember anything. Reluctantly he decided to give Lord Weidenfeld his million back and to walk away from the project. As a national newspaper rock journalist I knew Mick pretty well during this period. I travelled with him all over the world, was there when Jerry Hall was tried and acquitted of drug smuggling in Barbados, and even sat next to him at a bizarre lunch that he asked me to arrange with Robert Maxwell. Mick was always drawn to the very rich and very powerful. Perhaps that is where Jerry gets it from.

Anyway, I thought that was the end of the story until three years ago, when a mutual friend handed me a pristine typescript Mick had written. I was dumbfounded. This was the rock 'n' roll equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls. So far as I have been able to ascertain, a publisher rejected the manuscript because it was light on sex and drugs. In the early 1980s, when it was written, shock and awe was a vital part of any successful autobiography.

Read now, however, it is a little masterpiece. A perfectly preserved time capsule written when the Stones had produced all

their greatest music but still burned with the passion and fire of youth and idealism.

One of my favourite anecdotes is of Mick returning unannounced to Dartford to see his parents after two years of chaotic world tours, debauchery, mayhem, riots and goodness only knows what else. 'Oh Michael,' says his horrified mother on opening the door. 'Your hair...'

The book shows a quieter, more watchful Mick than the fast-living caricature. He describes the little room he'd retreat to backstage before a performance, where he'd hide away, sizing up the audience. All that famous partying had to wait till afterwards. Those extravagant feasts that rumour had it the Stones demanded backstage: caviar, vintage champagne, stuffed quails... they never ate any of it. They took their shows far too seriously for that. He had carbs for an early lunch. Then water, 'maybe eight pints', because he'd lose ten pints on stage.

Mick tells of buying a historic mansion, Stargroves, while high on acid and of trying out the life of horse-riding country squire. Having never ridden a horse before, he leapt on to a stallion, whereupon it reared and roared off 'like a Ferrari'. Summoning his wits and some half-remembered horse facts, he gave the stallion a thump on the forehead right between the eyes and slowed it down

FROM THE ARCHIVE

War and law

From 'The confiscation of enemy property', The Spectator, 17 February 1917: It is perfectly possible to remove German influences without confiscating German property. This, as far as can be gathered, is the policy which the French have followed, and in their interest as well as in our own we ought also to follow it. The Germans, to give them in this matter the full credit which is due to them, have been very slow to take any steps against British property held in Germany... We do not wish to give them an excuse for fresh crimes. Our business is to punish them as a nation for the crimes they have already committed. In order to effect this object we have to concentrate all our energies upon beating our enemy in the field and on the sea. We shall do nothing to help our cause, and we shall do much to impair our reputation, if we allow covetous hands to steal enemy private property established here under the implied guarantee of our laws.

— otherwise the Stones' story might have ended differently.

Then there's the tedium of looking at Keith's scraggy, monkey-like bottom night

after night, but also the touching respect he has for Keith: always late, always smashed but 'a creative genius'. The world needs more creative people like Keith, writes Mick.

It is delicious, heady stuff. Like reading Elvis Presley's diaries from the days before he grew fat and washed-up in Vegas.

I was determined that this book needed to be published. Mick's delightful manager, Joyce Smyth, responded encouragingly to my letter. Mick could not remember any manuscript. Please could I show it to him? Once he saw it, he asked if he could write a foreword to establish that he wrote this story long ago and far away. It seemed we were there. But then, as is the way with the Rolling Stones, life took over. There was a tragic death, a tour, a film, a TV series, the Saatchi exhibition. I kept gently pushing but when, eventually, I tried to force a decision, the steel gates clanged shut. Mick wanted nothing further to do with this project. He never wanted to see it published.

As a fan, as a publisher, I think I have now reached the end of Route 66. So, apologies to the 10 million people around the world who would love to read this story. After all, as the philosopher Jagger once said: 'You can't always get what you want.'

John Blake is publisher of John Blake Publishing, a Bonnier company.

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Let's not dance

Why does it make people angry that I don't want to?

MARK MASON

Why will people simply not believe you when you tell them that you don't want to dance? Their reactions mimic the classic pattern of grief: first confusion, then denial, then anger. They tug at your arm like they're trying to pull it from the socket. 'Come on, you have to dance!' 'No I don't.' 'Oh come *on*! You want to really?' 'No I don't.' 'Yes you do! Of course you do! Everybody likes dancing!'

It's at this stage that I sometimes get all dark on them, losing the smile, injecting a note of firmness or perhaps even menace, and pointing out that if I wanted to dance I would be dancing, but as I'm not dancing they can safely infer that I don't want to dance. None of which reflects well on me, I know, seeing as it's someone's 50th in a village hall. But balls to them. They started it.

People always make the same accusations. 'You're boring!' Well no, if I was boring I wouldn't be here in the first place, would I? I'm sitting having a drink, a laugh, an enjoyable conversation with Emma about that new series on BBC4 — and you want me to interrupt it all for 'We Built This City' by Starship? Who's the boring one here?

Next up is: 'You don't like music!' Wrong again. I love music. It's just that I feel no need to dance to it. Recently I was sitting on my own at a bash, delighted that the DJ had chosen 'Walk This Way' by Aerosmith. Only a few days before I'd been playing along to it on guitar at home, and was happily rerunning the experience in my head. That and concentrating on the drum riff — my son got a kit for Christmas (I bought myself a kit for Christmas), and trying to decipher the timing of hi-hat, snare and bass drum was great fun. But then someone had to come up and ruin it, didn't they? 'Have a dance!' 'No thanks.' 'What's up, Aerosmith not cool enough for you?' I was tempted to hit them.

The other assumption made about those of us who shun the dance floor is that we're scared of making fools of ourselves. Oh, if only you knew. I refer anyone making that charge to my partner. She will confirm my persistent habit of air-guitar playing, and indeed air-drumming, in the car. It's fun at any time, of course, but especially when you're waiting in traffic and so can really get stuck in. Who cares that the other drivers

can see you? If they're capable of remaining unmoved by the charms of 'Rocks' by Primal Scream, then their opinions are as nothing to me. Jo feels differently and hisses at me to pack it in. This, of course, only adds to the enjoyment. I've become adept at main-

*If you think I'm afraid
of making a fool of myself, then you've
never seen me play air guitar*

taining note-perfect accuracy while blocking her route to the volume control.

Why do people get so angry that you won't dance? There's a desperation in their pleas — no, their commands — which says far more about them than it does about you. No one gets this het up about other activities. Imagine if you were round at some-

one's for dinner and declined their offer of coffee after the meal. Should they start yelling, 'Come *on*, you've *got* to have coffee!' while forcing a cup to your lips, you would run from the house as fast as possible and never see them again. Yet bullying someone into having a dance is seen as normal.

I reckon these people are trying to recapture their youth. They have three kids and a mortgage so large it won't let them sleep at night. All of a sudden the strains of 'Karma Chameleon' transport them back to the age of 14, when their only worry was how they could snog Greg. If they can make everybody in the room dance along, perhaps they will find themselves back in 1983, free of the miseries of middle age. But no, look at him over there, the boring one refusing to dance...

I wouldn't mind if they were any good at dancing themselves. I could take an attack from someone with serious moves. But despite talking like they're the lovechild of John Travolta and Michael Jackson, they then head out onto the floor and throw the sort of shapes associated with electrocution. It's dancing that bears no relation to the beat, the type actors have to do when the music is getting dubbed on later.

So what's the solution? Could I take the dance Nazis to court? After all, the manhandling they subject you to would, in any other situation, count as assault. I might give it a go next time. 'Get back on the floor, or I'm calling the law.'



'CCTV.'

In (conditional) defence of John Bercow



James Duddridge is not wrong. The Tory MP for Rochford and Southend East, who has put down a ‘no confidence’ motion in Mr Speaker Bercow, says John Bercow has abused ‘his employment contract’ by his openly political remarks. The last straw was telling students at the University of Reading that he voted Remain in last year’s European referendum. Duddridge is a fiercely outspoken Leaver, but his complaint is that the Speaker should not have revealed any preference at all. Few should contest this.

Anger over the Reading revelation builds on a history of complaint: the most recent example is still fresh. It was wrong to create the news story that as Speaker he would block an invitation to Donald Trump to address both Houses in Westminster Hall during a presidential visit that (I’d take a small bet) may not even happen. Such an invitation had never been extended and could have been privately blocked by the Commons Speaker if mooted with him. Bercow was just grandstanding.

But then Bercow is Bercow. He isn’t the first and won’t be the last Speaker to grandstand, and his role should not prohibit a bit of grandstanding: Bercow’s weaknesses must be taken alongside his strengths. Of these, more in a moment; but first I’d better be plain. Mr Speaker Bercow’s last two public gestures have been well out of order and he should soon call it a day. Whether or not (as some Tories feel) he has favoured Labour from the Chair in his Commons judgements, speaking in public from the left does invite suspicion.

Mr Duddridge’s motion, however, would probably have the unintended effect of guaranteeing Bercow’s tenure, but in an atmosphere of partisan ill-will. This Speaker has previously said that he would anyway step down in 2018. It’s now very clear (to your former-MP columnist at least) that everyone should pipe down, the motion should be withdrawn, and the Speaker should be allowed to choose his own retirement date next year.

The worst outcome is the one Duddridge’s plan makes most likely: that the ‘no confidence’ motion is debated in a poisonous cloud of insult; the whole thing begins to feel like Tories-versus-Speaker; all opposition parties unite in Bercow’s support; many Conservative backbenchers end up opposing (or abstaining on) the motion; Bercow ‘wins’ and

strides on, a hate figure to one group of MPs, the toast of another. And he’d go next year leaving a faint sense that he’d been hounded out by Tories. His memoirs would break a number of unwritten codes. There would be a rancorous argument about whether it was now the Tories’ ‘turn’ in the Chair because the previous notionally Conservative Speaker (Bercow was a Tory MP) had turned out to be a left-wing imposter. This would be bad for the office of Speaker, further undermine the principle of the Speaker’s neutrality, and give a nastily sharp edge to what had previously been no more than an amicable understanding: that the Speakership tends to alternate between the two big parties, but is best decided in a peaceable and un-tribal atmosphere.

He isn’t the first and won’t be the last Speaker to grandstand, and his role should not prohibit it

And now for a not-unconditional defence of John Bercow, who has said and done plenty of silly things, but some seriously good things, too. Consider the previous four Speakers, all of whom I was able to observe at close quarters.

The late Viscount Tonypanody (George Thomas) was a shameless grandstander and a great 20th-century Speaker (1976–83), the first to be broadcast. Politically (though he was from the Labour benches), he appeared studiously neutral. He loved the sound of his own voice — and so did the rest of Britain. At Westminster there was whispered criticism of his love of attention, and some Labour MPs thought him overly indulgent to Margaret Thatcher; but he was too popular to oppose.

The late Bernard (‘Jack’) Weatherill (1983–92) was my personal favourite: a pre-



‘I was the first in my family to get into student debt.’

media Speaker in a media age. Somewhat wooden and retiring, he stood up privately to bullying Tory ministers, infuriating them, though always in his heart a Conservative. He made little public impact. A touch of the Bercows would have done him no harm at all.

Lady (Betty) Boothroyd (1992–2000) had more than a touch of the Bercows, but did remain pretty unpartisan. In media terms she was an outstanding Speaker, but the positive imprint she left was on the public imagination rather than on the mores of the Chamber, where she was fairly cautious in all things.

Lord (Michael) Martin’s speakership (2000–2009) ended in his resignation after expenses rows, and there were Tory allegations of partiality to his old Labour comrades; but his air was avuncular and the worst that should be said of him was that he was dull and Buggins’-turn. He badly needed a touch of the Bercows.

Bercow and Betty have needed a touch of the Weatherills; Jack needed a touch of the Bercows; and George needed a shade less of the Betties and a dollop more of the Weatherills. As Speaker you just can’t win. At least all these departed from a tradition of alcoholism and narcolepsy in the Chair.

John Bercow has been both outstanding as a Speaker, and seriously flawed. You would need to be a sixth-former or Westminster habitué to know of the impact he’s made on public access, on engaging with the voters and with young people, on the lecture evenings to which he’s opened his Speaker’s House home, and the endless dog-hangings, so important for public-spirited people, on which he tirelessly drops in. He misspoke at Reading — but he was at least there at Reading, talking to students. His motivating idea, that a Parliament fit for the 21st century must invite and engage the world outside, and the Speaker is its ambassador, is true and strong.

So, Mr Duddridge, don’t pick a fight, lose, and further politicise the Chair. Don’t make the Tories look mean. Let Bercow serve his time then depart of his own accord, to the cacophony of cheers and jeers, the mixed reviews, the lessons learned and the virtues exemplified that are this pompous, vain, humane, public-spirited, indiscreet, ground-breaking but sometimes ill-judged Speaker’s due.

It's all too personal

We don't need to put our names on everything we buy

LARA PRENDERGAST

When I was little I owned a set of pencils that had my name engraved on them. I didn't have anything else with 'Lara Prendergast' on it other than my school uniform. The pencils seemed so rare and precious that I tried not to use them. The other day I found one stored away, the lead still sharp.

Personalised pencils aren't too rare any more. In fact, stationery sits at the most mundane end of the personalisation spectrum. These days you can have your name on pretty much anything you buy. Personalised swings. Personalised bird feeders. A personalised 'selfie' toaster, which sings a picture of your face on to every piece of bread. Personalised tennis balls and horse saddles. Or a personalised quiver for your personalised arrows, perhaps. There are personalised jam-making kits and personalised pork pies. James Middleton's company 'Boomf' does a range of personalised marshmallows. Prince George and Princess Charlotte must have received a box or two.

The personalised cheeseboard has become the present to give at weddings. One friend forgot to ask for just one, and found herself bombarded by the things, each stamped with the date of her wedding should she be at risk of forgetting it. 'Personalised loo roll' brings up 199,000 search results on Google. Tea bags, matchsticks, even condoms can all be stamped with your name. Or if you are feeling more romantic (or vain, depending on how you look at it), you can name a star or even personalise a seed so that your initials appear on the leaf.

It's nothing new. The Greeks and Romans engraved their names on coins, and aristocrats and arrivistes have used coats of arms for centuries. But in the past decade the pace has accelerated at a terrifying rate.

The internet seems the most likely cause. Retailers can now sell directly to customers and have worked out that the 'selfie' generation will pay more for an item with their name or image on it. In 2014, Burberry started to offer the option of embossing a name on to their bottles of scent, which more than doubled sales — never mind that everyone wearing it smells exactly the same. NikeiD lets you 'build your own' trainers and print your name on them; Ray-Ban 'Remix' is the same service for sunglasses. Aspinall recently launched a 'chameleon'

service, which allows you to design your own tote bag. This lets you 'take control', apparently. 'We have all become fashion designers,' gushed one press release, as if remembering your own name while out shopping somehow turns you into Christian Dior.

There are laughs to be had. A friend's uncle gave a large packet of M&Ms with his face on every single one as a thank-you present. For Christmas, another friend gave each family member a cushion with a close-up picture of his face on it. But, in general, personalisation results in more problems than laughs. You can't re-wrap and palm off a set of 'Lara Prendergast' tea towels. You can't even give them away to a charity shop.

And where does it end? What would life

You can't re-wrap and palm off personalised tea towels. You can't even give them to a charity shop

be like if all my possessions were personalised? I would wake up in my personalised sheets, drink coffee from my LP mug, with my name dusted on the foam in chocolate, using my personalised coffee-cup stencil. My house would be full of personalised pictures in personalised picture frames. Perhaps a personalised fruit bowl in the kitchen. I'd use my personalised travelcard holder to get to work. My personalised diary would be full of exciting appointments. In the evening, I'd open a bottle of personalised prosecco and fill up my personalised prosecco glass. Then I would move on to the personalised bottle of vodka. Before long, I'd lose the plot and use my personalised axe — £32.50 from notonthehighstreet.com — to lay waste to all my personalised objects. And when the time came, I'd be taken out in my personalised coffin, then buried, like everyone else, under a gravestone with my name on it.



'I see — and how long has your kettle been talking to your laptop?'

BAROMETER

Special forces

Cathedral constables at York Minister got back their powers of arrest, which they had held from the 13th century until the 1930s. They will be allowed to carry batons and handcuffs. Other private police forces:

- **British Transport Police**, which is almost entirely funded by the rail industry, has 3,069 officers with similar powers to those of regular police.

- The **Civil Nuclear Constabulary**, with 1,500 officers, secures nuclear power plants and the transport of nuclear materials around the country.

- **Cambridge University Proctors**, who used their powers of arrest mostly to detain prostitutes and unruly students, gave up policing powers in 1970 and now perform more of a ceremonial role.

- **Oxford University Bulldogs** kept their powers until 2001 but the force was disbanded two years later.

EU plots

Bad weather in Spain has led to a shortage of salad. Where are Europe's vegetables and fruit grown? Some leading producers, and the percentage of the EU's vegetable- and fruit-growing land they contain:

	VEG	FRUIT		VEG	FRUIT
Italy	19.5	17.3	Romania	7.1	4.5
Spain	16.6	38.8	Germany	5.7	1.7
Poland	11.1	10.4	UK	5.4	0.7
France	10.9	5.1			

Source: Eurostat

Private needs

A higher proportion of independent school pupils are getting extra time in exams on the basis of special needs than is the case with state school pupils. How have numbers of these 'access arrangements' grown over the years?

YEAR	TOTAL	YEAR	TOTAL
2011-12	232,350	2014-15	380,450
2012-13	342,550	2015-16	410,800
2013-14	352,350		

Wrong move

Wikipedia said it would stop using the *Daily Mail* as a source on the grounds of unreliability. But how reliable is Wikipedia itself?

- A 2005 study in *Nature* compared it with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and found that in 42 entries both had four serious errors. Wikipedia had 162 minor errors and *Britannica* 123.

- The Leveson Report misattributed the foundation of the *Independent* to a Californian student thanks to Wikipedia.

- For some time Wikipedia contained references to a bogus medical condition called glucosaminogen, which in turn came to be quoted in two learned journals.

Living room

Sir: Sajid Javid is quoted as saying that the biggest constraint on building more houses is the 'lack of land' ('Javid's home truths', 11 February). While he is right to call for government intervention, I don't agree with this view. We may live on a small island in relative terms, but that doesn't diminish our actual land mass. For argument's sake, let us say the average house takes up 100 square metres. This means that you could fit 10,000 houses into a single square kilometre. To put that into perspective, the Isle of Wight, with an area of 380 km², has the capacity to accommodate 3,800,000 houses.

Obviously, housing estates require much less land. Singapore (twice the size of the Isle of Wight) can accommodate most of its 5.6 million residents in high-rise flats.

Farmland, amenities and public infrastructure must be accounted for, too. But the UK does not have a shortage of land.

*Anne-Marie Baxter
Barnstaple, Devon*

Even up the score

Sir: Rod Liddle does a great job lampooning the shady honours system and the over-hyping of David Beckham's talents ('The dishonouring of David Beckham', February 11). However, he is himself guilty of hyping up Golden Balls when he says Beckham's goal against Greece was a case of 'clutching victory from defeat'. In fact the game ended 2-2, although the point earned from the draw earned England a World Cup finals place.

*James Potts
Penylan, Cardiff*

Good knight

Sir: On David Beckham, Rod Liddle utters many a heresy in maintaining that the boy from Chingford is far from worthy of a knighthood. One can understand how Beckham might be miffed when his mate Elton John was fast-tracked to National Treasure status by his own 'K'. But in the spirit of restoring the honours system, may I suggest that our cricketing supremo Andrew Strauss is as worthy as anyone?

He has been in three Ashes-winning sides, captaining two, with one in Australia (a very rare achievement). He has been handed the England captaincy three times and had it taken away twice, never complaining. But more than all that he has called Kevin Pietersen the C-word live on air and got away with it. Surely that makes him as worthy as anyone else alive?

*Andrew Cunningham
Chingford*

Burning desire

Sir: Cosmo Landesman's rejection of a 'crazy and posh' girl – much given to outrageous antics and bedchamber incendiarism – was a sensible decision ('Why do the middle classes let posh people be so rude?', 11 February). Mind you, Mr Landesman's leaving of the field raises an obvious question from men of taste and refinement: what's her telephone number?

*Mark Ribbands
Tibenhams, Norfolk*

Unfounded

Sir: I was disgusted, but not surprised, to read a letter to a national newspaper from Professor Alan Sked (LSE) awarding himself sole honours for getting the UK out of the EU. The message he trumpeted was 'No Sked no Ukip; no Ukip no referendum; no referendum no Brexit'. He also claimed to be a 'professional historian wanting to set the record straight'.

It is true that in 1991 he founded the party which became Ukip two years later. He did not mention that he soon fell out with the party, left it, and from then on has

regularly published anti-Ukip letters in the press. I think it is fair to say that Nigel Farage and Ukip's success has been in spite of its founder, not because of him.

*Sir George Earle Bt.
Creditor, Devon*

Well schooled

Sir: James Delingpole blames his 'wretched genetic input' for making his son, who is leaving Eton, carefree about his future ('My poor Boy. He's going to end up just like me', 11 February). He worries that his son doesn't seem bothered about putting his own sons through Eton. But he is being too hard on himself. After all, James didn't go to Eton. Through tenacity and perseverance he managed to get his child educated there. His son, if lucky enough to have inherited such ambitious genes, might go a step further, and send his progeny to an even better school, such as Westminster or Winchester.

*Roger Satie
London W11*

Green with envy

Sir: Marcus Berkmann's green corduroy jacket, which hangs in his cupboard in grief-stricken solitude, has caused me tearful contemplation (Notes on Corduroy, 4 February). Why doesn't he wear it with a pair of grey flannel bags and set forth to admiring glances? Failing that, if the jacket is size 46 and has regular length sleeves, I'd be happy to take it off his hands.

