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THE SPECTATOR

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May's third way

James Forsyth on the Prime Minister's course between nationalism and globalism

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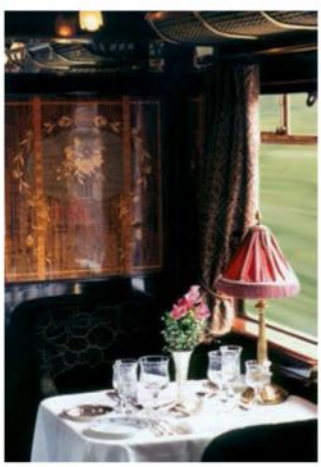

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THE SPECTATOR
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Lost boys

For a body supposedly committed to eliminating inequality between the sexes, the Women and Equalities Select Committee don't exactly lead from the front. Only three of the 11 members are men. To some, this will be a welcome corrective to the still male-dominated House of Commons. To others (such as Philip Davies, one of the three male members), it is a sign of how, in Westminster, the cause of equality is narrowly focused on the interests of white professional women. There is not a single ethnic minority representative on the committee.

This week, committee chair Maria Miller announced her 'deep disappointment' that the government has not adopted their proposals on closing the gender pay gap. They are not satisfied with new rules coming into force in April which will compel all companies with more than 250 employees to publish data comparing the remuneration of male and female employees. They wanted that duty extended to firms with 50 or more employees, as well as a right for anyone to work flexible hours unless an employer can prove a pressing reason not to allow this. They wanted employees to have a right to 'care leave' of up to six weeks and more shared parental leave.

The government has rejected these suggestions, but not because the Prime Minister has gone back on her promise to boost the interests of women in the workplace. While a government has to face all kinds of competing demands, the Women and Equalities Select Committee, by contrast, is increasingly coming to resemble a single-issue pressure group. It cannot see, for example, that there is an economic cost to regulations. Imposing yet more bureaucratic duties upon small businesses, however well these duties might be intentioned, detracts from their ability to create well-paid jobs.

For years, various forms of statistical chicanery have been used to exaggerate the gender pay gap. The point most often concealed is that it has been virtually eliminated for anyone born after 1975. This is cause for celebration: the idea that a woman should be paid less than a man for the same work is repugnant and indefensible. Happily, the vast majority of British employers agree. For older women there is still ground to be made up. But any sober assessment of the pay gap needs to take in its virtual absence among the under-40s.

Such sober assessments are in short supply: it's far easier to use crude figures to generate headlines. PricewaterhouseCoopers this week published a report claiming that the UK has a gender pay gap of 17 per cent. This figure was created by ignoring the fact that men tend to work more hours than women. When, like the Office of National Statistics, you compare the hourly rates of pay, the average gap across all age groups is 9 per cent.

What is it about our schools which is failing to engage boys, and how can it be corrected?

Even that doesn't tell you the whole story. Among 22- to 29-year-olds, the gap is usually negative, with women earning more than men over much of the past decade. For women in their thirties, it is a negligible 1.5 per cent less. The problem that remains is for women in their forties (13 per cent) and fifties (16 per cent). Factor in career breaks for childraising and the problem persists. So yes, there is still work to be done.

But among the younger generation a new issue is emerging. For those not yet in the workplace, the grave equality problem comes in the form of a school attainment gap. There is no biological reason why boys and girls should not do just as well at school, fare just as well in exams and stand the same chance of thriving at university. But today, gender inequality in school is far worse than in the 1960s — except this time it's the boys who are suffering. For three decades now, they have been less likely than girls to get decent GCSE results. They are now 27 per cent less likely to apply to university and 30 per cent more likely to drop out if admitted. Men now make up barely a third of law graduates, and two in five medicine graduates.

A select committee that champions equality ought to be concerned about this growing disparity in educational attainment. What is it about our schools which is failing to engage boys, and how can it be corrected? To her credit, one who has paid attention to the underachievement of boys in education is Mary Curnock Cook, retiring chief executive of UCAS. She points to schools where the only male staff member is the janitor, and asks about the lack of male role models at a time when 15-year-olds are more likely to have a smartphone in their pocket than a father in their home. As she recently pointed out, if the university gender imbalance were reversed there would be no end of inquiries and initiatives to address the problem.

Harriet Harman's memoir, reviewed on p. 35, recalls an era when the feminist agenda was synonymous with the struggle for equality. But slowly, these two notions are coming apart. The pay of the over-40s is a cause for concern, but the educational attainment gap of under-20s is another. Anyone genuinely concerned about equality in Britain should be worried about both.

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THE WEEK

BOOKS & ARTS

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LIFE

All election addresses should contain a short line on every page saying, 'We apologise to Liverpool'
Charles Moore, p9

Every summer in Thrace, people drive across borders to see their grandparents' houses. They are generally welcomed by locals, who know how it feels
Simon Kuper, p28

Tip for women considering a career in S & M: carry nail scissors at all times in case he gets inextricably tangled in a leather harness
Lloyd Evans, p49

CONTRIBUTORS

Andrew J. Bacevich is a retired US army colonel whose books include *America's War for the Greater Middle East*. He assesses Donald Trump's second national security adviser on p. 16.

Mary Dejevsky has worked as a foreign correspondent in Moscow, Paris and Washington, and a columnist for the *Independent*. She writes about dealing with her husband's Parkinson's on p. 18.

Simon Kuper is a columnist for the *Financial Times*. His books include *Football Against the Enemy* and *Why England Lose*. On p. 28, he contemplates border territory.

Richard Holmes's books include *Shelley: the Pursuit*, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* and *How We Took to the Air*. Our arts special begins, on p. 40, with his reflections on electricity.