*Frank Debenham
Kelso, Borders*

Lost saint

Sir: I was delighted to see Susan Hill (Diary, 11 February) commending St Anthony's ability to find lost property. I recently stood before the large statue of the saint in our church and more or less shouted: 'St Anthony, find me my keys!' In ten minutes, he had done it. In one of my previous parishes, somebody dissatisfied with his saintly services pushed him off his plinth, causing his head to break off. He was reattached with iron collar and chain round his neck, like a holy rottweiler.

Anybody worried that St Anthony is overworked could follow the more full-blooded Spanish practice of calling on St Cucufato. You tie three knots in your handkerchief and say: 'Cucufato, Cucufato, I'm tying up your balls; find me my (lost object) and I'll untie them again.' It always works, and he is never resentful.

*Father David Sillince
Southampton*

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My survey of bank closures suggests a new purpose for the tarnished Co-op



Many thanks to the stampede of readers who sent news of bank branch closures. There's certainly a national pattern, and possibly an epidemic, with HSBC, NatWest, Clydesdale and Yorkshire Bank closing outlets as fast as they can, and only the Nationwide building society making a virtue of offering an undiminished service. Counter staff still in post are praised for their kindness, particularly to readers' elderly mothers, but sham 'consultations' on closures that are *faits accomplis* are a frequent cause of irritation.

It's clear that many towns will soon be left with no more than a single ATM plus, if they're lucky, a post-office counter — making life particularly tough for small businesses. A reader in New York quotes Paul Theroux, in *Deep South*, on the 'bank deserts' that leave rural Mississippi and Arkansas beyond hope of economic revival: is that what will happen here?

Or should we just get over it? I'm grateful to the respondent who reports 'numerous branches within easy reach though personally, I don't need them' and 'no facile busybody "community" to bother me either'. He suggests I move to where he lives, on the outskirts of Preston. I also admire the 72-year-old widow who tells me I'm 'quite wrong' to bang on about closures: she shops with a contactless card, never uses cash or cheques, hasn't visited a branch for a decade and praises (as do several others) the 'wholly excellent' online services of First Direct. 'Technology has made my life incomparably easier,' she says. Maybe we should all learn from her example.

Or is there a third way? If banks can co-operate on ATMs — as several of you observed — why can't they combine branch services so that one multi-bank outlet survives in any significant locality? It occurs to me this could become the new business plan for the tarnished Co-operative Bank, which still has a nationwide network and four million customers of its own but (for lack of capital) was forced by the Bank of England to put itself up for sale this week. Shorn of its

recent negative connotations, 'Co-operative' could be the perfect name for the multi-purpose high-street money shop most of us still occasionally need.

Yet another Greek crisis

I didn't have to be Delphic to predict that the Greek crisis wasn't over when an €86 billion third bailout deal was provisionally agreed in July 2015, with the aim of preventing forced exit from the euro: 'Impossible to see how it could be "over" without the debt relief [Greece] asked for but the Germans adamantly refused,' I wrote. Of course that wasn't how Brussels presented the deal: 'On this basis, Greece... will irreversibly remain a member of the euro,' declared Jean-Claude Juncker — without, presumably, having consulted any oracles himself. Further trouble was inevitable, because the trajectory of Greek debt is unsustainable even if the most optimistic projections come true, and because the IMF declined to commit to the 2015 settlement unless it sees further cuts in Greek pensions and willingness on the EU side to discuss sufficient debt relief to make ultimate recovery possible.

As ever, deadlines loom: without a release of bailout money, €8 billion of debt due in July cannot be repaid. With elections coming up in France, Germany and Holland, the EU political establishment is terrified a continuing Greek fiasco will boost right-wing Eurosceptic candidates. And the Trump team — whose chosen man in Brussels, Ted Malloch, sees collapse of the euro as a desirable outcome — now call the shots as the IMF's biggest funder. Those of us who believed the euro might fracture in the first Greek crisis of 2010 were surprised by the strength of political willpower that held it together; but that's still the way the tide of history is flowing.

Versace to the rescue

Our issue of 11 April 1992 contained two items that still catch my eye. One was my

own first contribution to the magazine; the other, on the inside front cover, an advert for Versace, featuring tanned male models with oiled hair and cream suits — a look so alien to the archetypal elbow-patched *Spectator* reader of those days that one wonders how on earth the Italian fashion house had been persuaded to buy a page.

The answer is that it was sold by Luis Dominguez, who held the title of publisher here from 1990 to 1996. Trained at the *New Yorker* and *Harper's & Queen*, he favoured luxury-goods advertising as the path to financial survival. An elegant Anglo-Argentinian with a mid-Atlantic accent, Luis (who died on 31 January) was more at home among Bond Street *boutiquiers* than in our mildly dissolute Doughty Street house, but he was good at his job. Circulation was rising too; Simon Courtauld's history records that after many years of losses, 'The *Spectator* declared (though not too loudly) a profit of £10,000 in 1992', and many times that figure in the following years. Why not too loudly? Because — so the board concurred with the then editor Dominic Lawson — 'the contributors must never find out.'

The glossy gentleman

I made my West End stage debut last week in *London by Night*, a musical tribute to Victorian melodrama at the Savile Club. Several audience members asked afterwards whether I was trying to inject a layer of political satire into my portrayal of a lustful, ill-tempered, money-grabbing, over-the-top braggart with bad hair. In truth I was just playing the stock villain of the genre — and perhaps, with my habitual eye for the sins of the financial sector, channelling J.B. Priestley's observation in *English Journey* about moneymen doing to the working classes what the 'glossy gentleman in the old melodramas always did to the innocent maiden'. But at least my character got shot in the back (by the innocent maiden's long-lost mother) before he could think of running for President of the United States.

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BOOKS & ARTS

Michael Tanner finds Simon Callow ill suited to channelling Wagner

James Walton says a history of Britain's census is a fascinating tribute to its founder, John Rickman

Stuart Kelly thinks Sara Baume is a writer 'bruised by greatness'

Daniel Hahn claims that Victor Hugo's ambition for his big book was nothing short of revolutionary

Richard Bratby wonders why conductor Daniel Oren is marginally less popular than Donald Trump

Alexandra Coghlan laments how the Victorians debased Monteverdi's radical madrigals

Lloyd Evans emerges from the Red Lion Theatre with his consciousness altered



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*'Suprematistic
Construction of Colours',
1928–29, by Kazimir
Malevich
Martin Gayford — p46*

BOOKS

The game of life

Sam Leith is delighted by the idea that having fun is the key to human progress

Wonderland: How Play Made the Modern World

by Steven Johnson

Macmillan, £16.99, pp. 297

In the introduction to his new book Steven Johnson starts out by describing the ninth-century *Book of Ingenious Devices* and its successor, the 13th-century *Book of the Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanisms* by the Arab engineer al-Jazari. Here were books of extraordinarily advanced technology. The latter contained sketches of

float valves that prefigure the design of modern toilets, flow regulators that would eventually be used in hydroelectric dams and internal combustion engines, water clocks more accurate than anything Europe would see for 400 years...

But in both books, Johnson says, 'the overwhelming majority of the mechanisms [...] are objects of amusement and mimicry': they are toys. A point to conjure with.

Steven Johnson is an able and witty writer about the culture of technology, whose breakthrough book was the excellently titled *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter*. It made the case that all the things we are accustomed to think of as brain-rotting, down-dumbing emanations of modernity, such as videogames, telly and surfing the internet, are in fact the chief drivers of the so-called Flynn effect, which sees the average western IQ ticking ever

upwards. Their increasing complexity is cognitively challenging, he argued, and therefore helps make — as Molesworth would put it — 'grate branes'. It was a wonderful provocation; and, as I once heard him remark ruefully, far more people wrote op-eds about it than actually bought and read it. They were probably too busy playing computer games.

In *Wonderland* he advances another slickly counterintuitive hypothesis. It is that one of the most important drivers of human progress is fun, leisure, novelty, the impulse to delight: aka, mucking around. The utilitarian account of human progress, he argues, concerned chiefly with work, market efficiencies and the hierarchy of basic human needs such as shelter, food and nookie, misses several tricks.

Taking this as his starting point, he hares off through six chapters that look at fashion and shopping, music, food, illusions, games and public spaces. And he starts, at least, at a gallop. He looks at the ancient appetite for Tyrian purple — a dye produced from a particular sort of sea-snail, and which answers no obvious human need, but the pursuit of which took Phoenicians out into the Atlantic, 'a true threshold in the history of human exploration'. He considers the 17th-century appetite for cotton — spread, like the colour purple, through fashion and display — and the way it changed the face of global industry. He considers the spice trade, as a path-finding globalising activity, and notes that

the tastes of pepper, vanilla and nutmeg add nothing but the pleasure of the unexpected to human utility.

He points out that music is, strictly, useless — yet that bone-flutes with musical intervals we recognise now were being made 43,000 years ago and that their successor instruments, for nothing more than the delight and surprise of harmony, were implicated in some of the central innovations of the 20th century. Peer-to-peer networks, the notion of software (or programmable hardware — punch-cards originated in weaving programmes and player pianos), the idea of a live interaction between a human and a machine, the input devices that made the latter possible — all originated in play. He looks at how coffee-shops and taverns created social networks, and argues that the cradle of the American Revolution was the 'third space', as Starbucks later called it, of the east coast's pubs. And he considers how at one point 'even Christianity's geographic footprint looked small beside the long stride of chess'.

He even takes us on a tour of the visual illusion industry over three centuries or so — panoramas, phantasmagorias and magic-lantern shows — to argue that our brains evolved to make sense of a series of images in a certain way, and that we came to delight in confounding or confusing our own brains. Optical illusions — peaking in the realisation that we interpret 12 frames per second as motion rather than a series of stills —



GETTY IMAGES

Magic lantern slides from the mid-19th century

gave us cinema and, finally, the modern concept of celebrity.

These are, as you'll have noticed, a rather disparate set of data-points. The breadth and suggestiveness of Johnson's thesis is a strength but also a weakness, and there's a good deal of cherry-picking and post-hoc-ergo-propter-hockery at work. Or, at least, a sense that if an idea seems to rhyme with another it can be chalked up as a win for the author's thesis.

For instance, he describes the cunning device with which the probability nerds Claude Shannon and Edward Thorp — gambling being the primal entry point to probabilistic maths — attempted to beat the odds at roulette in 1961. They treated roulette as a physics problem, and realised that if you could clock how fast the ball was moving around the wheel before it clattered into the fretted section, you had a good chance of figuring out roughly in which section of the wheel it was likely to land. After much tinkering, they ended up in Vegas with a miniature computer the size of a cigarette packet (well ahead of its time) in one of their pockets. Sensors in their shoes allowed a discreet toe-tap to register the speed at which the ball completed a circuit of the wheel, and the computer would register its calculation by way of a musical tone played through headphones. They cleaned up.

'It might have looked like two men goofing off and trying to beat the house at rou-

lette, but it was also something much more profound,' writes Johnson. 'An entire family tree of devices — iPods, Android phones, Apple Watches, Fitbits — descend directly from that roulette hack.' Or, the reader might think, possibly not. Rather often, glancing similarities — or points as general as miniaturisation — are passed off as lines of causation.

But there is meat in here — not least in the suggestive argument Johnson makes in his conclusion that it isn't play, exactly, so much as surprise or novelty that our brains respond to with such pleasure and interest.

Thomas Jefferson's recipe for vanilla ice cream was one of his enduring contributions to American culture

Here's the at least cursorily neuroscientific argument that fun is not a marginal or unserious activity, but some sort of evolutionary desideratum.

And the salmagundi of anecdotes and examples makes this book rich. Johnson leaps with a cavalier glee between Habermas and Walt Disney. We meet Pierre Poivre, the original Peter Piper, who picked a peck of *unpickled* peppers — or, at least, smuggled cloves and nutmeg to transplant them in French colonial soil — and in so doing broke the fabulously lucrative and bloodily maintained Dutch spice monopoly. Having had most of his right arm ampu-

tated following a wound in a naval battle, he was, Johnson notes, 'the most successful one-armed bandit in history'. We get the story of how the screen siren Hedy Lamarr teamed up with the avant-garde composer George Antheil (whose *Ballet Mécanique*, in its day, caused bigger riots than Stravinsky and 'out-sacked the *Sacre [du Printemps]*'; also, he was an agony aunt for *Esquire*) — to design a guidance system for torpedoes.

We learn that Thomas Jefferson's handwritten recipe for vanilla ice cream was 'one of his many enduring contributions to American culture'. We share historical disappointment in off-brand panoramas ('You are allowed to look through glasses at miserable models of places, persons and landscapes while two or three nasty people sit eating onions and oranges'). We learn, too, that nobody drank coffee for the taste in the 17th century — it was described by one enthusiast as 'syrup of soot and the essence of old shoes'.

So even if you don't buy the central thesis — or, rather, if the central thesis, like the illusion from an 18th-century phantasmagoria, seems so tenebrous and smoky as to resist pinning down — there is a fabulous amount here to be surprised by and interested in. It's a book about delight that is itself delightful; and a happy reminder of the truth uttered by the late Kurt Vonnegut: 'I tell you, we are here on earth to fart around, and don't let anyone tell you any different.'

A whirlwind life

Michael Tanner

Being Wagner: The Triumph of the Will

by Simon Callow

William Collins, £14.99, pp. 208

The dust cover features one of the best-known caricatures of Richard Wagner, his enormous head in this version opened like a boiled egg, with a photograph of Simon Callow either emerging from his skull or sinking into it. The idea is that rather than just writing another book on this over-biographical figure, Callow will let us know what it was like actually to have been him, something he also tried in his one-man show at the Linbury Theatre, *Inside Wagner's Head*. Callow tells us that he has been a lifelong Wagnerian, but that only in the last four years has he investigated him as a man, reading the most important biographical and, especially, autobiographical works, together with a fair number of critical studies.

So we have one flamboyant theatrical figure claiming to portray another. Wagner's narratives of his life — there are many of them — are notoriously unreliable, often with dramatic intent. Callow is not the man to mind that; and he adds a large number of inaccuracies and flourishes of his own, so that, in many respects, the book turns out to be a mine of misinformation. Callow even gets Wagner's birthday wrong, twice, though it is correct in the chronology at the end. More seriously, he takes Wagner's word for it that it was seeing the great soprano Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient as *Fidelio* in 1829 that determined him to become an opera composer, and also was a lifelong influence on his view of the ideal operatic performer. But it has long been known, and stated in several of the books Callow lists in his bibliography, that she didn't perform in *Fidelio* then. It was part of Wagner's mytho-autobiography.

Worse, Callow's account of Schopenhauer's philosophy and its transforming effect on Wagner's view of life is almost exactly the opposite of what he actually thought. Callow claims that Schopenhauer believed that the only escape from the misery of life was through erotic love, though in fact Schopenhauer thought erotic love was the most extreme example of the rampant will, and thus one of the greatest causes of our wretchedness. Wagner thought 'friend Schopenhauer' needed 'correction' on that point, thereby exactly reversing the philosopher's view. Callow tells us that when Nietzsche met Wagner for the first time, '[Wagner] spoke in the measured tones of a great philosopher.' Actually Nietzsche wrote in a letter just after the first meeting, '[Wagner] really is a fabulously vivacious, fiery man, who talks very quickly and wittily, brightening up a party of this very

private kind... I still cannot think about [the meeting] without laughing.' Nor is it the case that 'Nietzsche never crossed the threshold' of the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth; he attended rehearsals of *The Ring*, but his migraines, by which he was often afflicted, forced him to leave, whatever later constructions he may have put on the occasion. And so on and on, casual errors littering the pages of what is a very readable book, in one way.

Callow should have written more about the great music-dramas themselves. As a lifelong Wagnerian, he has presumably thought very hard about them; but his references to them are so perfunctory that any reader who doesn't know them won't be helped, and any reader who does will find the references superficial. I wonder who Callow envisaged as his target audience. Presumably people who hear Wagner's name mentioned often enough, and in enough contexts, to want to find out more about him, by way of a vivid portrayal of the kind of person he was. Callow catches well the astonishing whirlwind that was Wagner's life, the ceaseless travelling, the homelessness, the roving eye, the

The Footfall of a Moth

Listen! the footfall of a moth
Across the kitchen tablecloth,
A weevil mumbling through a crust,
A susurrations in the dust,
A silverfish behind the fridge,
The thousand wingbeats of a midge,
Low murmurations of a mouse
Curled up inside your neighbour's house,

Whispering of a daffodil
In bloom on some far distant hill,
Coloratura of a bat
Above a Brighton laundromat,
The grunt of huge tectonic plates
Somewhere in the United States,
A moonbeam's hiss, a breath on Mars,
The sibillance of dying stars,

The music of the spheres, the sound
Of Stygian silence underground,
No perturbation of the air,
But perfect stillness everywhere,
The stillness of a single swan
Upon the lake of Acheron,
Black swan to mourn that love has gone,
When love has gone, when love has gone.

— John Whitworth

overwhelming charm — even, up to a point, the industriousness.

Reading a more straightforward biography makes you wonder how he had time to do all the things that he did, even if he hadn't written a note of music. But the extraordinary artistic ambition, all of it fulfilled more completely than even its composer expected, the meticulousness of his enormous scores, down to the famous calligraphy, the capacity to go on producing profound masterpiece after masterpiece when there was no chance of any of them being performed, yet they all were — this latter does impress Callow and earns a mention — these are really the only things that we should think about in connection with Wagner, and then concentrate on the richness and depth of experience that the works offer.

Roger Scruton's great book *The Ring of Truth*, published last year, the most helpful and profound study of what matters about Wagner, is a much larger book than Callow's, and not so easy to read, but on every page there are illuminations none of which can be found here.

The nature of genius

Craig Raine

The Bughouse: The Poetry, Politics and Madness of Ezra Pound

by Daniel Swift

Harvill Secker, £25, pp. 320

On 21 December 1945, Ezra Pound was confined to St Elizabeths hospital in Washington DC. He had broadcast for Rome Radio from 29 January 1942 to July 1943. To avoid his almost certain conviction for treason (and the death penalty visited on William Joyce, Lord Haw-Haw), the superintendent Winfred Overholser testified that Pound was insane and unfit to stand trial. Overholser connived with Julien Cornell, Pound's lawyer. He elided the testimony of six psychiatrists, whose verdict was more equivocal. He concentrated instead on Pound's brief, understandable breakdown after being kept in a cage at the Disciplinary Training Centre's stockade in Pisa. A. David Moody in his exemplary three-volume life of Pound delivers this lucid conclusion: 'The almost unanimous view of the psychiatrists present at the conference was that Pound was neither insane nor incompetent.' Not to embarrass their superior, the shrinks recorded no formal diagnosis. It was a fix. On 18 April 1958, the indictment against Pound was dismissed, on the grounds of incurable insanity, and he was released after more than 12 years. It was another fix. Pound was sane enough to write *The Pisan Cantos* — a great work, composed under impossible circumstances. He was always excitable, unpredictable, opinionated, eccentric, politically unacceptable, but far from mad.

Daniel Swift isn't so sure — about this, about anything, on principle. 'Pound hated universities' (p. 230). 'Pound loved universities' (p. 232). *The Bughouse* is replete with glib chiasmus. Two sample rhetorical oublies: 'Pound scholars are like a family; and his family are scholars.' Of Lowell: 'To understand the poetry, we might begin with the drugs; and to understand the drugs, we might turn to the poetry.'

This study of Pound's incarceration in St Elizabeths is immersive, indeterminate, a complacent attempt to impose freedom of interpretation. In his masterpiece *The Ring and the Book*, Robert Browning evokes the furthest attendant ripples around his true central narrative event — the murder of Pompilia by her husband Count Guido Franceschini. He invents details that reanimate history — from the gourmand defence lawyer's laugh in his larynx 'as he had fritters deep down frying there', to a Venetian visitor who has lost 50 gold zecchines betting on Franceschini's acquittal.

Swift aspires to literature, to the Browning version. And he is intent on participation, half creative critic, half dashing Geoff Dyer — to adapt Oscar Wilde, the critic as egotist. He achieves padding on an epic scale. We are given a guided tour of the National Portrait Gallery. 'In June 1946 the garden at Howard Hall produced 400 bunches of radishes and 12 bushels of green beans.' When Swift is given a conducted tour by Carter Wormeley, the asset manager for the redevelopment of St

Pound was sane enough to write The Pisan Cantos — a great work, composed under impossible circumstances

Elizabeths, we learn Carter was wearing 'blue-and-yellow braces'. At a Pound conference, an anonymous French participant wears red trousers. Pound was first interrogated by Frank Lawrence Amprin of the FBI, who 'once received a parking ticket for leaving his car too long while he was sitting an exam'. Swift has read his file and is reluctant to let anything go to waste. The file divulges the crucial character note that Amprin's moustache 'doesn't enhance his appearance any'.



GETTY IMAGES

Ezra Pound as a young man

Throughout, the argument is exiguous and melodramatic: Pound 'keeps the power to make paranoiacs of us all'. Some passages read like a proposal to a publisher, replete with febrile binaries, simplifications, shortcuts and meaningless hyperbole: 'Pound in the insane asylum encapsulates the central questions about art, politics and poetry of the 20th century.' Which are, apparently, 'questions about what madness is, and what makes genius; about the connection between experimental art and extreme, often illiberal political sentiment...' Surprising to see these dusty commonplaces of university modernism being given an airing again. What about Joyce, the most radical modernist experimenter with famously tolerant political views? The speculative alliance between genius and madness has been around since the Greeks. It was threadbare when Shakespeare floated the hypothesis that 'The lunatic, the lover and the poet/ Are of imagination all compact'. By Dryden, its retirement is overdue. Especially in the context of Pound.

Swift's stated focus is on Pound's visitors at St Elizabeths: Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, Charles Olson, William Carlos Williams, John Berryman, Samuel

Hynes. (And, too briefly, Sheri Martinelli and Marcella Span, two young women Pound serially fell in love with.) It is Swift's contention that a pattern is established: 'A young man goes out to the bug-house and returns a poet... They became themselves by visiting Pound and then writing about it.' A bold but wonky proposition that barely lasts the time it takes to type it out.