Henry Jeffreys is the author of *Empire of Booze*, a history of Britain through alcohol. He writes in praise of Wetherspoons on p. 52.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK

Home

Theresa May, the Prime Minister, sat on the steps of the throne, as a privy counsellor, watching the Lords debate the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill. The Supreme Court upheld the rule that Britons must earn more than £18,600 before their husband or wife from outside the European Economic Area can settle in Britain. Rebecca Steinfeld and Charles Keidan failed (on the grounds that they are of different sexes) in their Court of Appeal application to be allowed to enter into a civil partnership. The BBC said that in 28 out of 44 areas in England subject to NHS 'sustainability and transformation plans', hospital services would be reduced. The BBC is to spend £30 million a year on a new channel in Scotland. The BBC also investigated complaints that dialogue in its new drama series *SS-GB* was inaudible: 'We take audibility seriously,' it said.

Government finances recorded a £9.4 billion surplus in January, a touch up on January 2016, and with borrowing at £49.3 billion in the current financial year, it seemed likely to run up a deficit less than the £68 billion forecast. HSBC reported a fall in annual profits of 62 per cent to £5.7 billion. Lloyds Bank announced its highest profits for a decade at £4.2 billion. Kraft Heinz abandoned a £115 billion offer to buy Unilever, its Anglo-Dutch competitor. PSA, the French owners of Peugeot and Citroën, expressed interest in buying General Motors' European operations, including Vauxhall, which has works at Luton and Ellesmere Port employing 4,500. Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, said that drivers of older, more polluting cars would have to pay £10 to use them in central London. Shops, hospitals and gentlemen's clubs faced rises in business rates of up to 400 per cent from 1 April.

Kamran Sabir Hussain, the imam of a mosque in Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, appeared in court accused of influencing his congregation to carry out terrorist acts in support of the Islamic State. The Rt Revd Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry, said he had pressed the wrong button and thus voted against a report by the House of Bishops of the General Synod maintaining the position that marriage in church should remain the lifelong union of a man and a woman; the report failed to win support in the Synod because the House of Clergy voted by 100-93 against it. Lincoln City became the first non-league team in 103 years to reach the FA Cup quarter-finals, and will meet Arsenal, which beat Sutton, another non-league team. Sutton's reserve goalkeeper, Wayne Shaw, resigned after a bookmaker had taken bets at 8-1 on his eating a pie on camera, which he did.

Abroad

Iraqi government forces began a new assault on the western part of Mosul, still held by the Islamic State. A Mancunian, Abu-Zakariya al-Britani (formerly Ronald Fiddler), aged 50, reported to have received £1 million from the British government on his release from Guatanamo Bay, set off a suicide car bomb at an Iraqi army base near Mosul, said the Islamic State. The bodies of 87 African migrants were washed ashore at Zawiya on the Libyan coast. Elor Azaria, an Israeli soldier, was jailed for 18 months for the manslaughter of a wounded Palestinian who had just stabbed another soldier. Three people in France were arrested on suspicion of plotting a terrorist attack. Police in Barcelona arrested a Swede after opening fire at a lorry loaded with butane gas canisters speeding on the wrong side of the road to the port.

President Donald Trump of the United States named Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster as his national security adviser to replace Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, who had been sacked after 24 days. President Ilham Aliyev, who has ruled Azerbaijan since 2003, appointed his wife Mehriban as first vice-president. The American aircraft carrier Carl Vinson, with supporting warships, began 'routine operations' in the South China Sea, where China has been constructing artificial islands with airstrips. Gibraltar seized a 12,600-ton yacht with 300ft masts belonging to Andrey Melnichenko, a Russian industrialist against whom its German builder has lodged a claim for £13 million in fees.

A state of famine was declared by the UN in parts of war-torn South Sudan, the first declared anywhere since 2011. Vitaly Churkin, Russia's permanent representative to the UN since 2006, died aged 64. The North Island of New Zealand suffered a wave of thefts of garden ornaments, thought to have been stolen by methamphetamine addicts. CSH

DIARY

Julie Burchill

More than 20 years ago, I left my fast life in London for a rather more relaxed one in Brighton and Hove. I never dreamt I could enjoy it more till all the business with the trains started up a few years back. The chaos at Southern Railway — which has seen commuters lose their livelihoods and property prices all along the London–Brighton line plunge, and culminated last summer in the resignation of the rail minister Claire Perry — has effectively put an end to the one thing I disliked about my seaside city. Namely, that it's too close to That London. I never minded mates coming down to visit — all the better for showing off my beloved playground. The trouble came when they expected one to reciprocate. I tried pleading agoraphobia for a while, but then I was reported in the press as going all the way to Ibiza for a gay wedding, so that was out. Now, however, I merely have to say 'I'd *love* to come to your first night/recital/private view — but, my dear, *the trains*!' and no one presses you further. Of course, I wouldn't have wished all this bother on anyone — but as it's happening anyway, I might as well make the best of it. And I now have the perfect excuse to leave Sussex only via Gatwick, en route to Tel Aviv – which takes around the same amount of time as it can to get to London these days.

Everyone is London seems to be fuming all the time — although, to be fair, fuming has become the default setting of our time. Historically, it's the sexually repressed, swivel-eyed *Daily Mail* reader who fumes hardest, but ever since last June 23, when the glorious chaotic dawn of Brexit was revealed, liberals have been fuming up a storm with all the parasexual frustration of fat-fingered One Direction fans tweeting hatred about the paternity of Cheryl's baby. Tempering, tantruming and thweatening to thwcream till they're sick, it's hard not to feel that what's making them the most angry isn't the alleged racism of Brexiteers or the alleged financial ruin waiting just around the corner. No, the reason the Remnants hate us so much is because after lifetimes of flattering themselves that they're progressive, adventurous and daring, they now stand revealed

as a veritable mothers' meeting of doom-mongering, curtain-twitching, tut-tutting stick-in-the-muds. The pathetic petulance which has come from the Remnants in the face of our victory stems from the fact that many of those who prided themselves on being rebels were, actually, just a differently styled part of the status quo-embracing establishment all along. And it is for robbing them of their illusions about themselves that we Brexiteers will not be forgiven.

I'm especially enjoying the havoc which Brexit has wrought on families and friends. Isn't disagreeing with people, and forming new alliances, one of the most enjoyable parts of the big scary ride we call life? If you want to avoid conflict, go and live in a cupboard. A charming lady braves the rail chaos to lunch with me; not only pretty and clever, she has been thrown out of her north London book group for liking on Facebook a pro-Brexit *Spectator* piece by me! I gaze at her with something like adoration. She thinks it would make a brilliant play. Am I interested in co-writing? 'Waiter, champagne!'

When I'm not plotting my comeback and decimating book groups, I work at a charity shop and I must say it's about the best fun you can have without getting paid. Our donations run from bandbox-fresh designer gear to offerings so rank they have to be handled using surgical gloves. But the best ever, and one which I only have to think about to howl with glee, was the donation of a tooth in an envelope. The envelope had 'Tooth' written neatly on it. Those inverted commas get me every time.

Do you see yourself as a tragic figure or a comic one? To paraphrase Clemenceau, 'Not to see oneself as a tragedy at 20 is proof of want of heart — not to see oneself as a comedy at 50 is proof of want of head.' I'm 57 now, and I realised that I was a fully fledged joke one day in 2008, after my best friend's mother's funeral, when I got really drunk and ended up vomiting in broad daylight in the grounds of Brighton Pavilion while a Montessori group of organically grown kiddies were shepherded away from me by their disgusted teachers. As I lay flat out on the grass, the Pavilion danced a mad mazurka and my friend wiped the vomit from my funereal finery. 'But I'm meant to be looking after you!' I cried, before vomiting again. That day was when I first got an inkling that far from being a tragic figure — something a lot of us fall hard for in our teenage years — I was actually a comic one. I am a joke! As are a lot of people — especially those who think that they're tragic figures. Accept this and you'll be halfway to happiness.

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THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

Last month, at Policy Exchange, I met a charming, quiet American general called H.R. McMaster. In conversation, I was struck by his zeal for Nato and his concern wherever the alliance is now weakest, as in Turkey. In his speech to the thinktank, he said clearly that Russia and China are attempting to 'collapse' the post-1945 and post-Cold War 'political, economic and security order', with unconventional forces hiding behind conventional ones, subversion, disinformation, propaganda, economic actions and 'proxies' such as organised crime networks. The situation had echoes of 1914, and the risk of a great-power war was the highest for 70 years. He emphasised that, 'despite public comments by our President', the need to combat these threats by having strong alliances was 'inescapable'. This week, Lt Gen McMaster replaced the pro-Russian Mike Flynn after his brief, turbulent stay as Trump's national security adviser. The appointment looks like a belated outburst of sanity.

It is almost always unwise to postpone the introduction of a big, scheduled tax change, but often tempting at the time. George Osborne, when Chancellor of the Exchequer in the coalition government, postponed the revaluation of business rates, when it fell due two years ago, for obvious political reasons. So now it is happening, and it hurts more. The current rates are based on the rental value of business properties in 2010. Since then, the scene is transformed. The internet has called the whole concept of the ordinary physical shop into question. Values have vastly altered and the political problem — as with the poll tax in the 1980s — is that some rises are huge and losers are more vocal than gainers. The political assumption always was that you could get away with changes to these rates because businesses have no votes. But it turns out that the 'just managing' classes lauded by Mrs May are feeling aggrieved. After all, rates — unlike corporation tax — are payable whether or not you make a profit, and many small businesses aren't doing so. The rates are also payable 100 per cent (again thanks to Mr Osborne) on empty properties, which is why you see so many

charity shops, which get an 80 per cent discount, in run-down high streets. The difficulty for the government is that the business rate raises so much money — £28 billion a year, only slightly less than that raised by council tax. Philip Hammond will not want to imperil this revenue, let alone devote mental energy to business tax reform. But the fact is that, in the age without filing cabinets, the British economy needs ever fewer square feet of commercial property per pound of GDP. So he is seeking the same golden egg from a thinner goose.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse, which is currently chaired by Alexis Jay, has an entire 'strand' devoted to the case of Lord Janner of Braunstone. This is strange because his is the only 'strand' in the inquiry which concerns an individual, and because Lord Janner is dead, and because no sexual abuse has ever been proved against him, so the inquiry falsely implies an established guilt. It is also problematic, because a civil case is being brought against Lord Janner's estate by his alleged victims, some of which will be argued in court next month. Can he get a fair hearing? Besides, if the civil case finds nothing against him, why would he be part of the inquiry? The overall purpose of the inquiry, as restated by Professor Jay, is to 'examine closely whether institutions have taken seriously their responsibility to protect children…' Despite its loss of three chairs and several lawyers, the inquiry is not allowed to admit its lack of an overarching theme and re-form better defined, because the person who thought of it was the then Home Secretary, Theresa May. But when it is finally over, an inquiry into the inquiry would be interesting. It would ask whether institutions have taken seriously their responsibility to act according to justice.

As Paul Nuttall, the Ukip leader, has recently discovered, there usually comes a point in a British political career when you have to apologise to Liverpool. The origins of this custom are obscure, rather like the rule that the Cap of Maintenance must accompany the Sovereign to the State Opening of Parliament, but it must not be questioned. It is no good asking why Liverpool should receive more apologies than, for instance, Runcorn or Milton Keynes: you must just say sorry. Rather than having to stammer an inconvenient 'mea culpa' at a by-election it would be more sensible to get your apology in first. I suggest that all election addresses and other political products should automatically contain a short line on every page saying 'We apologise to Liverpool', like notices that announce 'We are an Equal Opportunities employer' or 'May contain nuts'.

On the subject of equal opportunities, I notice that the new rules for the appointment of Supreme Court judges will apply what is called the 'Equal Merit' provision. This means that when two candidates are assessed as being equal in the qualities required, the Commission may use the provision to discriminate in favour of 'diversity'. The Commission will 'consider race and gender only at this stage'. The sole race categories permitted are 'white and BAME' (black, Asian and minority-ethnic, where 'minority-ethnic' means non-white). Is it actually imaginable that, in a job of such refinement and importance, two candidates would offer nothing to choose between them except their race or sex? Will enough people of the necessary seniority apply if they believe they may be turned down because they are male and white? The rumour is that Lady Hale, the deputy President of the court, will be its next President. If so, it will be interesting to know whether she got the post through the Equal Merit provision.