William Carlos Williams, Pound's friend, competitor and rival, is given a chapter, though he visited Pound only once. Before the visit, Williams alluded indirectly to Pound in his poetry. Whereas, after his visit, Williams quotes a Pound letter more or less directly in Book III of his long poem *Paterson*. Swift: '[Williams] dreams of springing Pound from the hospital and into the rival custody of the poem.' It sounds good only because it is hollow and therefore reverberant. Having established that Pound and Williams are aesthetic opposites — Pound Europeanised, Williams stubbornly American — Swift contrives a reversal, 'a deeper proof of their conjunction, and [we] might then see radio as a sign not of distance but of destiny'. What does this murkily turn out to mean?

It means that Pound performing on Rome Radio is the puppet of his American DNA. His middle name was Loomis. One of his ancestors, Mahlon Loomis, demonstrated in 1866 that communication was possible between two towers 14 miles apart. In 1872, Congress refused him \$50,000 to develop his discovery, describing the project as moonshine. 'Loomis died forgotten in 1886. Less than a decade later, the Italian Marconi sent a wireless message a distance of nine miles in England and was greeted as a genius.' There is no evidence that Pound ever knew of this ancestor. This is no obstacle to Swift's operatic conclusion:

Pound in his broadcasts is Mahlon Loomis, the genius bringing light to a darkened world, spinning truth from the air and conjuring the waves. Pound in his broadcasts is Mahlon Loomis, the crackpot inventor and laughable madman, thwarted and mocked by the US Congress.

Nonsense cooked two ways and typical of Swift. The art of overreach. On a par, in fact, with George Steiner's grotesque claim that Kafka prophesied the death camps in *The Trial* (published 1925) and therefore contributed to their enactment: 'Could prophecy so mercilessly articulate have been other than fulfilled?' Feel the flourish.

In Swift's readings, rhyme has prophetic, oracular properties too. It is a species of divination, disclosing 'facts' invisible to the ordinary reader, but available to the adept. For example, Robert Lowell's *Life*

Studies poem, 'Home After Three Months Away', narrates Lowell's return from McLean's mental hospital. He is cured and apparently happy, but feels, shockingly, existentially diminished by sanity. The last line is: 'Cured, I am frizzled, stale and small.' Swift, however, has an alternative reading. 'Lowell's rhymes remind us that this poet is a patient.' Though the poem itself is completely silent on the matter, Swift insists that 'Once the weekend is done he must return to the hospital for the week.' The 'evidence' in the poem is that 'rhyme is return, is rules'. The return of sound implies Lowell's return to hospital. 'Which is the poem's deepest rhyme', according to Swift. Which I think is a misreading that mislocates the poem's power. Compare his assertion that the half-rhyme in Elizabeth Bishop's 'Visits to St Elizabeths' — 'Bedlam' and 'man' — 'whispers one more thing: that this [Bedlam] is his proper place'. Looking at Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', Swift considers the couplet, 'In the room the women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo' and comments: 'Inside the rhyme is the fear.'

Avoid this book. Read instead *Ezra Pound: Poet* by A. David Moody — a painstaking, detailed, scrupulous, calmly factual account of an intricate life.

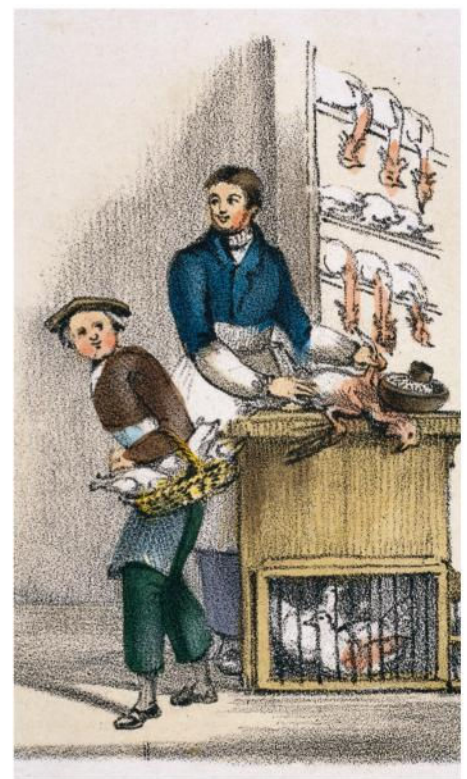
Tricks of the trades James Walton

The Butcher, the Baker, the Candlestick Maker: The Story of Britain Through its Census, Since 1801

by Roger Hutchinson
Little Brown, £20, pp. 340

Oddly enough, one of the most historically influential pieces of British writing has turned out to be an essay that appeared in the June 1800 issue of the *Commercial, Agricultural and Manufacturers Magazine*. Over the preceding decades, there'd been much anguished debate about the size of the country's population. Many commentators were convinced that, thanks to the gin craze, it was in potentially disastrous decline. Others, led by Thomas Malthus, were convinced that it was on the potentially disastrous rise. The biggest question of all, though, was what the population actually was, with most estimates — or, as it transpired, wild guesses — ranging from four million to six million. But then, in that 1800 essay, amid his magazine's more usual fare of articles on manure and cowpox, the editor John Rickman came up with a radical suggestion: why not count it?

Fortunately, he was sufficiently well-connected for his argument to be taken up



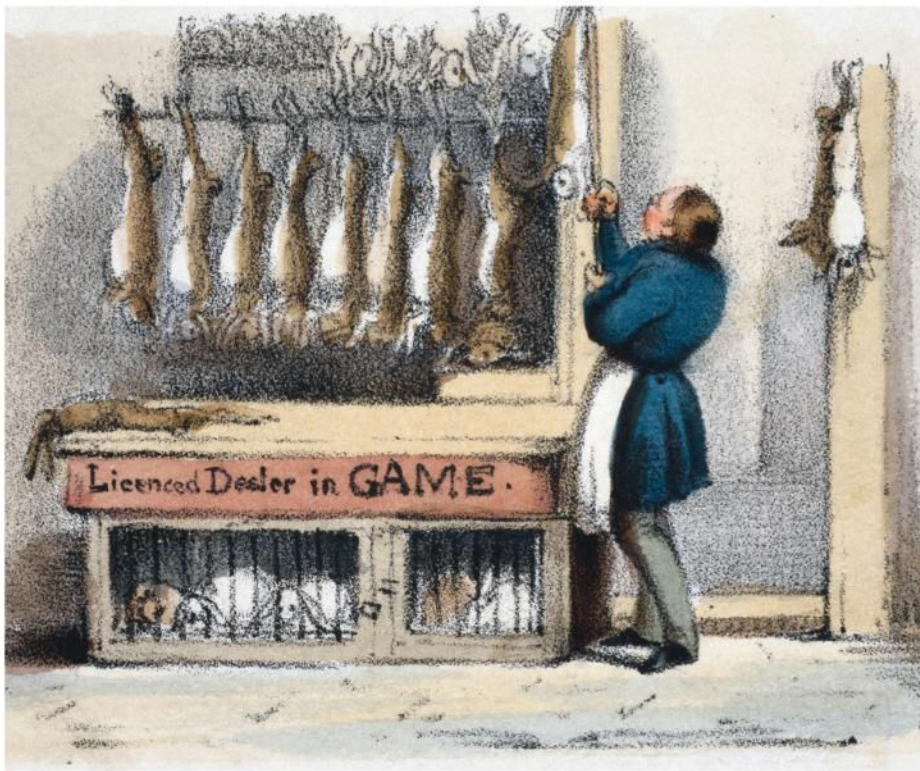
The poulterer

by a couple of friendly MPs — and, with the government desperate to know how many soldiers it might be able to muster against Napoleon, Britain's first census was soon commissioned, under Rickman's direction.

In fact, suspicion of what the government was up to made the 1801 census a fairly hit-and-miss affair. Nonetheless, its figure of around 15 million for the inhabitants of Britain and Ireland wasn't too far wide of the mark. It was also considered successful enough for a census to be recommissioned every ten years from then on, with ever more accuracy, and ever more information about the inhabitants' lives. By 1831, Rickman was convinced that he'd seen off both sets of doom-mongers by proving that the country's population and prosperity were growing together nicely.

Using the census records as the basis for a history of Britain is clearly an excellent idea for a book. Even so, Roger Hutchinson has carried it out particularly well. The ten-yearly snapshots allow him to identify the precise timing not only of the most profound social changes (between 1821 and 1831, the expansion of Britain's cities was 'breathtaking'), but also of the more minor ones (between 1851 and 1861, the number of professional photographers increased nearly 60-fold).

Happily, too, he manages to do this without the result ever becoming merely a blizzard of statistics. Admittedly, if you have ever wondered how many Brits made arti-



The game butcher, with dead rabbits and live, caged ones beneath. (Both scenes from the 1840s)

ficial flowers for a living in 1851, then here's where you'll find out. (Spoiler alert: it was 3,510.) Yet Hutchinson's sharp eye for the telling detail, his deft use of individual stories to illustrate the wider trends and his willingness to throw in any vaguely related facts that he (rightly) thinks we might find interesting make this a book to read with much pleasure, rather than simply to consult.

Take, for instance, one of his biggest themes: the changing nature of work. The growth, and later the decline, of heavy industry are duly laid out in forensic detail. But along the way we also learn that, by 1881, there were so many new types of job that the census-takers had to commission a special dictionary to help them understand such occupations as 'crutter', 'spragger', 'whitster' and 'oliver man'. More deliberately misleading, meanwhile, was 'seamstress': apparently the self-description of choice for most prostitutes.

You might also be surprised by how many billiard-markers and slaves there were in 1911 — until Hutchinson points out that, back when many sports forbade players from being paid, their clubs would pretend to employ them in billiard halls; and that married women calling themselves slaves was part of a protest campaign organised by the suffragettes.

On the whole, Hutchinson shares the essentially sunny approach of John Rickman, the book's chief hero. But some census-

es, naturally, make cheerfulness impossible. In 1921, the decline in the number of young men since 1911 was as unmistakable as the rise in the number of widows. As for Ireland — the source of much of the book's gloom — the post-famine census of 1851 (partly conducted, as Hutchinson characteristically adds, by Oscar Wilde's father) discovered a population loss of more than 1.6 million in a single decade.

But if some of the events it illuminates feel almost unimaginable now, the book contains plenty of *plus ça change* moments too. As long ago as 1851, it seems, people

'Seamstress' was the self-description of choice for most prostitutes

had a tendency to exaggerate the importance of their jobs. ('Many of the 2,971 architects are undoubtedly builders,' reported the census-takers rather sniffily.) There's also the 1931 census — which contained what many felt to be worrying evidence of Britain's growing London-centricity. 'It looks as if London were becoming almost dangerously the Capital of the country,' reflected the historian Godfrey Elton — although he did find one organisation obstinately trying to buck the trend. 'Decentralisation is being undertaken to a very considerable extent,' he noted, 'by the British Broadcasting Corporation.'

Everyday unhappiness

Stuart Kelly

A Line Made by Walking

by Sara Baume

Heinemann, £12.99, pp. 312

This is an extraordinarily compelling novel for one in which nothing really happens but everything changes. Sara Baume's narrator is Frankie, a 26-year-old art school graduate, who has fled Dublin to live in her dead grandmother's rural bungalow. What happened to her 'started with the smelling of carpet' in her bedsit; she feels such a failure that she 'can't even do mental illness properly'. It is all 'because of nothing... because there's nothing right with me. Because I cannot fucking help it.' Over the course of part of a year, she acquires a bicycle from a born-again Christian, allows her father to mow the lawn, takes care of a guinea-pig for her sister, and tries to summon the ghost of her grandmother. She also thinks a lot about art — the text is punctuated with Frankie's interrogations of herself ('Works about the Sea, I test myself', 'Works about Lying, I test myself') — and with her own art project, photographing roadkill. The chapters are headed 'Robin', 'Rabbit', 'Rat', 'Mouse', 'Rook' and so on, and feature a picture of the unfortunate animal.

Those who have read Baume's intriguing debut, *Spill Simmer Falter Wither*, will recognise some of this already: an estranged narrator trying to connect with the world via animals and injuries, the non-human as revelatory and epiphanies of everyday unhappiness ('Now I look like a perfectly regular person, definitely not a genius,' Frankie realises). What makes it so gripping is that the reader is trapped in Frankie's mind as much as she is; every tiny detail is magnified into metaphysical significance that she cannot understand and that the reader cannot parse.

Almost every page has a sentence or an observation that made me wish I had a commonplace book to transcribe Frankie's — or Baume's — precisely opaque and fleeting thoughts. Frankie's surreal and yet understandable mind-patterns are eloquent as well as awful:

Last thing at night, every night, I adjusted that ornament until it was precisely aligned with an invisible point which I perceived to represent completion, and if I didn't get it absolutely right, then something monstrous would happen to me or someone close to me, or so I believed: some dolphin-induced catastrophe.

Anyone who suffers from anxiety will recognise that preternatural thinking — the unnecessary rituals, the tip-tap needs, the pointless liturgies to stave away disaster. On the dust-jacket Joseph O'Connor says that Baume is 'a writer touched by greatness'. I think she is bruised by it.

What the secretary saw

Sarah Churchwell

Big Bosses: A Working Girl's Memoir of the Jazz Age

by Althea McDowell Altemus

University of Chicago Press, £10.50, pp. 220

In 1922, writing a facetious review of her husband's second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*, Zelda Fitzgerald made an ironic reference to the fact that Scott Fitzgerald had used sections from her diary in his novel: 'It seems to me that on one page I recognised a portion of an old diary of mine which mysteriously disappeared shortly after my marriage...'.
 1922 was the same year in which Fitzgerald would later set *The Great Gatsby*, in part as a tribute to the other great modernist works of that literary *annus mirabilis*. And it was also the year in which *Big Bosses* begins: 'It was 1922, America had been at war, money was tight, work was scarce,' Althea Altemus remarks, launching us into a memoir of her adventures as a professional secretary to the wealthy during the Jazz Age.

That money was tight in 1922 is an important corrective: there had been what Fitzgerald called a 'baby recession' in 1921, and by 1922 the famous boom of the 1920s had only achieved a low thrum. For

ordinary Americans like Althea Altemus, 1922 was more austere than our casual histories allow.

Altemus worked for several seriously rich businessmen in Florida and Chicago while raising her young son as a single mother, and in 1932 sat down to record some of her stories of rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous. Recently rediscovered, the diary has been heavily annotated and published as a unique glimpse into the daily life of a Jazz Age woman. The cover promises us that Altemus is 'sharp, resourceful, and with a style

'My first assignment as private secretary was to the world's oldest and wealthiest bachelor playboy'

all her own', her story providing a 'one-of-a-kind peek inside the excitement, extravagance and the challenges of being a working woman roaring through the Twenties'.

That's a trifle hyperbolic. The most accurate part of the promise is that the book offers a 'peek' into the Jazz Age. As peeks go, it's not unenjoyable, but it will help if you don't mind viewing the daily life you've been promised through a keyhole.

Altemus was a single mother who had divorced her alcoholic husband. Sex-

ism was systemic, and perfectly legal: many employers would not hire Altemus if she admitted to her divorce and child, forcing her to pretend that she was single and childless. To raise her young son, she advertised for a 'congenial business woman having youngster of same age' to create, in effect, a private daycare service: they shared an apartment and the cost of a maid to look after the children. Altemus became good friends with her first housemate, Nita, whose livelihood was mysterious until she was run down in the street by a truck. It turned out that Nita had been fired as a legal stenographer when it was discovered that she had a child, at which point she had secretly joined 'a gangster group', who killed her when she tried to leave the mob.

Altemus also lost jobs when employers learned about her child. She worked briefly for an artist who never paid her; his studio was littered with 'magazines, a rat trap, soiled linens, torn papers, cameras, cigarette stubs and other things best not mentioned', which is one of the book's many keyhole moments. What unmentionable things should we be imagining? Chamber pots in an era before indoor plumbing was standard? Or something more risqué, like the paraphernalia Edmund Wilson described seeing at the Yale Club in 1922, in a room 'festooned' with condoms?

Social historians value diaries precisely because of the quotidian detail they offer into how life operated for ordinary people. Unfortunately, Altemus's editors share her discretion, informing us in a note that 'three words now viewed as pejorative have been eliminated' from her account. That damages its value as social history: learning how people actually spoke — and the attitudes thus revealed — is part of the benefit of reading such accounts.

The book has two saving graces: its slenderness makes it an exceptionally quick read and, thankfully, Altemus has a sense of humour, if a gentle one. 'Neither beautiful nor dumb,' she begins, 'I had received my first assignment as private secretary to probably the world's oldest and wealthiest bachelor playboy.' There are some amusing stories, albeit frustratingly abbreviated. Altemus was hired one time by a jealous wife to discover why her husband stayed in the office so late every night. Eventually Althea managed to become the man's temporary secretary and was invited up to the private apartment where he kept his mistress, in the Chicago office building of Commonwealth Edison (the equivalent of working for the head of British Gas). The president of Com Ed was none other than Thomas Alva Edison himself, who makes a brief, tantalising cameo. There are very brief glimpses, too, of Marion Davies, Constance Talmadge and James Singer Sargent.

Eventually Altemus went to work for

Tina

crystal meth

She makes wraiths, phantoms, of the most remarkable people.
 She shows you all your friends are false friends and you spend

whole weekends awake and wasted at the kind of party
 where you put a rubber sheet down before the fun starts,

naked or dressed in leather, rubber, PVC or clingfilm. Boys arrive
 like 3D printing from the internet. They are new friends for you.

Do I envy your abandonment to pleasure? Possibly.
 But not the ashen afterwards not knowing how you got home,

not the swinging door and the money missing,
 not waking scratching as though trying to tear your face off.

She speeds your speech until it is unintelligible.
 Quite soon, there will only be her to talk to.

—Lachlan Mackinnon



Cardinal Richelieu is transformed from villain to 'physical and moral genius' in Dumas's sequel to *The Three Musketeers*

James Deering ('America's 13th richest inhabitant') at Vizcaya, in Miami, Florida, and we learn a bit about how Prohibition worked in practice. Deering planned for it when he designed his palatial home, building a casino — 'about the size of an average home' — on the property, with secret rooms beneath it in which he stored a shipment of fine alcohol worth half a million dollars in 1918. Altemus remarks somewhat austere just as Prohibition was drawing to an end in 1932:

I'm sure that if the guests of these gala events reminisce now over the extravagance of Beau's frolics it is with a sense of disgust at the wanton display of money and foolhardiness of the American people during the past decade.

This book is an amusing way to spend a few hours, and aficionados of the Jazz Age will pick up a detail or two, but anyone who really wants a personal glimpse into American life in the Roaring Twenties would be better off returning to either Scott or Zelda Fitzgerald, each of whom had the courage of their jazziest convictions.

Swash and buckle aplenty A.S.H. Smyth

The Red Sphinx, or The Comte de Moret

by Alexandre Dumas, edited and
translated by Lawrence Ellsworth
Pegasus Books, £20, pp. 808

A feeble king and his scheming minister, a hunchback noble and the Daughters of Repentance, a botched assassination and a walled-up prisoner, some comic horse-sex, cross-dressing valets, a handful of gay jokes, a dwarf, and a literal *éminence grise*. The latest instalment of *Game of Thrones*? No, actually: a sequel to *The Three Musketeers*.

December 1628, mere weeks after the great siege of La Rochelle, and attention has now turned to the goings-on in Italy, where France is being outmanoeuvred by Spain and the Austrian Habsburgs. The childless Louis XIII is forever said to be at death's door; Queen Anne still mourns her departed lover Buckingham; the Queen Mother plots to put her second son upon the throne; and Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal-Duke

of Richelieu and of Fronsac, is, as usual, trying to keep his head atop his shoulders in the most difficult of circumstances.

Into all this strolls the Comte de Moret, aka Antoine de Bourbon, 'natural son' of Henri IV and therefore Louis's half-brother (yes, another brother). He's in disguise for now (of course), but to cut a long story short — i.e. 600 pages later — they do eventually invade Piedmont, the Comte in the heroic lead. And here the novel ends — quite accidentally, on something of a cliffhanger — because the paper it was churned out for went bust.

Serialized from 1865–66, *The Red Sphinx* is Alexandre Dumas's unabashed attempt at recapturing certain former glories. With its cantering pace and patchwork of court gossip, official correspondence, 'gallantry' (that is, sex), operatically fortuitous timings and

It's a mash-up of every other Dumas novel, with all the subtlety of a Verdi opera worked over by the Daily Mail

13-page historical sidebars, it is basically a mash-up of every other Dumas novel, with all the subtlety and nuance of a Verdi opera worked over by the *Daily Mail*. (I stopped, in fact, to check it wasn't just a cheeky franchise spin-off.) But there is swash and buckle aplenty, and even plumage if that's what does it for you. And it is great fun.

Its translator, Lawrence Ellsworth, makes no bones about Dumas's penny-a-line prose, which comes out considerably more brawling than the Collins pocket hardbacks I was weaned on. But there's no denying Dumas's own too-frequent clunkers ('Boileau, who wouldn't be born for another eight years, hadn't yet said...'), his anachronistic perspectives, the open adverts for preceding novels and everywhere the smudgy fingerprints of the project's journalistic origin. Given the avowedly unfinished nature of the source material, more editorial involvement might have been a kindness.

Still, *The Red Sphinx* is a nice find for the completist. D'Artagnan enthusiasts take note, however: the musketeers make no appearance here. And Cardinal Richelieu is no longer the villain. In fact, he is the central character. Though we don't set eyes on him for the first 100 pages, the Cardinal then furiously and comprehensively takes over: 'a figure fine, keen, and vigorous', a 'physical and moral genius'... 'who manipulated all Europe from [his] study'. Not only is he a loyal and efficient servant of the French crown, what's more, but he is also shown as generous, compassionate and oftentimes light-hearted. A pleasant enough surprise, for sure — and perhaps not only to the reader. Dumas's newspaper title was *Le Comte de Moret*; but the tale reads now like an apology to Richelieu —

one Dumas only knew that he was making many weeks into its publication.