In Parliament this week, the Green leader, Caroline Lucas, complained that Donald Trump had the 'effrontery' to question climate science. A revealingly haughty choice of word. 'Effrontery' is inseparable from democracy.

The new third Way

Theresa May's path between globalism and nationalism

JAMES FORSYTH

Forget left and right — the new divide in politics is between nationalists and globalists. Donald Trump's team believe that he won because he was the America First candidate, defying the old rules of politics. His nationalist rhetoric on everything from trade to global security enabled him to flip traditionally Democratic, blue-collar states and so to defeat that personification of the post-war global order, Hillary Clinton.

The presidential election in France is being fought on these lines, too. Marine Le Pen is the nationalist candidate, a hybrid of the hard right and the far left. She talks of quitting the European single currency and of bringing immigration down to 10,000 a year, while cursing international capitalism with an almost socialist fervour. Her likely second round opponent, the ex-finance minister Emmanuel Macron (profiled on p. 12), is the globalist candidate: a former Rothschild banker who believes in a eurozone budget, the Schengen borderless area and the need for France to deregulate.

Theresa May's strategy is designed for a nationalist *vs* globalist era. Her response isn't to embrace either extreme, but to try to chart a third way between them. She wants to be the politician who squares the circle, who makes globalisation work for those who feel left behind by the current system. Nationalistic enough to speak to her country's concerns; globalist enough to make Brexit Britain a champion of free trade and an international success.

At first blush, it might seem surprising that it is a British Conservative Prime Minister who is attempting to tackle the problems of globalisation. Since Margaret Thatcher's time, the caricature of the British centre-right has been that it is happy to let the market rip. But this is a shallow reading of British conservatism. Indeed, May is attempting to tackle these problems precisely because she is a British Conservative.

The genius of the British political system is that it is more responsive to popular concern than any other form of government in the world. This is why our Parliament has so many anachronisms: an upper chamber with unelected hereditary peers; a state opening where Black Rod summons the Commons to the Lords to hear the monarch while a government whip is held hostage at Buckingham Palace — it's what happens when you haven't had a revolution for more than 300 years. The British system has, instead, evolved through the ages. Its responsiveness and adaptability explain how this country has avoided both extremist governments and powerful populist parties, and why a House of Commons that was overwhelmingly in favour of Remain has adjusted so quickly to the vote to Leave.

There is no shortage of concern about how the economic system is operating; the wealthiest have had by far the best of the post-crash recovery. So, in true British fashion, the May government is attempting to respond to this concern. And its response is distinctly conservative too. May likes to point out, as she did in *The Spectator*'s Christmas interview, that since Edmund Burke, conservatives have believed 'that if you value something, if you want to preserve it, there will be times when you have to be prepared to reform it and to change'. This is the paradox of conservatism: you preserve through change, and sometimes radical change.

This is the key to understanding May: she isn't trying to end globalisation, but to save it.

May thinks that we have reached that moment with globalisation and 21st-century capitalism. At Davos last month, she quoted Burke again, reminding the gathered global elite that 'a state without the means of some change is without the means of its own conservation'. She declared that this 'great Conservative principle — change in order to conserve — is more important than ever in today's complex geopolitical environment'.

It is more important than ever because of the growth of aggressive nationalism. If their concerns are not addressed, more and more Western voters will turn to aggressive nationalist leaders. Add to that an international system already having to deal with a revanchist Russia and a rising China and the global order starts to look unstable.

Alarmingly, too many leaders want to respond to these concerns either by trying to ignore them or by doubling down in defence of the current system. The European political class might think the nation state is a thing of the past but lots of voters don't. May grasps that Britons look to the nation state for security — in all senses. If the public believe the nation state has their back, they are much more likely to accept the creative destruction inherent in a liberal, open economy.

In her conference speech in October, May made a point of mocking those who find 'ordinary working-class' people's 'patriotism distasteful'. It was a far cry from the days when David Cameron's spin doctor Andy Coulson had to fight to get the Union Flag back on to the stage at Tory conference. The globalists also got a tongue-lashing when, in the most memorable line of her premiership so

far, May declared: 'If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere.' This line was a calculated, and brutal, rebuke to Davos man. It caused great offence in certain quarters; one grand media panjandrum went to see May to complain about it to her face. But May's real aim was to show the voters that she loathed cheating bankers, Philip Green and other private jet users just as much as they do. From this position, the calculation went, voters would trust her to try to make globalisation and markets work for them rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater and opting for full-blown populism and protectionism.

This is the key to understanding May: she isn't trying to fight globalisation but to save it. She really does want Britain to be a global champion of free trade. She has virtually nothing in common with Le Pen or Trump. When she said at Davos that she is 'determined to stand up for free markets, free trade and globalisation', she wasn't just telling the audience what they wanted to hear.

Those around her point out that changing things in order to conserve them has been a hallmark of May's career. As party chairman, she told the Tories that they were seen as 'the nasty party' and needed to change if they were to win again. In government, she told the police that they needed to change to maintain public trust and win over minority communities. But as she knows, globalisation is a far bigger thing to try and reform than the Tory party or the police: by definition, it crosses national boundaries. Make life too difficult for businesses here, and they'll simply move elsewhere.

In No. 10, they recognise that what they are attempting is of a different magnitude than anything May has taken on previously. But there is confidence that national policy can have a real impact. 'Global forces are not so powerful that domestic measures can't make a significant difference,' one senior figure tells me — though her team acknowledge that change won't happen immediately. They argue that those who feel left behind 'know better than anyone' that these problems are complex and won't be solved overnight; and that what these voters want, as the necessary reforms work their way through, is an 'understanding that the government gets their sense that the system isn't working for them'.