This does not quite fit with Ellsworth's chosen 'ending' — Dumas's inflamed epistolary novella *The Dove* (published 1850), about the latter fortunes of Moret and his true love Isabelle de Lautrec. It is, *mais oui*, jam-packed with high poetry, historical allusions, and absurd coincidences — but we also lurch back to the old trope of the Cardinal as cruel and avaricious tyrant. It is an ending in the same way that *The Red Sphinx* is 'a sequel'. Does it work? Not particularly. Does it matter? No, it doesn't.

The classic that conquered the world

Daniel Hahn

The Novel of the Century: The Extraordinary Adventure of *Les Misérables*

by David Bellos

Particular Books, £20, pp. 336

Somewhere between his first and second drafts, Victor Hugo decided to change the title of his great novel from *Les Misères* to *Les Misérables*, shifting the focus from society's problems to the people suffering them. And what problems they were. Hugo had never been brutally poor himself, but he'd borne witness to enough brutal poverty around him to know it was real, and to understand what it did to people. He knew, too, how ill-equipped his society was to help the poor, or to fix the causes of their predicament. Not least because in the 1840s, when he started writing *Les Misères*, only land-owning citizens voted, so as long as the poor didn't create trouble they weren't a constituency in whom politicians were especially interested.

Hugo's novel, then, is a rare voice for the unfortunate, the impoverished, the wretched, the cast-out — all these people were right there in his new title. (The fact that his *Misérables* includes all those meanings explains why it's almost unique as a foreign title we don't even bother trying to translate.)

Though Hugo set his novel in the near historical past, it feeds on his experiences of his own turbulent times, and the questions it asks are perennials: we know there are people who need our help, but how do we best help them? One of Hugo's solutions is not charity but the dignity of even the most menial wage-slave job. Poverty, Hugo knew, makes staying good even more difficult, and the book is also about where that goodness (modelled by Bishop Myriel) is to be found. And it is possible: even the taciturn ex-con Jean Valjean, a hard worker, builds a respectable civic life for himself.

Les Misérables is about the revolution-

ary change that Hugo saw his society and politics desperately needing, and to which he expected his book to contribute. By the time he'd finished it, he had lost his respected position in the Paris political sphere and was living in exile, so writing was his sole means of influencing the world. Hugo's belief that his book might help to change his country tells us something about his confidence in his abilities, certainly; but it tells us that he was an optimist, too, with an unquenchable belief that societal change really was possible. His own political position was always complex — with ambiguous allegiances, and sometimes fierce ambivalence — but this book had room for it all.

Hugo's aspirations, in truth, were huge, and he needed a more than usually generous-sized and capacious story to meet them. Stack up *Great Expectations*, *Moby-Dick* and *Crime and Punishment* all together and you'll get some idea of the scale of *Les Misérables*. It has subplots as long as many novels, it has digressions, essays on historical events, but all of them, argues David Bellos in his new book, are essential: 'The story of *Les Misérables* is like a path through a forest — but the forest is as much the subject of

the novel as the path.' If all you know of the book is what fits into a three-hour West End show, you'll be surprised what you might find here.

Bellos's own digressions aren't on the scale of Hugo's, but they're there nonetheless; he has interludes about colour, the significance of coinage denominations, vehicles, character names, each of them illuminating a part of Hugo's world and his book. He's interested especially in those things Hugo chooses not to explain because he can assume his readers' prior understanding, and what these silences reveal to us.

The Novel of the Century describes the preoccupations that Hugo used his fiction to express, how he came to understand poverty and the need for social change; but it's about his writing process, too. Once the huge deal had been signed (enough money 'to endow a chair at the Sorbonne or to build a small railway'), and the ragged-edged manuscript shipped off to the publisher, we're given a genuinely fascinating chapter following the back-and-forth logistical hassles involved in correcting the proofs, with the typesetting being done in Brussels and each individual page making a sometimes unpredictable



Cosette, by Emile-Antoine Bayard. Illustration for *Les Misérables*

journey to Hauteville House, the author's home on Guernsey, to be checked over, only for him to decide he wanted to change everything again.

Bellos touches on what some see as the novel's weaknesses, both in structure and style (those sometimes terrifying sentences of 'opulent' prose), forgiving everything by explaining it, showing how he finds it all deliberate. His occasional overblown claim notwithstanding, Bellos's near-unmitigated zeal is convincing, and itself part of the pleasure of the book; and he's a knowledgeable, attentive reader, and an engaging storyteller himself, alert to vivid detail. (Hugo bought paper of slightly different sizes in Paris and Guernsey, hence that ragged-edged manuscript.) Any reader who hasn't yet embarked on Hugo's book might be converted to the idea by this one.

In praise of LSD

Helen R. Brown

A Really Good Day: How Microdosing Made a Mega Difference in My Mood, My Marriage and My Life

by Ayelet Waldman

Corsair, £13.99, pp. 229

Ayelet Waldman is, surely, not the first writer to have scrolled through a list of 'Books of the Year' and become increasingly enraged to find her own book not on it. But where other authors manage to keep a dignified silence (sticking pins into critics' byline photos in private), Waldman demonstrates a lively lack of self-control, and often reaches for her phone. In 2014 she fired off a volley of increasingly furious tweets when the *New York Times* omitted her novel *Love and Treasure* from its list of 'Notable Books'. Her book was, she railed, 'fucking great'. It felt 'fucking demoralising' to be excluded when her book had garnered 'better reviews' than many on the list.

As a fan of the Berkeley-based author's taboo-busting writing about motherhood, my response is conflicted. I enjoy the savage wit and energy of her outbursts, knowing I'd be mortified if I behaved like that myself. Inevitably Waldman is mortified. She quickly deleted those tweets, but not before the gossip site Gawker had grabbed a screen shot and mocked her as a 'famous emotion-haver'.

Despite holding down a responsible job as a lawyer for years and raising four children, she has suffered from a lifetime of ungovernable feelings, diagnosed first with bipolar disorder (like her father) and then with premenstrual dysphoric disorder (which allowed her to keep vague tabs on herself until the menopause kicked in). At 52, she worries that her volatility is damag-

ing her family. Over the years she has tried all the usual talking therapies, sedatives, antidepressants and hippy retreats, but nothing has really reined her in.

At her lowest she became addicted to Ambien, lost most of her memories of her youngest child, and tried to set up a replacement wife for her husband in the event of her death. It's terrifying and hilarious to read the text exchanges she instigated with her husband (the novelist Michael Chabon) while dosed up on this entirely legal, socially approved prescription medication: 'Sex in nit sir. Very sky adequate', she typed as he repeatedly begged her to turn the phone down. 'You talk me' she insists. 'Before you I was imonible. Now in on accordion monorail.'

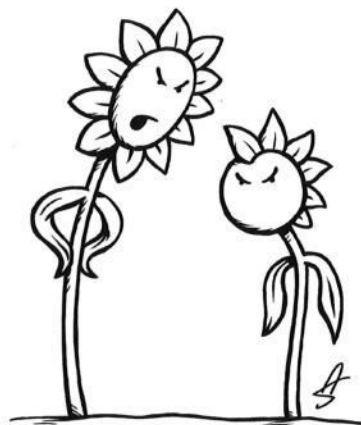
So her new book finds her reaching for the unusual and illegal. Intrigued by the revived scientific interest in the possible mental stabilisation and creative inspiration offered by hallucinogens, she decides to try 'microdosing' on LSD for a month. An increasing number of Silicon Valley geeks (inspired by LSD fan Steve Jobs) claim it helps them think outside the box without going out of their boxes, after all. It doesn't just help singers like John Lennon write about sparkly, flying women. Engineers and physicists have found it enhances their problem-solving too.

As a former federal public defender, hypochondriac and disdainer of the counterculture, Waldman is wary of illegal drugs. She

Silicon Valley geeks claim that LSD helps them to think outside the box without going out of their boxes

always told her kids that the most likely and damaging side-effect of scoring chemicals on the street is arrest and imprisonment. But after she puts the word out among the local academic community a little bottle arrives from 'Lewis Carroll'.

Taking only a tenth of the amount that would constitute a standard LSD 'trip' on a schedule advised by the celebrated psycholo-



'Grow up!'

gist and psychedelic researcher James Fadiman, Waldman gains more control over her moods and improved creative flow across the month. In charting her experiment she makes an entertaining guide to facts about LSD that surprised her: it's far less dangerous (in both the long and short term) than most other drugs; it may well be more helpful for people with anxiety and depression than most 'popular' antidepressants; it's allowed terminally ill people to accept their final days in peace and gratitude; taking it doesn't turn you into a hippy, maaan.

Obviously, Waldman is an unreliable case study and she knows it. She wanted this experiment to work and she wanted to get a book out of it. She's had happy, productive periods in her life before. Sometimes she shies away from the harder science with a 'blah blah blah'. But she proves a sharp debunker of the myths that have accrued around a potentially life-saving chemical whose star is clearly on the rise. Sadly for those of us who enjoy a little vicarious online drama, it does also appear to have made Waldman a more considered tweeter.

Three's a crowd

Matthew Adams

The Fall Guy

by James Lasdun

Cape, £12.99, pp. 266

James Lasdun's latest novel, billed as a psychological thriller, opens in Brooklyn in the summer of 2012. Charlie and his cousin Matthew are about to leave New York to spend the season in Charlie's mountain-top residence in the Catskills, where they are to unite with Charlie's wife, Chloe. The relationship between Charlie and Matthew is ostensibly unequal: Charlie is a wealthy former banker who feels uneasy about the morality of his sometime profession; Matthew is comparatively poor, has drifted in and out of the food industry, is haunted by the absence of his father (who disappeared when Matthew was a boy), and is creepily enraptured by Charlie's wife.

Yet beneath the apparent inequality lies a shared, and initially unspoken, sense of resentment: Matthew feels he was stifled by Charlie during their schooldays in London; Charlie suspects Matthew is stealing from him and trying to bring about his ruin. When, in the midst of these anxieties, the trio gather in the Catskills for their holiday, they spend their time eating, drinking, playing tennis and — in Matthew's case — indulging in the odd bit of snooping. He watches Chloe take midnight swims; he creeps around the bedroom she shares with Charlie (and finds a pair of Chloe's knickers); and one day, while out collecting provisions, he sees Chloe's car somewhere it shouldn't be and — 'with a kind of

play acting of husbandly suspicion' — decides to follow her. She leads him to a local motel.

From this point, Matthew occupies himself by wondering whether to tell Charlie about Chloe's dishonesty (the nature of which I will spare you), and rehearsing arguments concerning the apparently thorny ethics of spying on his cousin's wife.

Eventually, the whole situation unravels. And it does so in the most predictable way. You can see the fall guy losing his footing from page one. And the developments that will lead to the particular form of his demise are signposted so early and clearly that you feel yourself guided by a hyper-vigilant sat-nav system: 'slight twist in road in 13 miles'.

These deficiencies are compounded by the tedium of Matthew's ethical and existential ruminations, and by the relentlessly insipid prose. Here hours are 'ungodly'; heat is 'stifling'; minds are 'reeling'; hearts are 'racing' and events take 'a turn for the worse'.

But Lasdun does somehow manage to keep the pages flicking by. *The Fall Guy* might be lacking in psychological insight and narrative excitement. But it manages to offer the more workaday pleasure of undemanding diversion.

Bedside manners

Kate Womersley

What Patients Say, What Doctors Hear

by Danielle Ofri

Beacon Press, £21.99, pp. 288

'A tricky part of my job,' the GP said, scrolling through the next patient's notes, 'is breaking good news.' As a medical student on placement, I listened as he told the young woman that her 'presenting complaint' — blurred vision, fatigue and tingling down her arms — was not in fact multiple sclerosis. The diagnosis had been made several years earlier but her latest MRI scan suggested that

MS was very unlikely. Despite the GP's prediction that this would be a complicated consultation, he still looked frustrated when the patient didn't respond with relief to his diagnostic revision. Instead, her weariness was edged with anger. 'If it's not MS,' she said, 'why do I feel so unwell?'

For most doctors, 'bad news' means metastatic cancer, a paralysing stroke, amputation. For a patient, bad news might also include things like insomnia, taking pills for life, severe migraine. 'To the typical physician, my illness is a routine incident in his rounds,' said the American writer Anatole Broyard, 'while for me it's the crisis of my life.' This different scale of suffering helps doctors triage with a cool head, but it can also lead to dispiriting clinical encounters. One might say the profession and the public do not always see eye to eye. Danielle Ofri argues in her new book that the problem is rather one of listening.

A physician of general medicine at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan, Ofri is known for reading poems aloud on ward rounds. Her articles in the *New York Times* teach readers to appreciate patient stories as the most valuable currency in the unpredictable, imperfect business of healing. She is well aware that writing about medical mistakes, as in her book *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine* (2013), doesn't enthuse all of her colleagues. Despite hospitals' technological advances, Ofri insists that the 'everything else' of medicine — empathy, trust and a good bedside manner — although 'notoriously difficult to quantify', matter now as much as ever.

The 'primary diagnostic tool' for any medic is taking a good history, and like taking blood or taking swabs, the material for analysis should come from the patient herself. But doctors often undervalue the importance of staying silent, Ofri says — maybe because active listening is not a skill bestowed exclusively by completing a five-year degree. Ofri experiments with her own reluctance just to listen, and surreptitiously starts a timer in every consultation. She

then lets her patients speak uninterrupted. The fear that they might never stop was misplaced: Ofri's mean of 92 seconds doesn't ruin her schedule, and pays dividends later. Yet studies show the average doctor interrupts after just 12 seconds.

Certainly healthcare environments collide against attentiveness: the computer screen, the keyboard click, the translation of patient symptoms into codeable jargon (a doctor learns 10,000 new words during training), all intensified by the ten-minute countdown. Time-pressed juniors tend to dismiss patients as 'poor historians' if their narratives aren't amenable to instant classification. But Ofri is adamant that meaning is 'co-created', and its elusiveness might be as much the clinician's fault as the patient's.

Central to diagnostic detective work, listening also has a therapeutic effect. Patients who feel acknowledged and unrushed report greater satisfaction, lower pain scores and better concordance to drug regimens (not to mention fewer errors and lawsuits for

*Studies show that the average
doctor will interrupt a patient
after just 12 seconds*

the doctor). This analgesic potential is welcome news to medical students who hang around the wards without the power to prescribe drugs, but do have time to sit and chat with the bed-bound. By listening carefully, doctors may then better use the salubrious effect of their own words to 'frame things as optimistically as possible, within reason'. A well-chosen phrase, Ofri suggests, 'may act physiologically by decreasing cortisol and adrenaline', thereby altering the patient's neural perception of pain. If there's a choice not to reach for pharmaceuticals, 'Conversation is way cheaper and it doesn't decimate your sex drive or make you puke.'

Talking with patients — rather than at them — is a teachable skill. Like performing a lumbar puncture or reading a chest X-ray, it requires method and practice. Medical schools still select future doctors almost exclusively on academic excellence, yet have recently added Clinical Communication to their curricula. Few students look forward to being videotaped as they ask set-piece questions, stiff at first, to a medical actor. Acronyms such as ICE ('what are the patient's ideas, concerns and expectations?') may seem forced, but it's surprising how well they work, no matter if, as Ofri says, 'your inner emotions haven't quite caught up yet'.

Some will always see the doctor-patient exchange as a fluffy appendage to 'real medicine'. But if Ofri's book succeeds in easing the passage from 'presenting complaint' into open conversation, informative for and complementary to further technical interventions, that would be very good news for both the doctor and the patient.



Thoroughly modern Monteverdi

On his 450th anniversary, Alexandra Coghlan celebrates the composer's remarkable musical prescience

Eppur si muove' — And yet it moves. Galileo's defiant insistence that the Earth revolves round the Sun, his refusal to submit to the Inquisition, is a familiar one. It's the battle cry not of a reformer but of a revolutionary, a passionate teller of truths.

It's a credo he shared with composer Claudio Monteverdi. Born barely three years after the astronomer, Monteverdi faced his own inquisition. Defying those who would make music an immovable sphere, bound in place by harmonic proprieties and structural conventions, he made works that rejected tidy formalism in favour of messy, fleshy humanity. His was music that moved in every sense, that lived as vividly as those who inspired it. He may celebrate his 450th anniversary this year, but Monteverdi was the first modern composer.

'It solicits the ear and roughly, harshly strikes it... those dissonances are crude, ugly and insupportable.' Provoking critical scorn with his experimentation long before Stockhausen or Boulez, Monteverdi's musical prescience cannot be overstated. If Wagner is the father of contemporary music, then Monteverdi is its grandfather, transforming music from a beautiful act of artifice into one rooted in human truths and emotions, from a language that spoke only in smiles and affirmatives to one capable not only of mirroring but of challenging the world around.

'The aim of all good music,' Monteverdi wrote, 'is to affect the soul.' This agency took many forms — the expansive variety and soaring beauty of his 1610 *Vespers*, the deft character-portraits of his late operas — but nowhere is it more richly explored than in the composer's madrigals, a sequence of secular works of unprecedented emotional breadth, a musical rival to the sonnets of Petrarch or Shakespeare.

When we think of a great composer we think of symphonies — large-scale works that carry the weight of moral and social conflict; of heroic struggles against authority, and of strength in adversity. In short, we think of Beethoven. It's his model we see echoed in Tchaikovsky, Berlioz, Mahler, Shostakovich, even Wagner — composers of big, troubled works whose musical conflicts

If Wagner is the father of contemporary music, then Monteverdi is its grandfather

in turn mirror those of their complicated lives. It's a Romantic archetype that struggles to assimilate composers who operate at their best on a smaller scale. Schubert's lieder carry all the weight of a symphony but enjoy little of its stature; the compact scope of Byrd's motets belies the intensity of their spiritual and political struggle; Haydn's string quartets are treated indiscriminately as tuneful coffee-concert affairs.

And so it is with Monteverdi. His three surviving operas are masterpieces — some

of the very earliest in the genre still regularly performed today — but they are part of the problem, distracting us from the true revolutionary heart of his music. Monteverdi's eight books of madrigals span more than 40 years of his life, and condense the emotions of that lifetime into a sequence of miraculous miniatures that hit the ear with shocking force. A narrative in thrall to greatness, which cannot forget the operas, sees these madrigals as apprentice pieces, growing in sophistication and innovation until they graduate to the late, great works — *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. But this is writing history backwards.

The word 'madrigal' is not a fashionable one. These secular songs have been thoroughly debased by the Victorians, who drained their rich colours into consumptive pastels, beribboned their melodies with coy fa-la-la-ing. Monteverdi's madrigals couldn't be further from this anaemic genre. Part of their strength lies in the difficulty of identifying precisely what they are. The composer's madrigal books contain everything from duets to dramatic scenes,



'Portrait of a Musician', thought to be Claudio Monteverdi, c.1590, by a Cremonese artist

scored for forces from a single solo voice and continuo to eight voices. And they are far from being isolated miniatures. Many are strung together into dramatic sequences that offer contrasting snapshots of a single relationship or situation — a montage before its time.

It's precisely this flexibility of form, its endless adaptability, that gives the madrigal its power. The quality of the texts is also far higher than in opera, where libretti often represent awkward compromises or multi-author composites. The madrigal allowed Monteverdi to work with his artistic equals — to let poetry by Tasso, Petrarch and Guarini become the 'mistress' of his music.

But where to start? The early Books I–III belong to the stylistic world Monteverdi inherited, while the Ninth is a posthumous collage of trifles. The real interest begins in Book IV. Craving a new expressive freedom, the composer frequently breaks off from polyphony, ripping through these carefully woven textures with freely declaimed text. The effect is electrifying — just listen to the erratic beauty of 'Sfogava con le stelle', in which a lover pours out his heart to the same stars that watch over his beloved. The arresting breaks in the texture pull the ear back again and again with their direct, unmediated appeal. This is emotion played raw.

But if Book IV fires a warning shot across the bow, Books V and VIII launch an all-out musical assault on convention. For the first time an instrumental *basso continuo* part appears, providing continuity that allows voices to falter, stop altogether or even sing alone. Suddenly, musical emotion is less a matter of symbolism than of imitation; sighs, moans and shouts of joy can all be rendered truthfully, with each voice unshackled from its fellows. Harmonically, too, things are very different. The knife-twisting dissonances that famously angered the theorist Artusi in 'Cruda Amarilli' ('A tumult of sounds, a confusion of absurdities, an assemblage of imperfections') turn the poem's cardboard lover into something of flesh and blood, someone whose thoughts alternately gallop and linger, whose emotions ebb and flow naturally, if unpredictably.

Book VIII is the greatest and widest-ranging volume of secular music of its age — perhaps of any. Composed over a 30-year span, the madrigals tackle not only the erotic charge of love and sexuality, but also for the first time its warring conflicts — the restlessness, agitation and rage that go hand in hand with its pleasures. No single work can represent such a collection, but perhaps the 'Lamento della Ninfa' comes closest; if you listen to just one work, make it this one.

Instead of setting this story of a nymph's despair over her faithless lover as a strophic madrigal, mirroring the verses of the original poem with descriptive music, Monteverdi instead dramatises it. The nymph's impassioned first-person speech runs continu-

ously through the middle of the texture, a stream of freewheeling, recitative-like grief that winds and coils itself around the choric music of the three shepherds who narrate her story. The music unfolds with breath-taking spontaneity, eschewing the confines of an orderly musical form. Although ragged and at times uneven, the effect is profoundly modern, its shifting uncertainties held together by the musical thread of the inexorably repeating bassline. We close in an eerie tranquillity; despair has given way to sobbing silence, and circling harmonies to stasis. All is still. And yet, it moves...

Les Arts Florissants' latest Monteverdi recording, Madrigali, Vol. 3, is now available on Harmonia Mundi. John Eliot Gardiner and his Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra will perform a complete cycle of Monteverdi's operas and the Vespers at Bristol's Colston Hall from 12 April.