In Downing Street they believe that their industrial strategy, education reforms, changes to corporate governance and plans to address workers' rights in the so-called 'gig economy' will, in the medium to long term, begin to remedy these problems. Whether she's right or not, May's focus on such issues is striking. She is Britain's first true post-crash Prime Minister.

If this is the new politics, it is slightly ironic that a 60-year-old is the trendsetter. May is ten years older than David Cameron, but she is politically more a product of our times than he was. Most of Cameron's thinking had taken place before the financial crisis hit. He was preparing to govern in an era in which, in Oliver Letwin's phrase, politics was socio-centric, not econo-centric. After the crash, he was having to work out on the hoof how to respond to the challenges that it had thrown up. May has taken office having had plenty of time to reflect on the events of 2007-2008 and how they influenced our politics. Indeed, perhaps just as important as the crash — and the problems it exposed with the financial system — has been the nature of the recovery. The UK has experienced a 'jobs miracle' but other aspects of the recovery have been disappointing. Between 2007 and 2015, real wages declined by more than 10 per cent. Home ownership rates have also fallen by more than 10 per cent.

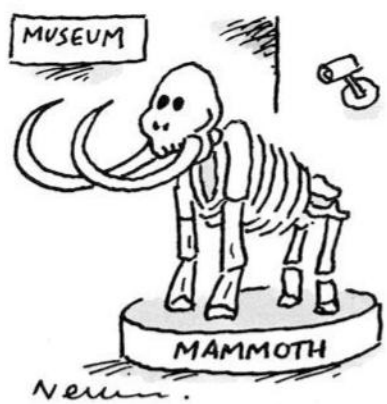
It is too early to tell if May's third way will deliver. But the public seem keen on it. The Tories lead Labour by, depending on your pollster, 18 or 16 points. Obviously a lot of this is down to Jeremy Corbyn. But it is worth noting that May is viewed considerably more favourably than her party, particularly in regions where the Tories have struggled: Scotland and the north of England.

It is hard to deny that a new style of politics is needed if the forces of protection and populism are to be halted. In Britain, France and America, less than half of voters see globalisation as a force for good. Indeed, Trump's election victory becomes much less surprising when you consider that per capita GDP growth in the US has averaged less than 1 per cent a year since the turn of the millennium. In the post-war era, it grew at more than twice that rate.

If mainstream politicians don't — or can't — respond to these concerns, then it will be the extremes that benefit. Just look at the eurozone, where the refusal of the established parties to abandon their support for the single currency as it is currently constituted—despite the economic misery it has caused—has been a boon for fringe parties. In Italy, the Five Star Movement, headed by a former comedian, has a growing chance of leading the next government. In France, Marine Le Pen is on course to score more than 40 per cent in the second round of the French presidential election.

Aggressive nationalist governments lead to disaster: Kaiser Wilhelm made sure that an earlier era of globalisation was brought to a dramatic halt by the first world war. Who would feel safe in an era when four of the five permanent seats on the UN security council are occupied by Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump?

To save globalisation it is now necessary to reform it. If May feels that quoting Burke is too Anglophone, she might want to remind her fellow leaders of Tancredi's advice in *The Leopard*: 'If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.' They must heed this wisdom. To leave the field clear for aggressive nationalists would be a historic mistake. But clinging to a mid-1990s globalist politics would be doing precisely that.



'If Tony Blair can make a comeback, there's hope for us all!'

The Duty of Trees

The trees lining our road
are trying to become a wood.
Their roots extend towards each other
like great bunions pushing to the surface;

their branches reach out and prosper
in the breath of exhausts.
Now they are shedding their golden leaves
to enrich the earth and further their ambitions;

but the road sweeper comes, with his enormous
broom, to remind them they are municipal –
that their duty is to shade cars
and carry blurred photographs of lost cats.

— *Connie Bensley*

L'anti-Trump

Can the whizz-kid of French politics win?

FREDDY GRAY

If you believe the hype, Emmanuel Macron is *l'anti-Trump*. He is what the international centre-left, reeling from the shocks of Brexit and the US election and fearful of a victory for Marine Le Pen in France, is crying out for: a politician who can win again. He is only 39 years old, handsome and radical sounding. He's not a career politico; he used to work as a banker for the Rothschilds (everybody loves them). He wears sharp suits and he's written a book called *Révolution*.

Better still, he has a buzzing movement behind him: his 'En Marche!' (Let's go!) campaign has excited trendy progressives. He is not bogged down with formal connections to the loathed establishment. Surely he could beat Le Pen to the French presidency in the second-round vote on 7 May? Surely?

This week Macron came to London (France's sixth city, in terms of number of French residents). At Methodist Central Hall he addressed a crowd of 3,500 mostly young *Londoniens* and the atmosphere was almost religious. It felt like a spiritual revival seminar for depressed Europhiles. Nick Clegg sat in the front row, looking for inspiration. Behind him lots of beautiful and well-dressed French millennials beamed at each other and chanted 'Macron! Macron!' Madonna's 'Like a Prayer' was played. On a screen above the stage, pink messages flashed up saying 'Partagez' (Share) and 'Adhérents' (Members).

Macron began by mentioning Boris Johnson and the crowd booed and whistled at the mayor turned Brexiteer. 'Never boo! Leave that to those who have no hope and no plans! We don't boo,' he said, and the crowd clapped and cheered.

Is Macron Europe's Obama, or France's belated answer to Tony Blair? He certainly speaks like a Blair 2.0 — he starts his English sentences with a pally 'Look…'. He has charisma and he stares at people intensely when he shakes their hands.

Macron may be cheesy, but he excites progressives precisely because he is unapologetic about his progressivism. He thinks, for instance, that David Cameron lost the referendum because he was not 'aggressive' enough. 'I respect him and his team,' he said at a press conference on Tuesday, 'but they didn't defend the Remain at all — they defended a "Yes, but", which is not the best way to win against "No". And at the end of the day they lost… if you are shy you are dead in the current environment.' As for Hillary Clinton, he adds, she lost because her campaign 'was not very clear and I would say not as clear at Bill Clinton's'.