Television

Fatal attraction

James Delingpole

Recently on holiday I did a very bad thing. I nearly left the Fawn to die on a precipitous mountain path in the Canary Islands because she was having a terrible attack of vertigo that was threatening to spoil my fun.

No, worse: it actually did spoil my fun. Now that I'm old and boring I desperately need little jabs of adrenaline to remind me I'm still alive, and this particular route was doing the job quite nicely. Although it's actually so undangerous that even my eightysomething dad can do it, it's reasonably steep, it's gobsmackingly picturesque, and it does now and then give you at least the illusion of a thrill because if you were to slip over the precipitous edge you'd definitely, definitely die.

My point was: 'But you won't die because the path's broad and you won't fall off.' And the Fawn's point — the vertigo sufferer's point — was: 'But I might. Don't you see? I might and that's why I can't go on!!!' So we had to go back and I couldn't forgive her. There can be no meeting of minds between two people with such wildly differing attitudes to physical danger.

It all came back to me just now watching *Life of a Mountain* (BBC4), Terry Abraham's documentary (the second of a planned trilogy) about hills in the Lake District, this one being about Blencathra. If you're into hill-walking or beautiful landscapes hauntingly shot over the period of a year with a haunting background track of plaintive folk music, you'll love it, as I did. Otherwise don't bother; you'll be bored.

What really tickled me was Sharp Edge, the spiny-ridge route up Blencathra which,

having seen broadcaster Stuart Maconie and comedian Ed Byrne struggling up it on the programme, I'm now itching to try because it looks properly scary. I did a similarly jagged route up Helvellyn once called Striding Edge, mostly in fog. My favourite bits were those moments when the mist cleared and you could see just how far you'd fall, screaming, before you hit the rocks hundreds of feet below.

Why am I drawn to these stupid things? An old friend of mine, the late Mickie O'Brien — who won an immediate MC with the commandos at Normandy for coolly rescuing his patrol from a minefield — told me that he never felt fear throughout his very adventurous war because he had 'no imagination'. But I do have an imagination — far too overactive a one — so it can't be that, I don't think.

What I'm blessed with, though — or cursed, as the Fawn would prefer to think of it — is a delayed overactive imagination. So, for example, in the many years since I swam across a section of the Congo that I knew to be infested with crocodiles, I have died a

My favourite bits were when you could see just how far you'd fall, screaming, before you hit the rocks

thousand toothy deaths in my thoughts and nightmares as the huge croc drowned me, then lodged me under his rock larder. But at the time I just thought: 'Ooh err! This is a bit tasty!' Same with fox-hunting. Same with that thing I did in Zimbabwe the other day where I gorge-jumped above the Vic Falls and for the first 200 feet just free-fell into the void.

'A coward dies a thousand times before his death.' Yep, that's definitely me. That's why I couldn't agree with what another of my late 47 RM Commando friends once told me: 'You'd have been just the same as we were.' No, I think a special streak of lunacy was required for the commandos and, even more so, for the nascent SAS — as we've been learning from Ben Macintyre's *SAS: Rogue Warriors* (BBC2, Mondays), which uses previously unpublished war diaries and some very rare interviews done in 1987 (including one with founder David Stirling) to explore the early days of the regiment.

One of them, their second-in-command Paddy Mayne, was clearly a psychopath, once killing 30 German Luftwaffe crew in cold blood and obviously not minding too much. The rest, though, were just misfits who hated spit and polish, liked getting drunk, singing songs and blowing things up, and definitely didn't dwell on mortality — something they considered deeply *infra dig*.

'To turn round and say, "I'm going to get the chop," you'll sure as hell get the chop,' one explained. 'You're wishing it upon yourself.' Well, he survived the war so the technique works, clearly.



Alex R. Hibbert and Mahershala Ali in 'Moonlight'

Cinema

Three ages of man

Deborah Ross

Moonlight

12A, Nationwide

Moonlight is, in fact, a traditional story about identity, and finding out who you are, but it has rarely been better told, or more achingly, or while navigating a subject that hasn't come up much at the cinema, if at all. (Being black and gay.) True enough, it was *La La Land* that swept the boards at the Baftas, and *La La Land* will probably sweep the boards at the Oscars, but it's *Moonlight* that deserves every award going (aside from the one that's been put aside for Annette Bening). I liked *La La Land* well enough at the time, but someone please make it go away now.

The film is written and directed by Barry Jenkins, as based on Tarell Alvin McCraney's semi-autobiographical but never performed play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*. It's set in the poor Liberty City projects in Miami, where both men grew up, and was filmed in just 25 days. This does give it a pressure-cooker intensity of the kind that, say, isn't found in movies where white people endlessly mansplain jazz — what can I say? I liked it well enough at the time, but

now it's so annoying — yet it is also a film of the utmost delicacy. The love that dare not speak its name does not speak its name, but there is desire, feeling, yearning, tension in every frame.

The story is presented as a triptych starring three actors playing the same character, Chiron, at different ages. So it's Chiron

I liked La La Land well enough at the time, but someone please make it go away now

(Alex R. Hibbert) as a little boy, Chiron (Ashton Sanders) as a teenager and Chiron (Trevante Rhodes) as a young man in his twenties (which is the biggest shock; prepare yourselves). Jenkins did not allow the three actors to meet during filming because he didn't want them to imitate each other, so they don't, and neither do they bear much physical resemblance, yet the performances are so extraordinary that there is no question it's the same soul throughout. How Jenkins did that I don't know, but it may explain why he's a film director and I am not.

When we first encounter Chiron he is a withdrawn, watchful, near-silent child. He is vulnerably different in some way. He knows it. The other kids know it, chase him, throw bottles at him. He lives in the projects with his mother (a superb Naomie Harris). She's a crack addict but she isn't the usual stereotype. She is layered. There's the drugs and

the pain but you also feel the love she has for her son. (This isn't *The Wire*.) Chiron is taken under the wing of the local drug dealer, Juan (Mahershala Ali; formidable). What does Juan want with the boy, we are thinking, while expecting the worst. But Juan isn't a stereotype either. Drug dealers can do love, softness, humanity. There's a breathtakingly beautiful scene where Juan teaches Chiron to swim. 'What's a faggot?' Chiron will ask Juan. Oh God, how's he going to reply? Here, I will only say that while homophobia is, indeed, prevalent in black male culture, not every black man is a homophobe. Important lesson.

There is, throughout, only one other significant person in Chiron's life, and that's his schoolfriend Kevin, whom we also see at the three ages (Jaden Piner, Jharrel Jerome, André Holland). Kevin can no more express his feelings for Chiron than Chiron can for Kevin but we feel the attraction between the two from day one. Chiron remains passive, quite annoyingly so, until the teenage section, when he suddenly snaps and returns as Chiron #3. It's a shock. Has he betrayed his true nature for a certain kind of manhood?

This is a deeply compassionate film that not only does astounding work on the being black, being gay front, but is also about anybody who feels they exist outside the world they've been born into. A traditional narrative, that, but it's rarely been better told.

Raising the roof

Why do people flock to a musical about exile, pogroms and poverty? Neil Armstrong investigates

It is a 'fantastic night out', insists the theatre's artistic director. Gemma Bodinetz is right, of course, but it is easy to see how those unfamiliar with *Fiddler on the Roof* might take some convincing. The first act ends with a pogrom, the second with the village's Jews being expelled from the country. This doesn't immediately suggest an evening of joyous, life-affirming entertainment.

'It's the story of people being forced to leave their homes by the powers that be, and that scenario, sadly, is still playing itself out all over the world today. But it's also about family and joy and love and it has terrific songs,' says Bodinetz. It opens the first season of Liverpool Everyman's new repertory company later this month.

Loosely based on short stories by the Yiddish author Sholem Aleichem, *Fiddler on the Roof* — the title comes from a recurring image in the paintings of Marc Chagall — is set in a shtetl in tsarist Russia in 1905. Tevye, an impoverished Jewish dairyman, is struggling to come to terms with the fact that a way of life unchanged for centuries is ending amid mounting harassment by the Russian authorities. Each of his three adult daughters, Tzeitel, Hodel and Chava, moves progressively further away from the cultural and religious traditions that are Tevye's bedrock. Chava's transgression is, in his eyes, a betrayal.

The cast of the original Broadway production thought it would have limited appeal. 'We all thought it was going to close after the Jews had seen it. We thought it was a show for Jews,' remembers Joanna Merlin, who played Tzeitel.

Yet even before the end of the opening number on the first night in September 1964, the actors knew they had a smash hit on their hands. They were dead right. *Fiddler on the Roof* ran for more than 3,200 performances, making it the longest-running Broadway musical at that point, and paid back more than \$1,500 for every dollar invested in what was initially thought to be a risky venture. It won nine Tony awards

in 1965 and has been revived on Broadway five times.

New York Times theatre critic Clive Barnes wrote of the first revival: 'The book, the music, the lyrics are absolutely perfect. There is not one song — and in this it is like the only other "perfect" musical, *My Fair Lady* — that you would consider being changed.'

There have been four West End produc-

the studio offered him the job assuming, incorrectly, that he was Jewish — it was the second-highest-grossing movie of that year, scooping three Oscars. It made a star of its Tevye, the Israeli actor Chaim Topol, who had played the role in the West End and who would, after the film, play it in countless more productions, giving his last performance as recently as 2009.

'Part of the genius of the show is that this bleak material has a certain uplifting feeling to it and that comes partly from the original stories, which achieve an amazing balance between being utterly despairing and having a kind of bittersweet humour,' explains Alisa Solomon, author of *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof*.

Fiddler opened at a propitious time, with many of its themes chiming with the political concerns of the day. Just two months before the first night, the Civil Rights Act had outlawed racial and religious discrimination. 'All of the show's creators were liberal and very alive to the civil-rights movement,' says Solomon.

As rehearsal exercises, the director Jerome Robbins had members of the cast improvise scenes of racial discrimination in the American South. And by sticking it to the patriarchy, Tevye's daughters were in step with the second-wave feminism that was just beginning to hit its stride.

Then there were the songs created by composer Jerry Bock and lyricist Sheldon Harnick, genuine earworms

suffused with echoes of klezmer and Jewish liturgical music: the rousing 'Tradition', 'Matchmaker', 'If I Were A Rich Man' and 'Sunrise, Sunset' among them.

The show's appeal was universal — or almost. Not everyone succumbed. Novelist Philip Roth, for example, dismissed it as 'shtetl kitsch'.

'There was plenty of that sort of reaction from scholars, Yiddishists and people who rejected musical theatre as middlebrow just on principle,' says Solomon. ➔

ARCHIVE PHOTOS/STRINGER/GETTY IMAGES



Star quality: Chaim Topol as Tevye

tions, 15 in Finland and it is huge in Japan, where its depiction of intergenerational conflict and the erosion of tradition strikes a particular chord. The librettist Joseph Stein liked to tell the story of attending an opening of the show in Tokyo at which the producer said to him: 'Tell me, do they really understand this show in America? It's so Japanese.'

The original Broadway version was still running when the 1971 film was released. Directed by Norman Jewison — he believes

david blackburn



POST AND FIELD DUSK, 2000

pastel 51 x 64 cms 20½ x 25¼ ins

Light fills these drawings as the motif gives way to something more ethereal, veils of mists shrouding the forms below, creating an increased sense of the sublime, the spiritual. **Charlotte Mullins**

22 February – 10 March 2017

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'This "shtetl kitsch" idea — you can't really refute it. A Broadway musical version of the Tevye stories does not have the layered ironic intricacies of the literary masterpiece that Sholem Aleichem wrote, and yes it's a vision of the shtetl that is simpler and a little cheerier than actually existed but so what? It's not making a claim to be a documentary. You don't look to *Guys and Dolls* for an anthropological description of New York City. *Fiddler* is a great show with terrific songs and a compelling story.'

In the musical, the fiddler on the roof symbolises life's uncertainties and hazards, but in the 53 years since first venturing up on to his precarious perch he hasn't put a foot wrong.

Fiddler on the Roof is at the Liverpool Everyman theatre from 17 February to 11 March.

Radio United nations Kate Chisholm

The Indian Prime Minister has twigged something that President Trump has yet to understand. On Monday, celebrated as World Radio Day, Narendra Modi tweeted his congratulations to 'all radio lovers and those who work for the radio industry and keep the medium active and vibrant'. Modi uses radio to reach out to those in his country who live in its most remote and inaccessible corners, giving a monthly address to the nation known as 'Mann Ki Baat' (or 'To mind'). He says it's his way of 'sharing his thoughts' with his citizens, and a useful way of extending the tentacles of government into those areas where television sets are uncommon, let alone computer screens or smartphones.

Modi has understood the power of radio to reach those parts that even Twitter can't access, and the way that radio is in many ways more powerful than online communication — because of the way it gets inside your mind. As the World Radio Day website says, 'It informs and transforms', and best of all it allows for audience participation, not through an exchange of words written and read via a digitally manipulated screen but through the human voice, a tangible connection, person to person. If you have a radio, you need never feel alone — as so many hostages have testified after their release. What kept them entertained and informed, but most of all helped them not to lose their connection to the world and their own selves while in solitary confinement, was listening to voices on air, often via the BBC World Service.

On Wednesday, *Hope Speaks Out* on the World Service (produced by Mukti Jain

Campion) told the story of a radio station run by refugees that is helping to connect those who have been forced to flee their homelands with those who have given them refuge. The Refugee Radio Network in Hamburg was founded by Larry Macaulay, himself a refugee from Nigeria. He fled the violence there in 2008 and settled in Libya, but had to drop everything and leave that country in 2011 as the civil war broke out. He crossed the Mediterranean to Italy in a fishing boat and spent two years in a camp before making it to Germany. He wants his network, which broadcasts online courtesy of a German community-radio station, to give a voice to those whose stories have not so far been heard. 'No one asked me what

Radio can reach those parts that even Twitter can't access

was my experience in Afghanistan,' said one refugee, from a rich family with a high-flying career. No one seemed to care what he had been before losing everything to events entirely beyond his control.

Macaulay wants his listeners 'to understand who we are as human beings — not just headlines'. But the station also gives advice to the new settlers from Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Palestine and elsewhere about how to survive and make friends in Germany — don't make a noise and party after 10 p.m. Be on time. Buy a ticket for the train.

In a programme called *Common Voices*, two young women, Reem and Frishteh, who have been forced to leave Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan by war and discrimination, host a discussion on topics aimed at giving women the courage to speak out. 'I studied computer programming,' said Reem. 'Everyone told me it was not possible. I made it possible.'

Back in the 1960s the writer Peter O'Donnell challenged the idea that only a man could be as daring, dashing and debonair as James Bond by creating Modesty Blaise, the heroine of a comic strip first published in the London *Evening Standard*. Modesty is every bit as chic as Bond, drives a Jensen, listens to Thelonicus Monk, wears a catsuit (of course) and is just as deft with guns and martial arts. She's also so smart she can twist every man she meets around her finger. In this dramatisation by Stef Penney for Radio 4's 15-minute drama slot, Modesty (played deliciously by Daphne Alexander) gets caught up in a plot to kidnap a British intelligence officer while on holiday in the south of France (where else?).

'I'm doing for blackmail what Ford did for automobiles,' boasts the chief villain, Colonel Jim, in a terrible American accent. Modesty meanwhile revs up her Jensen as she rescues the chief witness to the kidnapping. 'You're a real cracker, Duckie!' he exclaims. It's all very silly but so refreshingly

dated in a production (by Kate McAll) that's every bit as slick and engaging as the Sunday-night drama on Radio 3, *Jenny Lomas*, by the award-winning writer David Eldridge (and produced by Sally Avens).

Jenny is a solicitor who specialises in family law and takes on the case of a young girl whose parents, a Polish 'civil servant' and his English-born wife, are fighting over who should have custody. It sounds simple enough until Jenny's car is tampered with, her flat is burgled, her cat exterminated. She is frightened and then confused when no one, not even her boyfriend, believes her. 'What's real and what's in someone's head?' she asks in a creepy, clever play that investigates the impact of the internet and our own willing submission to its dangers.

Exhibitions The good, the bad and the ugly Martin Gayford

Revolution: Russian Art 1917–1932
Royal Academy, until 17 April

Vladimir Putin notoriously declared the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 to be one of the greatest disasters of the 20th century. However, as *Revolution: Russian Art 1917–32* — an ambitious exhibition at the Royal Academy — helps to make clear, the true catastrophe had occurred 82 years earlier, in 1917.

Like many of the tragedies of human history, the Russian revolution was accompanied, at least in the early stages, by energy, hope and creativity as well as by murderous cruelty and messianic delusion. The greatest symbol of the last was Vladimir Tatlin's huge projected 'Monument to the Third International' (1920), a sort of communist successor to Bruegel's 'Tower of Babel', much higher than the Eiffel Tower and intended to house an international government of the entire globe.

'We are now experiencing an exceptional epoch,' proclaimed the artist El Lissitzky. 'A new, real and cosmic birth in the world within ourselves enters our consciousness.' He and many others welcomed the Bolshevik uprising, believing that revolutionary art could help create a new and better society.

They were wrong. *Revolution* starts with a survey of Soviet art held in Leningrad/St Petersburg in 1932, a point when the avant-garde ferment was being suppressed and the era of Soviet realism was beginning. Consequently, a lot of what can be seen on the walls of Burlington House is disappointing. The good paintings dotted through the show are by familiar giants of modernism — Malevich, Kandinsky, Chagall (the last two escaped to



'Peasants', c.1930, by Kazimir Malevich

western Europe early on). A room devoted to a figurative artist, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, who is little known in the West only half convinces: on this evidence he was an interestingly idiosyncratic painter of still-life, but feeble when it came to people.

On the other hand, bad art can be as illuminating, historically, as good art. Thus Isaak Brodsky's stagey painting 'Shock-worker from Dneprostroi' (1932) is a reminder of the way in which, by a neat Marxist irony, the Soviet system was undermined by its internal contradictions. It presents a splendidly muscular figure, like one of Michelangelo's *ignudi* from the Sistine Ceiling (a shock worker was one who exceeded the norms of effort and production), perched high on a gantry of girders. He is engaged in the creation of the Lenin Dam — then the world's largest and Stalin's own brainchild — on the Dnieper River. This was not only colossal, but massively misconceived.

In his book *Adapt*, Tim Harford relates how the flaws in this prestige hydroelectric project were presciently analysed by a

brilliant Russian engineer, Peter Palchinsky. The resulting flood plain flooded so much prime agricultural land that an equal amount of electricity could have been generated, much more cheaply, by growing hay and burning it in a power station. Ten thousand farmers had to be relocated, the labour conditions — romanticised by Brod-

*Bad art can be as illuminating,
historically, as good art*

sky — were appalling and the ecological effects disastrous. 'The Revolution,' the art critic Nikolai Punin confided to his diary as early as 1919, 'is most wonderful for its lack of logic.'

One factor that doomed the Soviet avant-garde was the discovery that photographic media were much more effective at propaganda than abstract art. The camera is very good at lying. But in a painted portrait by Brodsky from 1927 Stalin looks exactly what he was: a malign thug.

The exhibition is full of images and objects that evoke the first decade and a

half of the Soviet Union. Many of these are entertaining, even delightful — particularly the porcelain turned out by the ex-imperial workshops, sometimes with designs by Malevich himself. These are wonderfully paradoxical: luxurious objects decorated with geometrical abstractions symbolising the advent of a brave new world.

The photographs of heroic workers and their gleaming machines are often powerful, though also deeply misleading. So, too, are the excerpts from films of happy peasants and ardent revolutionaries. Mind you, the current fashion for showing clips of moving images in this kind of show makes for an unsatisfactory visual mix: they give only tantalising snatches of the movies, but nonetheless tend to upstage static exhibits.

Only occasionally does the true harshness of Soviet life come through. One object that suggests it is a reconstruction of Tatlin's 'Letatlin' (1932), the name being a combination of the artist's name and the Russian verb 'létat', to fly. This is a would-be man-powered glider, closely resembling Leonardo da Vinci's impractical inventions.

It symbolises both the impulse to soar into freedom and its futility. Tatlin was subsequently declared an 'enemy of the people', though he survived and died in obscurity.

He was one of the fortunate ones. The engineer Palchinsky, so right about the Dnieper Dam, was arrested by the secret police and shot for, among other crimes, 'publishing detailed statistics'. His fate was shared by many of the most talented people in Russia. The celebrated theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold, several portraits of whom are on display, was tortured and executed in 1940.

Osip Mandelstam wryly noted that nowhere was poetry more respected than in the Soviet Union: 'There's no place where more people are killed for it' (he was to be one himself). The critic Punin looks worn and weary in a poignant portrait by Malevich from 1933. Eventually, he was arrested in 1949 for remarking that the innumerable portraits of Lenin that infested the country were tasteless. He was sent to the Gulag, where he died.

One of the most memorable exhibits comes at the end of the show: a room in which a series of prison photographs of victims are projected, one after another. The mugshots of Punin from his personal investigation file as prisoner — shaven-headed, crushed, prematurely aged — bring to mind the fate of Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Tim Harford put his finger on a central failure of the regime created by Lenin and Stalin: a 'pathological inability to experiment'. The Soviets, Harford argues, 'found it impossible to tolerate a real variety of approaches to any problem'. So it proved in the arts.

Opera

British sea power

Richard Bratby

The Pirates of Penzance
Coliseum, in rep until 25 March

Adriana Lecouvreur
Royal Opera House, in rep until 2 March

The story so far: in 1986 English National Opera hired Jonathan Miller to direct Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*. The result was so fresh and funny that it's been a mainstay of the ENO schedule for more than three decades, to the indignation of hard-core opera fans who can't understand why audiences keep flocking to hummable melodies and humour instead of, say, Berg's *Lulu*. Attempting to repeat the formula, ENO then made the rookie error of engaging Ken Russell who, being Ken Russell, promptly updated *Princess Ida* to the 21st century and



Doing a disservice to a lovely opera: Angela Gheorghiu as Adriana Lecouvreur

set it in a futuristic sushi bar. Finally, in 2015 they entrusted *The Pirates of Penzance* to Mike Leigh, whose G&S biopic *Topsy-Turvy* seemed to guarantee a safe pair of hands. Good call. The first run of Leigh's brightly coloured but basically traditional production was extended due to popular demand.

So there's a fair amount riding on this first revival, overseen by director Sarah Tipler. Is Leigh's *Pirates* going to be an infinitely repeatable bestseller on a *Mikado* scale? It certainly looked pretty full, and the matinee audience was the most youthful I've seen at a London house (some of the youngest had come dressed as pirates). And they laughed, too, which is never a bad sign. Leigh's approach to G&S isn't as radical as Miller's, and the costumes wouldn't have looked out of place when *The Pirates*

was first staged in 1879. Alison Chitty's sets, on the other hand, are as remote from the D'Oyly Carte tradition as it's possible to imagine — huge, abstract, geometrical flats in eye-watering primary colours. They throw the emphasis on to the individual performances, and occasionally, drolly, close in to frame a scene like an enormous pair of inverted commas.

But they do leave a lot of blank space — a high-risk strategy when you're trying to whip up some comic momentum. The choral choreography is a bit too baggy to fill the gaps, and you've got to wonder how the whole thing will look in a decade or so. Spirited performances are vital, and happily there were some corkers here: Soraya Mafi's deliciously bright and minxy Mabel, Lucy Schauer's tomboyish Ruth and — repris-

ing his role from the initial run — Andrew Shore as a twinkly Major-General Stanley, delivering his Act One patter-song as an actual song rather than a recitation, which was refreshing.

Ashley Riches's sunny, strapping Pirate King, meanwhile, certainly lived up to the picture of Johnny Depp that ENO (rather unfairly) included in its programme book. There was an enjoyably brazen swagger to his singing that compensated for a Fred-eric (David Webb) who couldn't always make himself heard over the orchestra — which played elegantly under Gareth Jones, although in a barn like the Coliseum it might need a bit more rhythmic snap if the piece is to sparkle rather than merely glow. Whether this *Pirates* will run and run is still open to question, but it's certainly worth seeing right now, not least because until mid-March John Tomlinson is playing the Police Sergeant. If you're not tempted by the prospect of seeing our greatest living Wotan brandishing a truncheon and belting low Fs at a man in a

Go and see our greatest living Wotan brandishing a truncheon and belting low Fs at a man in a pirate hat

frock and a pirate hat, there's probably no hope for you.

The Royal Opera has different priorities. David McVicar's lavish period production of Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur* was created in 2010 as a showcase for Angela Gheorghiu, and appears destined to remain one. That does a disservice to a lovely opera — which is rather more subtly characterised than some of the verismo shockers with which it's usually classed — and some compelling performances, particularly Gerald Finley's radiantly sung and touchingly careworn portrayal of the actress Adriana's besotted father-figure Michonnet. Add Ksenia Dudnikova — magnificently icy as the heroine's aristocratic rival — and the tenor Brian Jagde pumping out weapons-grade high notes as their love interest Maurizio, and this was more of an ensemble drama than a star vehicle. Charles Edwards's sets looked gorgeous, too: in particular his lovingly detailed, almost full-scale recreation of an 18th-century theatre.

Daniel Oren conducted. He's marginally less popular than Donald Trump among London's opera-going chatterati, for reasons which — on the strength of this lyrical if slightly lumpy reading — I was largely unable to discern. And, of course, there in the title role was Gheorghiu herself, exuding a dark, flashing brilliance and floating her quiet phrases with an intensity and a sweetness that — at least while they hung there — made nothing else on stage matter. Her acting involved a mixture of smouldering glances, languishing postures and florid hand-waving, noticeably at odds

with the naturalism of the rest of the cast. Maybe that was because she was portraying a character who is fatally incapable of distinguishing theatre from reality. But I wouldn't put money on it.

Theatre

Stuffed but dissatisfied

Lloyd Evans

Silver Lining

Rose Theatre Kingston

The Listening Room

Red Lion Theatre, until 4 March

Sandi Toksvig's new play opens in a Gravesend care home where five grannies and a temporary nurse are threatened by rising floodwaters. In Act One the ladies prepare for a rescue party that fails to materialise. In Act Two they build a life raft out of plastic bottles. There's a bizarre sequence involving a silly young burglar who gets beaten up and flung through a window by a woman of 71. The ending is more of a petering out than a conclusion. All the characters feel interchangeable apart from the nurse, who claims to come from Cheltenham. Her name, Hope Daly, prompts one of the old dears to quip, 'My life in a nutshell.' Later Hope admits, 'I'm from Croydon, OK? I don't tell people because I don't need the pity.'

The play's great virtue is its mood of lyrical whimsicality. 'I love a homosexual, they're so clean,' says one of the dears. 'I was the first in our village to get a mobile phone. I knitted it a cover.' Ms Toksvig perfectly understands the cultural mindset of her audience and she shamelessly flatters all their quirks and prejudices. She's aiming for the Radio 4 demographic: middle-aged, nostalgic, feminine, educated but anti-intellectual, utterly English and cosily snobbish. To these people the only part of the world that matters is the Home Counties. Northerners are poor, surly and amusing. Foreigners are quaint or dangerous. Or a bit of both. 'I know she was Polish but otherwise she looked harmless.' Anyone brought up on a south London estate, like Hope, is regarded as the victim of a prank in rather questionable taste.

The play's second act is darkened by passages of macabre reminiscence with one of the grannies admitting that she facilitated her husband's death and another regretting that she gave birth to 'three little sods. I used to look at them and think of all the things I hadn't done.' But the snag here, and it's a considerable one, is that the story doesn't develop. The characters, who are simply mouthpieces or collections of prejudices, are incapable of growth, redemption, self-discovery or any of the emotional conver-

sions that a properly realised personality can undergo. So it's like watching five sitcoms on the trot, or lurching on strawberry trifle and chocolate biscuits. You leave stuffed but dissatisfied. A few unfair critics have monstered the show because Ms Toksvig lacks the full complement of writerly skills. But those she has she deploys like a virtuoso.

The Listening Room by Harriet Madeley is a verbatim piece about criminals who meet their victims. We hear from a rootless thug who enjoys cruising the streets at night, heavily armed, and attacking random strangers. He got four years for clubbing a tipsy commuter over the head with a baseball bat. The blow dislodged several of the victim's teeth and nearly killed him. Asked how he felt afterwards, the thug said, 'Hungry.' Later he admitted that violence elated him. But he was intelligent. In prison he took to reading and acquired enough self-knowledge to turn himself from a violent parasite into an asset to society. At their meeting, his victim conceives a liking for his attacker. 'If he hadn't been a Muslim I'd have bought him a drink.' A more harrowing

I doubt if there's a writer alive who could recreate the range of emotions this play lays on

case involves a young paramedic killed for fun by feral teenagers. The lad who threw the first punch intended harm, rather than murder, but was found guilty of homicide. For 11 years the parents of the victim clung to their rage because it was the only vestige of sentiment that connected them with their extinguished child. They hated their anger but couldn't relinquish it. Finally, they met the initiator of the assault and praised his courage in agreeing to the encounter. 'I was a 15-year-old coward and I murdered your son,' were his first words. This cathartic confession dissolved their anger and enabled them to feel the beginnings of respect and even cordiality towards him. Now out of jail, the killer is settled, educated, employed, and a father himself. At Christmas he receives messages of goodwill from his victim's parents, who regard his children as a blessing in which they share, an emblem of their forgiveness and humanity.

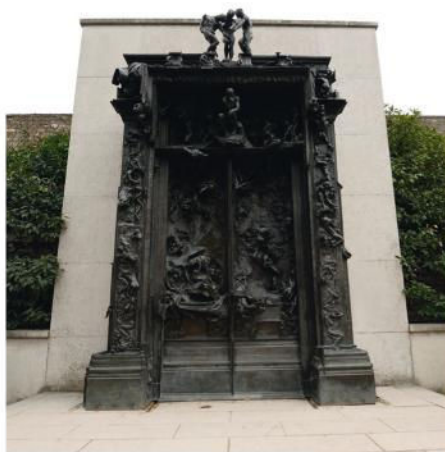
Anyone with an interest in drama should see this show because it delivers all the perfections great theatre aims for. Playwrights will watch it with a mixture of wonder and despair. I doubt if there's a writer alive who could recreate the range of emotions this play lays on. It drags the audience to the very limits of human endurance and demonstrates how far a personality can sink and what horrors it can tolerate and survive. You emerge with your consciousness altered, your conception of human beings elevated and amplified. Which is the goal of great drama. A painful, shocking, vital, uplifting experience. Quite unforgettable.

Rodin at 100

By Laura Freeman

The girl who posed for Auguste Rodin's figure of Eve on the 'Gates of Hell' was, the sculptor said, a 'panther'. She was a young Italian, pregnant, but barely showing. Not a professional artist's model. He found the girls who modelled for the Academy painters too affected. He liked stretchers, yawners, fidgeters, jitterbug girls who couldn't sit still.

His figures in plaster, bronze and marble have a pretzel suppleness. They do the splits, lie curled and foetal, fold at the waist, and crouch doubled like Atlas. His sibyls hold yoga poses. His prodigal son has a six-pack. A sketch might take only three, four, five charcoal or gouache strokes. Then: new pose, new page. He sought out dancers: Isadora Duncan, Carmen Damedoz — and Loie Fuller, who swirled her sleeves and skirts until she looked like a peony. He collected photographs of the Javanese dancers who performed at the Great Exhibition in Paris in 1889 and drew the Royal Cambodian dancing troupe on their state visit in 1906. He saw Vaslav Nijinsky dance the ballet *L'Après-midi d'un faune* in 1912 and invited the faun himself to his studio. A plaster was made of Nijinsky, like a Jack in the act of springing its box, but wasn't cast until after Rodin's death. He's a fierce sort of faun with a hard face, high skull and tense limbs.



Rodin's 'Gates of Hell': more than 300 figures, including a panther-like Eve

Rodin died 100 years ago, on 18 November 1917, but his figures are as lithe, slinky, expectant as when they were first made. Arms up, knees up, blood up, spirits up.

He chopped and changed body parts: this leg on that body, old head on new neck. He thought of these oddments as *abattis*, literally 'giblets'. He collected fragments of antique sculptures and called them his 'mutilated gods'. Sometimes he did away with the body altogether. His marble 'Head of John

the Baptist' (1892) lies on a salver, fringe falling over the lip of the plate.

It's a year for a trip to Paris for the Rodin Centenary Exhibition at the Grand Palais (22 March–31 July) and to the Musée Rodin; the painter and sculptor Anselm Kiefer has been given the run of the place (14 March–22 October). In the gardens of the museum you'll find the panther-like Eve on the 'Gates of Hell' (1880–1890), arms protectively wrapped across her breasts, one of more than 300 sinning figures. When I saw her it was January, freezing, beginning to snow. It was strange to stand in coat and scarf and hat and gloves below Rodin's inferno. Look also for Rodin's 'Monument to Victor Hugo' (1890) in an attitude half death-of-Seneca, half mermaid-on-her-rock.

Rodin was fond of London, spending days sketching Assyrian gods and Parthenon horses 'au British' — at the British Museum. Within his lifetime, a cast of the 'Burghers of Calais' was bought by the National Art Collections Fund. The six gloomy burghers now rattle their chains in Victoria Tower Gardens. Rodin went often to the V&A and so admired Michelangelo's 'Young Slave' in red wax that he asked that a prayer stool be put before it. Could Tate do the same for Rodin's 'The Kiss'? Lip-locked now since the turn of the last century.

Paris

RODIN IN PARIS

FOR DISCERNING TRAVELLERS

Marking the centenary of the artist's death, this major new exhibition at the Grand Palais will showcase works by one of the world's most celebrated sculptors, Auguste Rodin. A pioneer of modern sculpture, Rodin was one of the first to break from classical forms with his monumental, physical works such as *The Thinker*, *The Three Shades*, and *The Kiss*. The exhibition opens on 22 March and runs until 31 July 2017.

Price includes return Eurostar or flights, transfers, accommodation with breakfast, entrance tickets to the Rodin exhibition at the Grand Palais, a two day museum pass, a carnet of metro tickets, Kirker Guide Notes to restaurants, museums and sightseeing and the services of the Kirker Concierge.



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'Rocket leaves were connected with street-urchins, caterpillars, caprices and hedgehogs'

— Dot Wordsworth, p62

LIFE

High life

Taki



Gstaad

One's unpopularity on account of calling it a night diminishes in direct proportion to the severity of the next morning's hangover. I was literally booed by Geoffrey Moore and co. for asking the wife of a friend to drive me 200 yards to my chalet. Co., not Geoffrey, had other plans for the lady, and I will give you, the readers, two guesses what those plans were. It was 5.30 a.m., the friend's wife did look awfully charming — desirable is closer to the truth — and co. was getting touchy-feely, so I opened my big mouth and asked her to drive me home. The next day, all sorts of people thanked me rather profusely for ending the party. Starting with her hubbie, who was home babysitting. (Fool.) All the Mother of My Children had to say was that even our three dogs thought me ridiculous coming home at such an hour, 'and at your age'.

Well, if it weren't for the hangovers, I'd be out every night and twice on Sunday. The older I get, the less time I've got, as I'm rudely reminded by an inner voice just as night is falling. But the hangover is not the hang-up I pretend it to be. It's the women, young women at that. For some strange reason they feel that 80 is too old for them, and for an equally strange reason I refuse to lie about my age. My friend Michael Mailer is always telling me not to admit to the awful truth, 80, but I get rather a kick out of the horror in the eyes of a young woman when I say it.

On Saturday night, the MoMC and I had dinner at the house of a friend, who opened a magnum of Pomerol Château Certan 1986. Need I go on? Another guest was on the wagon but his glass was regularly empty and being refilled by the loyal (to me) Portuguese butler. The result was predictable. The MoMC went home after she had dropped me off at the Palace Hotel. In the middle of the lobby, a Hungarian orchestra was doing its thing: waltzes, tangos, the stuff of light operetta. I love everything Hungar-

ian, starting with Viktor Orban, and everything Polish, beginning with Lady Belhaven and Stenton, whose hubbie Robin will be 90 this month. (More about that later in the year.) Hungarian music, lotsa vodka and some pretty young women made me forget my promise to the MoMC that I would be back by 2 a.m. Well, I told you the rest at the beginning of this rather pathetic column. The only trouble was that I had a lunch with my friends Rosemary and Wafic Saïd the

A long time ago I went around locking women up

next day (though after what has taken place in his native Syria, my host Wafic wasn't surprised to see yet one more wreck).

Then came the big one. Like a fragile consumptive in a Verdi or Puccini opera, I swore to myself I would stay just one hour, wish him happy birthday, drink only water and then come home in order to watch *Homeland*, whose heroine Claire Danes I'm in love with and almost had a wet dream about. Well, things don't always turn out the way we hope they would. The birthday was Prince Victor Emmanuel's 80th, and the heir to the Italian throne — in fact, the pretender to the throne — and I have been boozing it up together since the late Fifties. We once ran into each other in Hong Kong and after a drink or two decided to go to a whorehouse. Silly old us. There were no whorehouses in Hong Kong back in 1967, although all the women were available. Then Victor and I were arrested in Greece for a driving offence, but a telephone call from the royal palace fixed that. They let him go and kept me.

On Sunday night my old friend John Sutin arrived and the moment I saw him I knew that *Homeland* and Claire would have to take a raincheck. The cake arrived and Marina of Savoy, Victor's wife, gave a wonderful speech about their dream marriage of 50 years. Then she pointed at me and announced that 55 years ago I had locked her in a room after she had refused my advances. I thought it was a joke and asked her why she had made that up. No, no, it's absolutely true, she said, don't you remember? I stayed locked up for close to two days. I tried to tell people that it was a joke, but then the MoMC announced that I had done the same thing to her 50 years ago. This was too much. 'What the hell are you trying to do to me?' I asked no one in particular. 'I've never mistreated a woman

in my life...' Well, you did lock me up once, said the MoMC, and Marina doesn't lie.

So, as I write this I am suffering not only from a howling hangover but also from the doubt, engendered by these two ladies, that a long time ago I went around locking women up. But for what purpose? What's so good about a woman locked up? Actually, I don't believe a word. I think Marina of Savoy and the MoMC got together, decided that I was a bit of a shit, and made this story up. Still, I'm never going near a keyhole again.

Low life

Jeremy Clarke



A deep frost in the winter of 1821–22 killed the orange trees in Nice. The Anglican minister to the English colony, the Reverend Lewis Way, appealed to his congregation for relief funds to provide work for redundant orange-pickers. The money raised was spent on the construction of six miles of coast road, the redundant orange-pickers were employed as navvies, and the completed road became known as the Promenade des Anglais. On 14 July 2016, Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, a 31-year-old Tunisian bisexual gym bunny, drove a 19-tonne truck into a crowd assembled on the Promenade des Anglais to watch the Bastille Day fireworks, killing 86 and injuring 450. On 13 February 2017, Front National leader and presidential hopeful Marine Le Pen visited the Promenade des Anglais to pay her respects to the dead and say a few campaign-defining words. I toddled down to the seafront after breakfast to see her.

She was due to arrive at 10.15. At 10.45 there was still no sign of her. Waiting for her on le Prom was a French press pack bristling with audiovisual technology and bourgeois French good looks. Also waiting were some big units with receivers stuck in their cauliflower ears who looked anything but bourgeois. Bouncing, poker-faced joggers threaded paths through the assembled journalists. A stiff onshore breeze was driving aquamarine breakers far up the stony



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beach. The driver of an approaching cartoon tourist train clanged his warning bell and the journalists reluctantly gave way before it, narrowly avoiding a comedy repeat of last year's massacre. Dodging the train's passing wheels, shaven-headed former FN regional councillor Philippe Vardon, sentenced last year to six months in jail for his part in a brawl (*bagarre* — feminine) in a car park with three 'Maghrebians' males, took a hasty step backwards and landed on my foot. It was nothing, I told him.

I waited companionably with a local pensioner and his elderly dog. The dog was a small, hairy, brain-dead thing. The pensioner was dressed for warmth above all other considerations. He had asked me who we were all waiting for, I had told him it was Marine Le Pen, and he had decided to stick around to welcome her. 'I've been a Nationalist all my life,' he explained. 'And your dog?' I said. 'Is he a Nationalist too?' 'Bien sur!' he said. You could have counted the number of local

I found myself looking into Marine Le Pen's face, which was serene and faintly humorous

FN supporters present on the fingers of a redundant orange-picker's right hand. I had expected hundreds, if not thousands. Maybe her visit wasn't widely advertised. Perhaps her supporters were conserving dwindling political energy for the walk to the polling booth on 23 April.

At last she came. Bottle-blond barnet, black cashmere cloak, blue jeans, five-inch heels, her pleasant face solemn. She was walking towards us from the direction of the Negresco Hotel at the centre of a line of ten black-suited, black-tied FN officials. I try occasionally not to think in stereotypes, but it was impossible not to draw an affectionate comparison with the *Reservoir Dogs* film poster. The press pack concentrated itself into a jostling scrum, presented arms and massacred the entire FN executive from 50 yards with its flashbulbs. About a minute later, Marine Le Pen breasted the front line of the media phalanx, which promptly broke ranks and swarmed all over her like a pack of foxhounds at the kill. There was a lot of unseemly pushing and shoving and some voices raised in French anger. A female FN supporter on the outskirts of the scrum clapped her hands and chanted, 'Vive Le Pen! Vive la France!' Nobody took up the deplorable chant, which fizzled out before I could join in.

A semblance of order was restored. Now Marine Le Pen was speaking calmly to the microphones on poles being thrust in her face, but I couldn't hear what she was saying. I read later that she was responding to the Nice deputy mayor's accusation that she is a populist. Her reply was that she was a woman of the people and if that meant she was a populist then she accepted the compliment. Then she attempted to continue her walk of

mindful remembrance and the media scrum suddenly shot violently sideways, knocking my friend the lifelong Nationalist off his feet, and his Nationalist dog was trampled half to death by, among others, Marine Le Pen's attentive boyfriend, FN deputy president Louis Aliot. I braced my arms against a security guard's back, which was the size of Wales, to make enough room for the old guy's dog to be plucked to safety. And as I straightened up I found myself looking into Marine Le Pen's face, which was serene and faintly humorous amid the hullabaloo. But before I could lean forward and softly plant my lips on her downy cheek, a French TV news network video camera was roughly imposed between us and the opportunity was gone.

Real life Melissa Kite



Fine, so I got it completely wrong. It turns out the sale of my flat was not held up by a wiggle in the garden, but by a kink in the kitchen. This kink in the kitchen is far more serious than a wiggle in the garden. I should have realised that, the buyer's solicitor has complained.

I don't know why I got the idea that exchange of contracts had been delayed by a mistake in the plan for the garden, but I'm struggling to keep up. I've been deluged with complaints about absolutely everything I had thought was fine. From the crisp new electrical safety certificates to the diligently maintained boiler service history, nothing has been good enough.

I'm sure someone told me at some stage that the garden fence didn't follow the right line, but it now transpires that no one is bothered by that at all. It's the kink in the kitchen that's causing merry hell.

Can I paint a picture for you? At the far end of my kitchen there is a small sloping cubby-hole above which are the upstairs neighbour's steps down to his garden. It has been there for about 40 years but alas, it is not reflected on the floor plan.

This means that where the red pen line on the drawing at the Land Registry ought to make a little bobble, it goes straight across. The mistake, if that is what it is, measures about two millimetres on the plan.

In reality, the four foot by two foot corner is where I store a slimline dishwasher and half a washing machine (for this juts over the space).

I am baffled by the buyers' aversion to

this cubby-hole because even if I did steal it from the upstairs neighbour — bricking up a small square of his garden in the night in a clandestine attempt to create London's smallest laundry room — it has now been there so long it cannot be reversed, except by a protracted legal battle the neighbour is unlikely to want to embark upon, I would have thought, especially since so many other flats in the street have done the same thing.