If he becomes France's president, Macron promises to be tough towards Brexit Britain. He insists that the EU's four freedoms (of people, capital, goods and services) cannot be abrogated. He will try to lure UK-based businesses to France by simplifying and liberating French tax and regulatory systems. This threatening talk thrills told-you-so

Remainers. 'The execution of the Brexit has to be compliant with our interests and the European interests. On financial passports, for instance, there is no access to the single market without contribution.' Phwoar! Take that, Dan Hannan!

'What is fascinating,' he says, 'is that those who should be liberal say now it's impossible to protect and defend a liberal approach.' He insists he is 'proud' to be pro-liberalisation, pro-welfare and pro-globalisation.

While populists are blowing up the orthodoxies on acceptable opinions, Macron is defiantly PC. Last week he found himself in trouble with the anti-PC police after he called France's colonial history a 'crime against humanity'. In London he said the far-right had 'manipulated the statement', but he did not retract it. I asked him if he thought British colonialism was also criminal and he said yes: 'All of us have to look very carefully at our pasts.' He added that the British 'have a much more multicultural approach... but at the end of the day we... [all] promoted some legislation which didn't respect human integrity and equality of rights and so we have to deal with it.'

Macron is easily caricatured as a cipher, a technocrat posing as a radical, an insider's outsider, a revolutionary who wants to prop up the global elite. He has, as Patrick Marnham noted in this magazine, powerful supporters behind his seemingly grassroots campaign. The Front National's Florian Philippot calls him 'globalisation personified' and such a label might stick.

Ironically, Macron's most compelling argument is a patriotic one. Theresa May believes she can navigate a British course between globalism and nationalism. Macron believes France's exceptionalism will make it globalist. Sailing headfirst into the populist winds, he says he can win because his country is different. 'I do believe that France, by definition, doesn't do the same thing as the others… when extremes (anti-Europe, anti-globalisation) win elections I think that's probably the best moment for France to do the opposite.' France, he says, is 'contrarian': 'We don't have the same political cycle.'

France has never had its equivalent of Britain's New Labour. Nicolas Sarkozy tried to hack at red tape from the right and failed. Hollande failed from the left. Macron promises to be more radical from the centre. He says his economic reforms will unleash the power of the French aspiration. He told the French Londoners he was fed up of hearing from start-up entrepeneurs on the Eurostar that they'd had to move to Britain because of France's suffocating regulatory system.

But France has not succumbed to liberal capitalism precisely because it is contrarian and therefore resistant to Anglo-Saxon globalisation. Macron may be the right man for Channel-hoppers and other socially mobile groups, but does he speak to La France Profonde? When he says of the French, 'If we don't love success, the people who want success will go elsewhere,' the striving bourgeoisie may cheer. But worse-off voters in Lyon and Le Var do not. For all Macron's hip appeal, France's leading party among young voters is still the Front National.

It is a common complaint that Macron's campaign offers no substance beyond Blairite razzmatazz and bold-yet-vague promises of reforms. One of his staff this week acknowledged this and said he was about to unveil something 'really credible and serious, and then we'll have a revolution'. Until he does, the doubts will only grow. As one London-based Frenchman I spoke to put it, 'Does he have a programme? Or is he just surfing on the wave of emptiness of the French political environment, hoping nobody will notice?'

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BAROMETER

Big league

Lincoln City became the first non-league club since **Queens Park Rangers** in 1914 to win a place in the FA Cup quarter-finals. But what happened in 1914?
— There were only 40 league clubs and QPR won a bye through the early rounds.
— They drew 2-2 with **Bristol City** before winning 2-0 in a replay.
— They beat **Swansea** and **Birmingham** (2-1 each) to reach the quarter-finals, where **Liverpool** beat them 2-1.
— Liverpool lost the final 1-0 to **Burnley**, the team Lincoln beat last weekend.
— That final was the last held at the Crystal Palace, which had been its venue since 1895.

Mega mergers

Unilever rejected a £115 billion takeover offer from **Kraft Heinz**. What happened after huge mergers that did go through?
—**Vodafone** paid £112 billion for German telecoms giant **Mannesmann** in 2000 but suffered hefty related losses.
— **RBS** paid £49 billion for Dutch bank **ABN Amro** in 2007, leading to its emergency bailout by the government.
— **AOL** paid $165 billion (then £82 billion) for **Time Warner** in 2000. It was a disaster and they demerged in 2009.
— **Kraft Heinz** was itself merged less than two years ago. In July 2015 the combined company was worth $46 billion and its share price was $77. This week it was $96.

Raising questions

The government proposed letting companies use the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) instead of the Retail Prices Index (RPI) as a basis for rises in defined-benefit pension schemes. What would a pension starting at £10,000 a year be worth now?

RETIREMENT	RPU RISE	CPI RISE
5 years ago	**£11,155**	**£10,718**
10 years ago	**£13,169**	**£12,580**
15 years ago	**£15,326**	**£13,758**
20 years ago	**£17,195**	**£14,653**
25 years ago	**£19,579**	**£16,514**

Source: ONS

Going rates

A controversial business rates revaluation will give some High Street shops larger bills and some Amazon distribution centres lower ones. How much does it cost to set up a small shop?

BUSINESS	SQ FT	RENT (P.A.)	RATES
Takeaway, GRIMSBY	350	£3,500	**£0**
Hair salon, ENFIELD	400	£5,500	**£600**
Grocery, BATTERSEA	850	£26,000	**£800**
Café, FITZROVIA	763	£19,000	**£6,200**
Lights shop, BATH	1,120	£30,000	**£9,000**
Bookie, MIDS'BORO	2,150	£37,000	**£16,000**

Source: Zoopla, Valuation Office Agency

Against Queen Camilla

The Prince of Wales is campaigning, with skill and discretion, to crown his consort one day. It's still wrong

MELANIE McDONAGH

How would you feel about a Queen Camilla, as in the wife of King Charles? Personally I'd be dead against, for reasons I'll bore you with later, but what matters is how the nation feels. Because the Prince of Wales very much wants Camilla to be queen when he becomes king.