Still, the buyers requested we correct the drawing at the Land Registry to include the kitchen kink, or they wouldn't exchange contracts. 'Everything but the kitchen kink isn't good enough,' was basically their line. But when my lawyer contacted the Land Registry and submitted the new plan, with kink, they said no, absolutely not. The Land Registry simply does not do kinky.

The only option, therefore, was to obtain a deed of rectification signed by the neighbour upstairs, and both his and my mortgage lenders.

So I asked the neighbour upstairs and, not unsurprisingly, for he and I have a history of tormenting each other, he said he would have to instruct his lawyers to look into it. (And maybe I will have to instruct my

It's the kink in the kitchen that's causing merry hell

lawyers to look into the water that still drips through my ceiling from his bathroom.)

Meanwhile, my solicitor continued to plough through letters of complaint from the buyers urging me to hurry up, and other such impossibilities. He rang me to inform me that one letter was so long he suspected it would take an entire day to make sense of it. So I told him to stop.

Enough was enough. I sent my agent an email pulling out of the sale and instructing them to put the flat back on the market.

But it will not be that simple, because the kitchen kink has been declared to all and sundry and must be dealt with to the bitter end. A legal monster has been born. It is ravenous and must be fed.

After consultation with experts, it turns out we may need a deed of rectification or we may need a deed of variation.

In any case, it is going to take many months of dancing on the head of a kink, making the lawyers rich beyond the dreams of avarice.

As I sat with my head in my hands the other night, the builder boyfriend suddenly erupted. 'I'm going to knock the damn thing out,' he declared, standing in the kitchen with hands on hips, like John Wayne about to draw a gun and shoot the offending laundry corner to smithereens.

'Oh no!' I said, feeling tears of despair welling in my eyes. It is never a good sign when the BB threatens to dismantle something.

'Leave it to me. I can take this corner

out and brick the wall up in a day.'

He's right, of course. It's going to be quicker to smash my flat to pieces to make it match the floor plan, rather than try to change a millimetre of ink at the Land Registry to make the floor plan match the flat.

The turf

Robin Oakley



The drumbeats are quickening ahead of the Cheltenham Festival and at this stage there really is no substitute for going racing. Some might have ducked Newbury's Betfair Hurdle meeting on Saturday because of the bitter wind, which made a hot-water bottle the most prized object on the winner's rostrum, and because the other two key races on the card were reduced to three and four runners. More fool them. Both produced intriguing contests and vital clues for the Festival.

An earnest statistician once asked a northern trainer what the crucial signs were that told her when one of her horses was ready to win a race. She replied, 'Just one. A grin on my husband's face after he comes in from the gallops.' You had only to take one look at Nicky Henderson's wide-eyed smile, half relief at surviving the conditions, half sheer joy at the quality of what we had just seen, to know that Altior in the Racing Post Arkle Chase is his banker for this year's Festival.

We all know how much Nicky adores the iconic Sprinter Sacre, who looked glorious despite the snow as he pranced around the parade ring before racing. Their trainer resists invitations to compare the two but he does acknowledge that Altior 'is on the same pathway' and head lad Corky Browne, never one to get carried away after his 75 years of experience, is happy to have them mentioned in the same sentence. Says Nicky: 'It's impossible to think you could put one away and pull another rabbit out of the hat because the world does not work that way but we've always thought that Altior was very good.' He had been disappointed when Altior, winner of last year's Supreme Novices' Hurdle at the Festival, had been beaten in a bumper by the talented Barbers Hill, and significantly he added that although he has in Buveur d'Air and Brain Power two of the most fancied horses in this year's Champion Hurdle (a prize he has five times taken back to Seven Barrows), 'If Altior had stayed hurdling he'd be favourite.'

Altior powered away relentlessly from

Fox Norton, one of our Twelve to Follow, who was clearly attempting the impossible in trying to give the winner five pounds, putting in some spectacular leaps despite the conditions, and it was good to see that his regular rider, Nico de Boinville, was back in the plate after his broken arm. Altior had won twice in the hands of Noel Fehily during Nico's absence and there is always a fear at the back of an injured jockey's mind when others have scored on his mount. Fortunately, loyalty goes both ways at Seven Barrows.

The Betfair Denman Chase also proved to be genuinely informative despite cutting up to just three runners and that race, too, provided an example of the jumping community's quality of character. Champion Jockey Richard Johnson is teased by his peers for his reluctance to spend money and does not often pass up the chance of getting his hands on more of the folding stuff. But having been declared to ride Native River for Colin Tizzard, Johnson found himself wobbly with the flu. He could have taken a risk. Instead he approached the trainer and said that he was not in a condition to do the horse justice. Dickie Johnson not only passed the horse to Aidan Coleman to ride but also suggested new tactics which helped to ensure success and strengthen the trainer's hand for the Gold Cup.

We all knew from his victories in the Hennessy Gold Cup and the Welsh Grand National that Native River possesses stamina in abundance. His trainer ran him in the four-miler at the last Cheltenham Festival and in his two big victories he galloped his opponents relentlessly into the ground, went on from four or five fences out and held on to win. At Newbury, advised by Johnson to give Native River more company, Coleman waited until two out before turning up the gas and accelerating clear of the persistent Le Mercurey, revealing a new weapon in his gun room. Native River showed he was the whole deal and his delighted trainer noted, 'He isn't just an out-and-out stayer, he has pace as well. We don't have to go on five out — he has every gear.' With Cue Card and Thistlecrack in his yard as well, Colin Tizzard has a brilliant hand for the Gold Cup but he is now more than ever reluctant to put them in a pecking order.

Ballyandy confirmed the good form of Nigel Twiston-Davies's horses by winning the Betfair Hurdle in a duel with Movewiththetimes, but there was another victory to note with the Festival in mind. High Bridge ran well in bumpers when John Ferguson was enjoying himself training jumpers. Passed on to Ben Pauling in the Bloomfields colours, with son Alex Ferguson riding, he won his third novice hurdle, giving weight all round. You could get 20-1 for his Cheltenham prospects afterwards and to my mind he is true value each way.

Bridge

Janet de Botton

What can be more regrettable than picking up a huge hand and landing in the wrong contract?

It happened to me recently in a Hubert Phillips match. I had a 3-3-5-2 twenty-four count, all Aces and Kings, and my left hand opponent opened 3♠ which was raised to game on my right. I gave it a proper think and emerged with 6NT. Wrong! 7 Diamonds was laydown but 6NT had no play. I still feel sick!

In the third division of the Norwegian premier league recently, a hand came up that was so extraordinary it provoked a global 'what do you bid?' contest. You are sitting South, and Partner, first in hand all vulnerable, opened 4♠. East passed and you hold:

Void

A

A K Q 10 x x x

A K Q 8 x

Before you read on, what would you bid?

First of all, what are your ambitions for the hand and how do you find out the information you need? Almost everyone agreed that they wanted to try for Grand-slam — but which one, and can it be bid with control?

Some took Blackwood, intending to find out if Partner's Spades were solid, but how can you find out how many spades he has and whether he holds the ♠Jack? Some people punted 7♦ (me among them) but I dreaded a replay of my 6NT disaster. Someone else bid 5♦ on the grounds that it should be a cuebid agreeing Spades, and that when partner bids 5♠ he would jump to 7♣, hoping that got his hand across.

All these are possibilities, but the bid that everyone agreed was brilliant came from the Norwegian international Siv Thoresen. She bid 5♣ (again a cuebid) and waited to hear if partner could cue Diamonds (showing a singleton or void).

If he did, she would raise him to 6♦ and if he didn't, she would know he had at least two and she could raise to 7♦.

On the actual hand no grand-slam was making. 6♦ only makes from the North hand (!) and 6♠ is cold despite spades breaking 5-0 as North held ♠A Q J 10 9 x x x and was void in diamonds.



Tanners have been around since 1842 and certainly know their onions. Both *Decanter* and the International Wine Challenge named them 'Large Independent Wine Retailer of the Year' in 2016. I mean to say, how lucky are we to have them as one of *The Spectator's* partners?

Their sales director, Robert Boufflower, put together a list of typically quirky wines, any one of which I would have been happy to recommend. The final six more than pass muster. Added to which, RB was magnanimity itself and tossed in some tasty discounts, with the mixed case just £108.

The 2015 La Petite Vigne Viognier (1) comes from near Carcassonne and the Foncalieu co-operative, which boasts some 1,000 growers, drawn from all corners of the Languedoc, Gascony and the Rhône. Quality of fruit is everything and where sometimes Viognier can be over-the-top, blowsy and — I hate to be rude — flabby, this is spot on, with delicate peach and apricot notes, a perfectly judged acidity and a crisp clean finish. It's ridiculously cheap, too, at £6.95 down from £7.95.

The 2016 Château de Tiregand (2) is a deliciously aromatic blend of Sauvignon Blanc (80 per cent) and Sémillon (20 per cent) from Bergerac, east of Bordeaux in the Dordogne. Château de Tiregand was said to have been founded in the 13th century by Edward Tyrgan, bastard son of England's King Edward III, and today it's owned by the Saint-Exupéry family, cousins of Antoine, the celebrated aviator and author of *Le Petit Prince*. The wine is fresh and enticing with typical grassy Sauvignon notes with added creamy weight thanks to the Sémillon. £8.00 down from £8.80.

If New, rather than Old, World Sauvignon is your thing, the 2016 Cucao Sauvignon Blanc Reserva (3) should suit you perfectly. It comes from the Colchagua Valley, blessed with long, hot summer days tempered by mountain and sea breezes. Full of fresh herbs, cut grass and tropical fruit, this Reserva sits somewhere between the Loire Valley and Marlborough, New Zealand, in style — slightly more expressive than the former and slightly less exuberant than the latter. I loved it. £9.00 down from £9.80.

The 2015 La Jeanette, Gonnet Rhône Selection (4) from Ventoux is a succulent, lusciously fruity and peppery blend of

60 per cent Grenache and 40 per cent Syrah from Etienne Gonnet, best known for his Domaine Font de Michelle in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The Gonnets have been making wine here since 1600 and Etienne puts as much care into this little beauty as he does

Aussie Pinot Noir can often be too in-your-face and too pricey. This is neither

into his top-end vino. Those who bought the 2015 Tanners Rhône Valley Red in November will lap it up. £9.00 down from £9.90.

The 2015 Prado Rey Tinto Roble (5) from the Ribera del Duero is a feisty, spicy, cherry-ripe, barrel-aged Tempranillo with just the tiniest drops of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot added to give character and plumpness. The estate is the largest in northern Spain and, thanks to recent huge

investment, is now state-of-the-art with its own hydroelectric plant, solar farm and so on. No expense is spared with the wines and this makes for a very sophisticated glassful indeed. £9.90 down from £10.90.

Finally, the scrumptious 2014 Trentham Estate Pinot Noir (6) from the Murray River, Victoria, Australia. The Murphy family emigrated from Ireland in the 1900s, were among the first to plant vines in Mildura and have been making wine here ever since. Current winemaker Anthony Murphy loves his Pinot and this example is delectably smooth and tasty, full of plums, cherries and spice. It's fruity for sure, but there's a welcome savoury note too and smooth, supple tannins. Aussie Pinot Noir can often be too in-your-face and too pricey. This is neither, it's just lovely. £11.50 down from £12.20.

The mixed case has two bottles of each wine and delivery, as ever, is free.

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White	1 2015 La Petite Vigne Viognier, 12.5%	£95.40	£83.40	
	2 2016 Ch. de Tiregand, Bergerac Sec, 12.5%	£105.60	£96.00	
	3 2016 Cucao Sauvignon Blanc Reserva, 13.5%	£117.60	£108.00	
Red	4 2015 La Jeanette, Gonnet Rhône Selection, 14.5%	£118.80	£108.00	
	5 2015 Prado Rey Tinto Roble, 13%	£130.80	£118.80	
	6 2014 Trentham Estate Pinot Noir, 13.5%	£146.40	£138.00	
Mixed	7 Sample case, two each of the above	£119.10	£108.00	

Total

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Start date Expiry date Sec. code

Issue no. Signature

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Chess

Cui Bono

Raymond Keene

The *cause célèbre* at the Tradewise tournament in Gibraltar, which finished earlier this month, was the extraordinary protest by Hou Yifan, the reigning women's world champion, against having to play seven female opponents in ten rounds.

In the tenth and final round she made her complaint manifest by deliberately throwing the game in just five moves. The sensational outburst went as follows: (Hou Yifan-Babu Lalith, Gibraltar 2017) **1 g4 d5 2 f3 e5 3 d3 Qh4+ 4 Kd2 h5 5 h3 hxg4 White resigns.**

The Gibraltar organisers reacted with indignation, pointing out that the pairings for their event are calculated by a well-established computer program which excludes any bias.

Ironically, the Tradewise tournament has gone out of its way since its inception 15 years ago to promote women's chess. In this respect, the tournament has been an unwitting victim of its own success, helping to create a cadre of powerful female players, whose strength, in terms of ratings, rankings and titles, should quite cancel out any issues concerning the gender of any players' opponents.

Furthermore, when examining Hou's score against her seven female opponents, it will be seen that her four wins, two draws and one loss, against a rival Chinese competitor, by no means justify any accusations of a conspiracy to overload her with female opposition.

The final nail in the coffin of Hou's complaint is the fact that there is no possible beneficiary of any attempt to manipulate the pairings.

I can see no advantage whatsoever for the organisers in arranging 70 per cent female opposition, while Hou herself was clearly opposed to the whole idea.

Hou Yifan-M. Muzychuk: Gibraltar Masters 2017; Nimzowitsch Attack

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 c6 3 b3 Nf6 4 Bb2 Bg4 5 e3 Nbd7 6 Be2 e6 7 h3 Bh5 8 Nc3 Bd6 9 d3 h6 10 a3 0-0 White's opening looks harmless but once Black has committed the whereabouts of her king White is given an opportunity to strike. **11 g4 Bg6 12 Rg1** This kind of attack, utilising the force of White's fianchettoed queen's bishop, combined with an advance of the kingside

Diagram 1

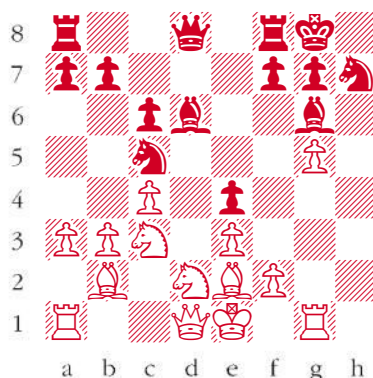
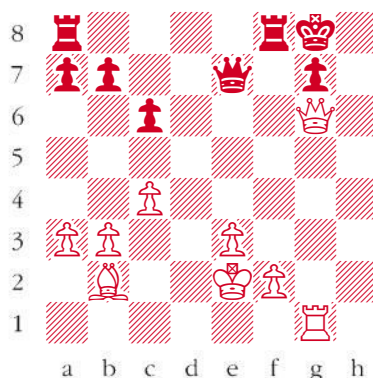


Diagram 2

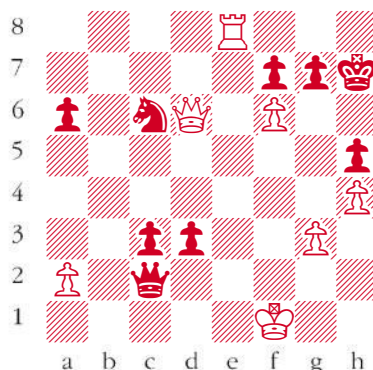


pawns, was pioneered by Nimzowitsch in the 1920s **12 ... e5 13 h4 dxc4 14 dxc4 Nc5 15 g5 e4 16 Nd2 hxg5 17 hxg5 Nh7 (diagram 1) 18 Ndxg4** A horrible shock for Black who clearly overlooked this tactical possibility. **18 ... Nxe4 19 Nxe4 Be7** Abject retreat but 19 ... Bxe4 fails outright to 20 Qd4 forking g7 and e4. **20 Bd3 Bxg5** Regaining the pawn but also opening further lines for White on the kingside. **21 Qc2 Qe7 22 Nxcg5 Nxcg5 23 Bxg6 Nf3+ 24 Ke2 Nxcg1+ 25 Rxg1 fxcg6 26 Qxg6 (diagram 2)** White has given up the exchange but the pressure against g7 is overwhelming. **26 ... Rf7 27 Rh1 Qe8 28 Qh7+ Kf8 29 Rh4 Qc8 30 Re4 Black resigns**

PUZZLE NO. 444

White to play. This position is a variation from Hou Yifan-Ju, Gibraltar 2017. Hou lost this game to her compatriot. The puzzle shows what might have happened if her opponent had gone wrong. How can she conclude her attack? Answers to me at *The Spectator* by Tuesday 21 February or email victoria@spectator.co.uk. There is a £20 prize 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 ... Qe1+
Last week's winner John Briggs,
Whickham, Newcastle upon Tyne



Competition

Trigger point

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 2985 you were invited to provide a poetic preview of the day Article 50 is triggered.

There were passionate voices from both sides of the Brexit divide, with many of you recruiting distinguished poets to your cause. D.A. Prince cleverly appropriated 'Vitai Lampada', Sir Henry Newbolt's tribute to English patriotism: 'There's a dread-filled rush in the House tonight/ With Article 50 poised to go./ After lies black as pitch and the blind claiming sight/ And nothing to halt, now, the whole sorry show'; Jennifer Moore's entry channelled the spirit of Dr Seuss: 'The sun did not shine./ We were too sad to work,/ So we cut out Farage/ And threw darts at his smirk.' And Paul Carpenter reworked Gray's 'Elegy': 'The curfew tolls the knell of lost UK...' Nice work all round.

Nigel Stuart and Jack William Ruddy earn commendations, Basil Ransome-Davies pockets £35 and his fellow winners take £30.

The Martian TV viewers were convulsed by
ribald mirth;
Some fool had pulled the Brexit trigger down on
Planet Earth.
They would have pissed themselves were they
designed in human fashion.
The Martian sense of humour does not entertain
compassion.

The Thames was choked with suicides. The
looters stripped the shops.
The medics were as helpless as the clerics and
the cops.
The dogs of fear ran in the streets, the loathing
was titanic.
Not even David Attenborough could counteract
the panic.

The Germans sadly shook their heads. The
French shrugged 'Eh, alors?'
As Brexit raised the Devil to destroy the rule of
Law
And Britain sank beneath the waves in
sulphurous expiry,
Too late to mend the severed bond, too late for
an Inquiry.

The Martian mind is frolicsome, the Martians'
style sardonic,
Their lowbrow taste incurable, their
schadenfreude chronic.
Their idea of a hoot's the ruination of a nation.
Reality TV on Mars is quite a Revelation.
Basil Ransome-Davies

The filibustering's finished. Fog
Descends at dawn, the squabbling's done,
It's time to end the dialogue
And pull the trigger on the gun.

From Dover's cliff the bullet goes
At lightning speed to Europe's shore
Where, crying havoc, Britain's foes
Let slip, at last, the dogs of war.

Today it starts, today we wend
Our way through battles wearisome,
O, that a man might know the end
Of this day's business 'ere it come!

But come it will, and fighting back
We'll break that continental link
And know if, after all the flak,
This Sceptred Isle will float or sink.
Alan Millard

Mrs May is playing poker.
David Davis holds the joker.
Jean-Claude Juncker's going spare.
Trump defibrillates his hair.

Daniel Hannan tries to barter
NHS for Magna Carta.
Sturgeon's in a tartan bind.
Farron's out of sight and mind.

Philip Hammond's sweating buckets
Over florins, groats and ducks.
Diane Abbot's gone to pieces:
From today free movement ceases.

Jezza knows not what to do.
Nigel's drinking from a shoe.
Michael's playing with the matches.
Boris sits and grins and scratches.
Nicholas Stone

Farewell to the Union! It's done with!
We were never exactly conjoined,
And it altered from what we'd begun with
As fancier titles were coined.
The CAP never fitted our farmers,
Our trawlers were left high and dry;
Obscured by late-night melodramas
New treaties went through on the sly.
What Brussels decreed became legal
Whether Parliament liked it or not;
The panjandrum grew more and more regal,
Though plainly 'all mouth, *nul* culottes'.
Farewell to the Union, we're splitting,
So they can pursue their own dream:
We'll have only laws we think fitting
And our courts will again be supreme.
W.J. Webster

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part;
For we are done, they'll get no more from us.
But we'd be glad, yes, glad with all our heart
To end it cleanly without hate or fuss,
Shake hands for ever, go our separate ways
And when we meet at any time again
Not have it seen in calmer future days
That we one jot of enmity retain.
Now as we trigger unity's last breath
And, stricken, common purpose stranded lies
When bitterness may bring a pain-wracked
death
To that which should have brought us painless
ties.

Now, if we can, when all the shouting's over
Our former friendships may we soon recover.
Martin Parker

NO 2988: MARK MAKING

You are invited to compose a poem making the case for a commemorative day for a person or thing of your choice. Please email entries of up to 16 lines to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 1 March.

Crossword 2297: Thoroughly by Columba

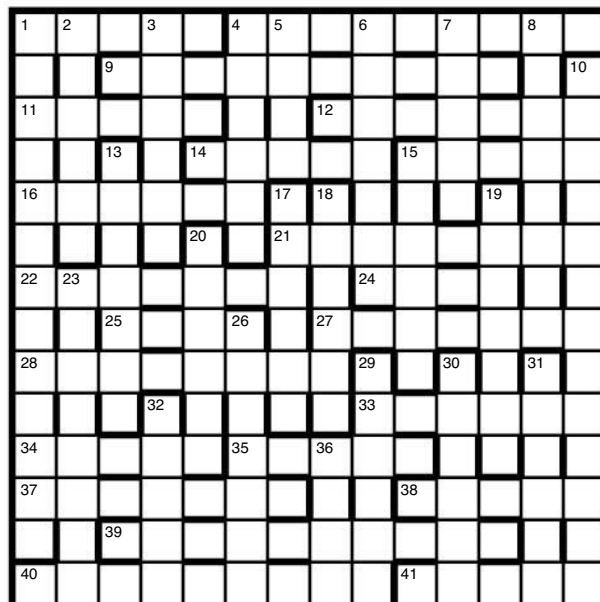
Each of nine clues contains a misprinted letter in the definition part. Corrections of misprints spell a two-word phrase. Clues in italics are cryptic indications of partial answers; in each case, the indicated part must be placed as suggested by the thematic phrase to create the full answer to be entered in the grid. Resulting entries (one of which is a two-word name) are defined by unclued lights.