As has been reported elsewhere, there's now a veritable ops department at Clarence House — jovially called 'QC' by its members — who are responsible for ensuring that the middle class is prepared for just this outcome. Actually, that's probably overegging it. Seems QC is more of a concept than a war cabinet, but also that if you're not with the programme, you don't last long in Clarence House.

Trouble is, this isn't a good year for the project, formal or informal. It's the 20th anniversary of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, and you know what that means: a year-long reminder of the existence of the woman who was, is, the great impediment to the Queen Camilla project, indeed who was the living impediment to the relationship between Charles and Camilla even before her untimely death.

To crown Camilla queen would be to suggest that adultery doesn't matter, if you persist long enough

So, we've got the exhibition at Kensington Palace of *Diana in Fashion* — where she really shone, for she was, whatever else you say about her, lovely — and the timely reissue of biographies, notably that by Sally Bedell Smith of Prince Charles, which did him no favours, and, still to come, whopping retrospectives for the anniversary by every British newspaper and broadcaster, and most American and Australian ones. Admittedly, it is only those who were around 20 years ago and who can remember the seismic effect of the death of the princess for whom all this matters, but there are a lot of us.

It's a generational thing. Young people aren't much exercised by royalty (though fond of the Queen), by titles or by marriage generally — but for those old enough to have been Princess Diana's contemporaries, the reminder of her existence is oddly moving. So it's not an ideal time for the prince, for Camilla and for those who want to see Camilla named queen in due course, rather than given the less loaded title of princess consort.

Foremost among them is Charles, rather than the Duchess of Cornwall herself. 'This matters hugely to him,' said one journalist who's followed the royal family for a good 30 years. 'She is the woman he loves, for whom he's put himself — and us — through so much. And he thinks we'd adore her rather more as queen than with a slightly lesser title.' The Prince wants her to get the ultimate recognition, the 15-gun salute, that goes with the title of queen. It may have been good enough for Prince Albert to be prince consort and for the Duke of Edinburgh to be the Duke of Edinburgh, but Prince Charles — a notoriously stubborn man — wants us to have Camilla on his terms.

An unfortunate circumstance from this perspective was the death this week of the journalist Steve Hewlett, who happened to have been the *Panorama* editor presiding over Martin Bashir's extraordinary interview with Princess Diana. That was the one in which she observed that 'there were three of us in that marriage': a line which, appar-

ently, Ruby Wax — a friend of Diana's — came up with. That gave the British public a glimpse of the pain that Prince Charles's adultery caused his wife. For a project based on the principle of softly softly catchee monkey, it was a disagreeable intrusion into the gradual acceptance of Camilla as part of the national furniture.

The endeavour to turn Camilla into a beloved national figure when once people pelted her with bread rolls in a Sainsbury's car park has in fact been brilliantly managed; nothing to frighten the horses. She's been insinuated gradually into national life. We've got to the point where her minders will let her be photographed having a drink, though not so far that she can be seen smoking; she is sometimes shown with Charles, more often alone.

Plainly she likes her position — unlimited means, beautiful jewels, lovely clothes and an undemanding and agreeable lifestyle — and when she does her charity work (her pet project is osteoporosis) she's respectfully received, though there's nothing like the adulation Diana got. Her children are kept judiciously, amicably, separate from Clarence House and Sandringham — contrast with the Middletons, who are very much in evidence.

But there are, still, a number of impediments to the QC project. Not in Prince Charles's immediate entourage, for the simple and sufficient reason that he has people around him who agree with him. Apparently, the replacement of his former private secretary, William Nye, with Clive Alderton was of a piece with his insistence that his courtiers should advance the cause — and if students of Tudor history find parallels with Henry VIII's insistence, after falling for Anne Boleyn, that his people advance his marital affairs, well, that's just how I see it too.

The Queen is not exactly an obstacle — her view, it seems, is the pragmatic one that she has done her bit for the monarchy; what happens after she's gone is up to Charles. But the prince's sons are perhaps a different story. The PR from the Palace is that William and Harry are best friends with Camilla; the reality may be a little edgier. They know how their parents' marriage unravelled. But they are, crucially, financially dependent on their father. William will cease to be only when he's Prince of Wales; that may affect their behaviour. And for Prince Harry, Camilla has meant his relationship with Meghan Markle has had an easy ride. Once, the notion that the Prince of Wales's son might marry an American divorcee would have been huge — shades of Wallis Simpson. In the wake of Charles marrying his mistress, whose husband is very much alive, Ms Markle doesn't seem such a big deal.

Which brings us to the real reason why I think Queen Camilla would be a bad thing. It would reward adultery, a relationship between two people married to others, which caused enormous hurt to their respective spouses. To crown Camilla queen would be to suggest that adultery doesn't matter, that if you persist in wrong behaviour long enough it'll be worth your while, at least in this life. A lesser title would seem less overtly triumphalist. Camilla is a mistress made good; if she were queen, it would be to diminish the residual value of matrimony. That matters.

The McMaster plan

Is Trump's new security chief still the thinking man's general?

ANDREW J. BACEVICH

When Lt Gen H.R. McMaster was appointed by Donald Trump to the post of national security adviser, newspaper reports hailed him as a military strategist. It's not fully clear what the phrase means: not, presumably, that he originated a big idea akin to Alfred Thayer Mahan's theory of seapower or Billy Mitchell's conception of strategic bombing. More likely it is supposed to mean 'a soldier who thinks'. Or more crudely, 'not a knuckle-dragger'. Or 'preferable to the cretin who Trump just fired'.

Of course, the responsibilities of the position to which McMaster now ascends extend well beyond mere military matters. The national security adviser operates (or should operate) in the realm of 'grand strategy'. In this rarified atmosphere, preparing for and conducting war coexist with, and arguably should even take a back seat to, other considerations. To advance the interests of the state, the successful grand strategist orchestrates all the various elements of power. While not shrinking from the use of armed force, he or she sees war as a last resort, to be undertaken only after having exhausted all other alternatives.