Across

- 1 Observation point secured by dog in window (5, hyphenated)
- 4 Chatter about old vestment, very dark (9, hyphenated)
- 9 Ice can help with treatment of the head (10)
- 14 Master destroys foxes (5)
- 15 *Caught by magnetic field strength*
- 16 State mineral grade (6)
- 22 Confide foolishly in duo ensnaring politician (7)
- 24 Melancholy song following trouble (4)
- 25 *Trespass, dropping in*
- 27 Amateur managed entire course (7)
- 33 Primate accepted spirit after singular uncertainty (6)
- 34 Both tense and ready (5)
- 35 Add force in a dilemma (5)
- 37 Rail and twisted rope (7)
- 38 Basket for fish in boat (5)
- 39 *Lecturer with unfinished commission retiring*
- 40 On spot, holding fort, reflected calmly (9)
- 41 What saint experienced? On the contrary (5)
- 4 Bony kind, left out (6)
- 6 Song, so very loud, ceases (7, two words)
- 7 Wife after course wanting electronic operating system (5)
- 8 Money added to pool for material (8)
- 10 Way to rattle an unsettled legal agent (13, three words)
- 13 Tables and gadgets broken by silly ape (7)
- 15 Prepared to scan constellation (6)
- 17 Part of field in general full (6)
- 18 Exercises ending in appraisal and mature chat (6)
- 19 West African I see working around valley (7)
- 20 Suite designed to accommodate hot romp (6)
- 23 Knight in crazy search for poisonous plant (8)
- 26 Buffalo one hurt? Cross about that (7)
- 29 Basketwork in pyre is offered up (6)
- 30 *Strike, not united, overturned*
- 31 Music including medley, mostly drinking songs (6)
- 32 Wasted power separating sediment (5)
- 36 Fellow raised office idiom (4)

Down

- 1 Mostly wandering land, I'm not entering quarry (13)
- 2 *Continually losing energy*
- 3 Free silver grabbed by stupid person ignoring diamonds (6)

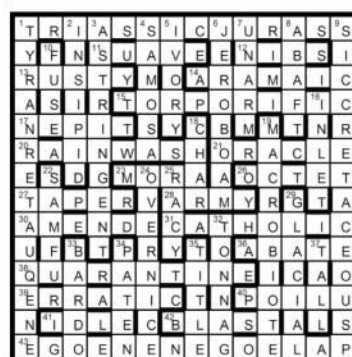


A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 6 March. There are two runners-up prizes of £20. (UK solvers can choose to receive the latest edition of the *Chambers* dictionary instead of cash — ring the word 'dictionary'.) Entries to: Crossword 2297, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name

Address

Email



SOLUTION TO 2294: TIMES SQUARE

Perimeter words are names of the most recent GEOLOGICAL PERIODS.

First prize J.P. Green, Uppingham, Rutland
Runners-up Paul Jenkinson, Zollikon, Switzerland;
Sebastian Robinson, Glasgow.

Status Anxiety

Can I bear to sack the digital babysitter?

Toby Young

I was astonished to discover in conversation with another dad last week that he and his wife intended to introduce a screen ban over half term. Not limiting their children to something reasonable like two hours a day. But a blanket ban. How on earth will they cope — and by ‘they’ I mean him and his wife, not their two kids? It’s not as if they’re going on a family cycling holiday on the Dalmatian Coast. No, they’ll be spending this week at home in Acton. The poor buggers will be forced to play Monopoly Empire from first thing in the morning till last thing at night.

When I hear talk of screen bans, it makes me want to set up a National Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Adults. Maybe it’s worse if you’ve got four kids. We tried it once and within 48 hours Caroline was muttering darkly about filing for divorce. Life without the electronic babysitter — or should that be digital heroin? — was unbearable. Suddenly, our children were lively and inquisitive, asking all sorts of questions about the world around them. For the first time in years, they wanted to engage in conversation. They reminded me of the catatonic patients in *Awakenings* after Robin Williams has given them a dose of L-dopa. We felt suicidal.

Admittedly, when I bother to find out what my children are actually



Fred, nine, showed me what he'd been watching. It was a step-by-step guide to making a gun

watching on their phones and tablets, I do sometimes have second thoughts.

Let’s start with Charlie, my youngest. He divides his time between playing *Fifa 17* and watching YouTube videos of other people playing *Fifa 17*. We’re talking eight hours a day during half term, interrupted only by trips to the park to play *Fifa 17* in real life, which involves dribbling the ball round his dad and burying it in the back of the net.

Fred, my second-youngest, spends all his time watching videos of how to make stuff. At first, listening to the cheery, enthusiastic voices of the presenters, I was reminded of those television shows of my childhood that encouraged viewers to engage in arts and crafts, like *Blue Peter* and *Vision On*. ‘Aren’t you ever going to make any of these things?’ I asked him, imagining it was some benign activity that involved cutting and sticking. He gave me a quizzical look then showed me what he’d been watching. It was a step-by-step guide to making a gun. Fred is nine years old.

Ludo, my oldest boy, has shown some signs of progress recently. He’s graduated from watching YouTube videos of Scandinavians playing violent practical jokes on unsuspecting members of the public — a kind of snuff movie version of *Candid Camera* — to watching repeats of old sitcoms. Alas, we’re not talking *Dad’s Army* or *Fawlty Towers*. No, he’s spending half term watching back-to-back episodes of *Friends*. God knows what he finds so mesmerising about it. Can he relate to David Schwimmer’s chronic inability to voice his desire for Jennifer Aniston? He’s only 11, so I don’t think that’s it. It’s proba-

bly the childlike, goofy behaviour of Matt LeBlanc who seems permanently marooned in a state of arrested development.

But it’s the viewing habits of Sasha, my 13-year-old daughter, that fill me with the most despair. At one stage I took great pride in the fact that Sasha wasn’t interested in ‘girly’ stuff. No princess dolls or pink wallpaper for her when she was growing up. Her favourite game was ‘incoming’, in which she would bounce up and down on the trampoline dodging footballs that I was hurling at her from the bottom of the garden. In the course of a normal game she would receive at least half a dozen direct hits to the head, but it never seemed to bother her. She had the courage of Achilles and was constantly throwing herself into dangerous sports, most of them invented by her reckless and irresponsible father.

However, since becoming a teenager, she’s developed a passionate interest in all the stuff she avoided as a pre-teen. My Little Pony, for instance. Can’t get enough of that. Or shrill, bouffant-haired mini-me versions of Kim Kardashian, spending hours talking about blusher and eye shadow. Earlier in the week, she delighted in naming all the different shades in Kendall Jenner’s lipstick range — it took 20 minutes. I begged her to spend the same amount of time memorising the capitals of the world instead, but she just laughed. She was lost to YouTube, parented by a screen. Perhaps my neighbour has the right idea. I certainly admire his fortitude.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH



Spectator Sport Breathtaking and brilliant Roger Alton

Perfection in sport: unattainable, but sometimes you can come close. Moments, people, actions you never tire of watching: Roger Federer's backhand; Virat Kohli's cover drive; Mo Farah's acceleration off the final bend or little Lionel Messi dribbling through a crowded penalty area as if his opponents were shadows; Fred Couples's sensuous golf swing.

Last weekend another moment: the long pass from England's Owen Farrell to Elliot Daly for that decisive try in the final minutes at the Principality Stadium. This 25ft rocket, superbly timed and delayed long enough for Farrell to be in touching distance of the defensive battery, was so quick and flat it left the defence flummoxed. It was perfectly placed for Daly to gather at speed, accelerate and leave Alex Cuthbert for dead. A masterpiece.

Earlier, Farrell had been whacked so hard, and late, by the inexhaustible Welsh No. 8, Ross Moriarty (later bafflingly withdrawn) that the ground seemed to shake. A few years ago Farrell would have sought quick and summary revenge. This time he got up,



The Six Nations is now the most consistently exciting sport on the planet

dry-retched and later laughed: 'Yes he got me there.' A cool dude, and a future England captain if ever I saw one.

That winning try came from an error by Jonathan Davies, whose clearing kick skewed infield into the arms of George Ford. As Davies's kick left his boot, you could hear an audible groan from his commentating namesake. In the press box, Welsh reporters put their heads in their hands: they knew what might happen. But it still needed lightning speed of thought, immense athleticism and courage from Ford, Farrell and Daly to execute. It was a stunning end to a breathtaking, brilliant match; how good to see a golden generation flourishing. England have acquired the ability under Eddie Jones of never quite believing they are going to be beaten. Wales don't quite look like a side who believe they can win.

The Six Nations used to be just an agreeable way of seeing winter into spring. Now it is the most consistently exciting sport on the planet, with the best supporters anywhere; better than the NFL, Premier League, even La Liga. It is producing games of matchless excitement that have totally eclipsed international football (England vs Lithuania, anyone? You must be joking.)

How has this gear-change come about? Partly it is southern hemisphere coaches, especially Jones. Partly it is bonus points that commit teams

to attack. Partly it is excellent refereeing: Moriarty could arguably have been sin-binned for that late smash, but instead the game flowed thrillingly. New tackling rules helped, too — there's a greater chance for an attacking player to make an offload.

The only problem now is how rotten Italy are. Time to build two divisions of northern hemisphere rugby, with promotion and relegation. Italy deserve to have something more to think about than finishing last.

You may have missed India's Ravi Ashwin this week becoming the fastest bowler to reach 250 Test wickets, achieving the feat in his 45th Test, three fewer than Dennis Lillee. Ashwin has a strong claim to be the most effective off-break bowler in cricket history. His now-notorious dismissal of Jonny Bairstow, says my friend Amol Rajan, author of the excellent *Twirlymen*, has a good claim — nearly 25 years on from Shane Warne's magic against Mike Gatting at Old Trafford — to be the ball of this century, and therefore the millennium.

So Joe Root it is: no big surprise. By my reckoning he is the first Yorkshire-born Test captain since 'Sir' Geoffrey Boycott 40 years ago (Michael Vaughan was born in Eccles). How will the boyish-looking but teak-tough new captain shape up? All of God's own county will be watching.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. My husband and I like to go to concerts and recitals but he is an artist with a very annoying habit of sketching the musicians in performance. The scratch of the pencil and his hand movements are distracting and I worry about his annoying other people nearby. Sometimes it is too dark for him to see what he's doing, but not always. When I ask him to stop, he insists no one else minds (even though people have, on occasion, voiced their irritation). What can I do to stop this annoying habit? —S.T., Chirton, Wiltshire

A. Make a point of always buying three tickets rather than two. Give the third ticket as a present to a series of acquaintances unknown to your husband. Your guest should travel separately to the performance and make no attempt to greet you as he takes his seat beside you. The deal is that, in exchange for the free ticket, once the sketching starts he will lean forward to politely signal that he finds it distracting. In this way you can achieve the desired result by proxy while sidestepping any Punch and Judy-style unpleasantness between you and your husband.

Q. My next-door neighbour has the most extremely noisy keys. I live in an apartment block and every time she comes and goes (incredibly frequently) she locks and unlocks all five locks, which

can be heard all the way through my apartment to the living room. When in my bedroom, which is adjacent to the front door, it sounds as if there is a home invasion and someone is coming in at my door. How best, without being rude, to ask her to somehow reduce the noise or perhaps lock fewer locks? —A.M.B., London SW

A. Start by spraying the locks yourself from the outside with WD-40. If this fails to reduce the noise then download baby-crying noises from the internet and play them at full volume for ten minutes each time your neighbour comes home. After two days take flowers next door and apologise as you explain that your occasional baby guest wakes when the locks are turned. You've tried moving him to other

rooms but the noise carries right through the apartment. Coax her to the conclusion that she should have her locks reconditioned and rendered altogether more silent.

Q. I have begun to suffer from insomnia. Too tired to read with a bedside torch, I have discovered LBC's Steve Allen show. This hilarious three hours of extemporisation and commentary on the newspapers hits the spot to dissipate night terrors. I wear headphones so as not to disturb my wife, who sleeps like a log, but these are uncomfortable and if take one out the noise wakes her. How can I resolve this without sleeping separately? —Name and address withheld

A. Single earphones exist and cost from £3.20. Put one in the ear you are not lying on.

Food

American English

Tanya Gold



Ralph's Coffee & Bar is in the Polo Ralph Lauren flagship store on Regent Street. It is rare that fashion admits food exists and when it does, it usually does something insane with it, like when the Berkeley Hotel celebrated fashion week by inventing a shoe biscuit, so you could eat your shoe.

But Ralph Lauren, who dresses Melania Trump because other designers will not — believing that the withholding of couture equals meaningful opposition to tyranny, a position that makes me laugh even as I place my head in the oven — goes beyond couture and into the weird lands of lifestyle. Don't know who you are, but want to pretend that you do? Find a lifestyle brand that approximates who you think you might be, and follow it into a Polo Ralph Lauren coffin.

Polo Ralph Lauren will clad the itinerant international shopper — we are in Regent Street, where brands are countries, with flags — in a purely American fantasy of how aristocratic English people live. *Spectator* readers know that real English aristo-

Polo Ralph Lauren men and women sit at tiny tables. They have lovely hair and shining leather goods

crats shop at Tesco, think Peter Jones is overpriced and do not brush their hair for fear of dislodging small animals that may live there. They couldn't afford to shop at Polo Ralph Lauren even if they wanted to; they would not know a silk tartan cushion if it addressed them by name. The interiors of Balmoral Castle, presumably the inspiration for Lauren's glossy tartans, resemble the innards of a themed hotel that is closed for renovation. Balmoral furniture is a startling orange wood; paint pots are lined against windows in the service block; there is an ornamental stag in the garden.

Even so, how the ideal Polo Ralph Lauren person eats, according to Ralph Lauren, is worth knowing. What plated construct does a construct place inside its mouth? What exactly do toys eat? The answer, at the Ralph Lauren Polo Bar in New York City, a place where, according to the *New York Times*, 'Rihanna and Naomi Campbell sit huddled like sleek and improbably beautiful fillies after a sudden storm', is surprisingly prosaic. It is hamburgers.

First, the London shop: a wide, bright, alien space, freshly painted,



'Dammit, no reception. I'll just tell you instead.'

with handsome men and racks of coats to file them in. The bar hides behind the coats: Narnia, but rich, and you needn't open the wardrobe door yourself. It is a dark-wood fairyland and very clean: brass fittings and horse paintings. This interpretation of St James's clubs, but miniaturised, is so finely wrought, it is, of course, screamingly gay, which is why I don't hate it. It reminds me, very slightly of *The Magic Faraway Tree*, as interpreted by Virgin Atlantic Upper Class.

Polo Ralph Lauren men and women sit at tiny tables, or on banquettes. They have lovely hair and shining leather goods. Their clothes are fiercely ironed; they are advertising hoardings, but small and fleshy; they look heartless and fecund. It has been open just one week: when others come, with Mr Messy tribute hair and battered bags, I suspect they will flee.

Hamburgers for fillies sheltering from storms are absent, due to the Crown Estate's terror of ventilation in newly built kitchens. The menu instead is salads, soups, sandwiches and sun-daes. They are lovely, tiny and precise. It is American food for English people who dress like an American version of English people who do not exist, and the experience of eating it, though pleasant, is slightly unreal. My mild butternut squash soup and careful club-sandwich salad seem to shine at me, like an illusion. I do not know how Lauren made food, which is base, seem so pretty, but I like his fashion food lurking behind coats, even as it has no substance; which is how it should be.

Ralph's Coffee & Bar, Regent Street, London W1B 4JQ, tel: 020 7113 7450.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Rocket

'It is rocket science,' said my husband waving a pinnately lobed leaf snatched from his restaurant salad. He doesn't much like rocket salad and wishes all supplies had perished along with the lettuces of Spain. So as a distraction I tried telling him that rocket leaves were connected with street urchins, caterpillars, caprices and hedgehogs.

The herb *rocket* is older in English than the *sky-rocket*, which appeared no earlier than 1566. The firework *rocket* took its name from *rochetta* in Italian, meaning 'little bobbin', from the similarity in shape. There is a related old word in English, *rock*, which once



meant 'distaff' and is used by historians now to mean 'spindle'. But that is nothing to do with the greenery. Salad *rocket* is related in origin to the Italian *rucola*, by which we have also learnt to call it. The Italian word from which we took *rocket* in the 16th century was *ruchetta*. This was a diminutive of *ruca*, borrowed from the Latin *eruca* — some kind of cabbage. The Americans sometimes call rocket *arugula*, a regional Italian variant of *rucola*.

The Latin word *eruca* also meant 'caterpillar'. It was used in the English of the Douay version of the Bible (1610) with that meaning. The English *urchin*, meaning 'hedgehog', is derived via French from the Latin *ericus*, said by philologists to be related to *eruca*. In medieval English Bibles the form *yrchoun* or *urchuon* was used for 'hedgehog'. A 15th-century cookery book recommends sticking almonds into pork to make it bristle like a hedgehog or *yrchon* — I might try it. The French form *hérisson* meant a spiked revolving beam as part of a fortification. Burns called a hedgehog a *hurcheon*.

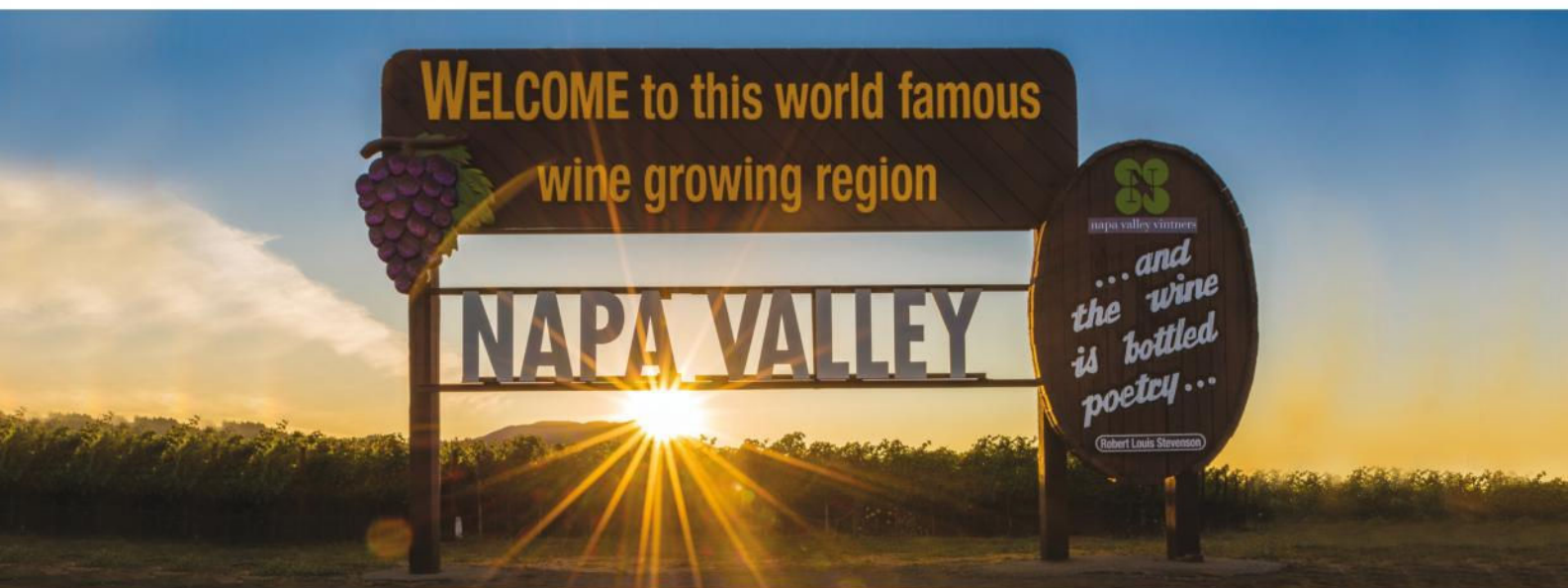
Urchins, like *kids*, also signified children, hence *street urchin*.

These bristly hedgehogs derived from an ancient Indo-European root that gave the *er*-element in Latin and in Greek *cher* and *echinos*. The Italian for 'hedgehog', *riccio*, combined with *capo*, 'head', gave *capriccio*, signifying 'hedgehog-head', bristling as from a fright. Under the influence of a completely separate word, *capro*, the frisky goat, *capriccio* came to mean a lighter jump of the mind or *caprice*. But despite all this distraction, my husband still hadn't eaten up his rocket.

— Dot Wordsworth

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Winemaker's lunch with Cain Vineyard & Winery



Join us in the *Spectator* boardroom on Friday 17 March for the next in this year's series of *Spectator* Winemaker Lunches, with Christopher Howell, wine-grower and general manager of Cain Vineyard & Winery in California's Napa Valley.

The Napa Valley is America's leading wine region, home to some exceptionally enticing wines, and Chris will bring with him a fine selection including examples from such glittering producers as Shafer Vineyards, Rutherford Hill, Farella Vineyards and Winery, Darioush, Hoopes and Chris's own Cain Vineyard & Winery.

Over a four-course lunch provided by Forman & Field, Chris will share his observations and insights from nearly three decades in Napa, and he and his wines should prove beyond doubt that this region has plenty more to offer wine lovers than just Cabernet Sauvignon. Book now to avoid disappointment.

The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP

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