This distinction between military strategy and grand strategy is more than semantic. Maintaining it is crucial to successful statecraft. Consider the case of 19th-century Germany. Von Moltke the Elder was a gifted military strategist. Bismarck was a master of grand strategy. Their collaboration, with the Iron Chancellor as senior partner, created the modern German state. Once Wilhelm II handed Bismarck his walking papers in 1890, however, the distinction between military and grand strategy was gradually lost. The results became apparent after 1914. In the person of Erich Ludendorff, war absorbed statecraft, with the fall of the House of Hohenzollern the least among the catastrophes that ensued.

US national security policy in the present century bears more than passing resemblance to that of Germany a century ago. Our various armed conflicts, campaigns, interventions, and punitive expeditions occur on a blessedly smaller scale. But the clarity of political purpose informing our military endeavours in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 has eroded with the passage of time. Today it has been largely lost. Our militarists fight on because they lack the capacity to imagine an alternative. In policymaking circles, war has become a habit.

The question is whether H.R. McMaster can play a role in breaking that habit, as President Trump (in his weird, inconsistent way) has suggested he intends to do. To put it another way: can General McMaster restore the distinction between grand strategy and military strategy and re-subordinate the latter to the former?

Little reason exists to suggest that he will do so — or indeed that he is inclined to make the effort. For the past two years, McMaster has devoted himself to contemplations on the future of the United States Army, not the future of the international order. On Russia, he appears to be a neo-Cold Warrior, favouring the recommitment of US ground forces to Europe, a prospect welcomed by an army that today finds itself searching for a raison d'être. On matters ranging from East Asian stability, Israel-Palestine, Iran, nuclear weapons, climate change and cyber-challenges, his views are less clear.

His book Dereliction of Duty is a savage indictment of dishonesty among civilian and military leaders

McMaster's reputation as a thinker does not derive from his expressed views on matters of basic policy. Instead, it rests almost entirely on a book that he published as a young officer nearly two decades ago. The book (now once more rocketing to the top of the Amazon rankings) is called *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*. Based on the dissertation that McMaster wrote for a history PhD at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, it remains today one of the most important books about that benighted conflict — a savage indictment of dishonesty among top US civilian and military leaders during the 1960s. On the battlefield, McMaster has demonstrated exemplary courage in the face of the enemy. For my money, he displayed even greater courage, albeit of an intellectual sort, in publishing his book.

The story he tells is an ugly one of civil-military distrust and shared contempt. To conduct the Vietnam War on the terms they wanted, President Lyndon Johnson and defense secretary Robert McNamara sought to marginalise the Joint Chiefs of Staff, even while going through the motions of soliciting their advice. In return, the Chiefs went through the motions of playing along, confident that ever-deeper US military involvement in Vietnam would eventually oblige Johnson and McNamara to fight the war their way. Out of this cynical exercise in mutual manipulation came a debacle that ended in costly and catastrophic failure.

The message of *Dereliction of Duty* was clear: The Vietnam-era Joint Chiefs of Staff dishonoured themselves and their profession. In doing so, they betrayed the soldiers for whose wellbeing they were responsible. When dealing with matters of basic policy, the paramount obligation of senior military officers is honesty — blunt, candid truth-telling.

McMaster's book generated widespread acclaim and rightly so. For a young officer to publish such a scathing indictment of four-star generals and admirals carried career risks. But McMaster's timing turned out to be just about perfect. By the late 1990s, when *Dereliction of Duty* appeared, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their peers, all of them Vietnam veterans, were in the mood for patricide. They welcomed the criticism that McMaster heaped on the prior generation. After all, their war — the Gulf War of 1990–91 (in which McMaster himself had performed heroically) — had been done right. So at least it seemed at the time. In the officer corps, *Dereliction of Duty* became required reading.

Through a twist of fate, McMaster now finds himself called upon to fill the role of blunt, candid truth-teller for his generation of military officers — and to do so while serving a commander-in-chief who gives little evidence of valuing those qualities. Yet circumstances demand more than mere straight talk. Only by transcending the role of 'military strategist' will General McMaster succeed in doing what duty plainly requires: identifying a course that leads away from permanent war and imparts to what remains of US grand strategy a semblance of coherence.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

The Americans are coming

From 'What will the United States do?', The Spectator, 24 February 1917: It may be that the congestion of American shipping may force Mr Wilson's hand, for a partial paralysis in the docks is temporary evidence that Germany can intimidate the greatest of neutrals. But, on the whole, we expect that some more sudden and violent demonstration of German violence will cause Mr Wilson to summon the American nation to action. When that happens we shall be able to say that Germany, among her other diplomatic achievements, has reunited the Anglo-Saxon world.

ROD LIDDLE

Are satanic abuse cops 120 per cent gullible?

I got lost in the forest near my house while walking the dog the other week. The path I was on, and which I thought I knew, narrowed until it was scarcely a path at all. The trees closed in and brambles tore at my legs. Somewhere, high above, I could hear the importuning mew of a buzzard. And then I reached a small clearing where the tall grass and the broom had been flattened. There were signs that a fire had been lit in the centre, and there were the shadows of human footprints in the hard earth.

I immediately felt sick inside — for I knew exactly and without question what this was. It had been the site of a satanic paedophile orgy involving our former prime minister Sir Edward Heath. Heaven knows how many children had lost their lives in this tiny glade in Kent during a foul and emetic bacchanal. I saw, with sudden clarity, Heath stripped naked and — in a voice familiar to millions of unsuspecting decent, Christian British people — invoking the Dark One as he dangled some poor child over the fire after he and his deranged, shrieking cabal had had their wicked way with it.

You evil bastard, Heath, I thought to myself. You evil, evil man. We thought of you as a statesman and an organist who quite liked yachting. Now, after all this time, we at last know what you really liked. Satan and killing children.

I had read about these goings-on in one of our daily newspapers. A group of women have made allegations that a paedophile ring linked to Heath had murdered at least 16 children during satanic orgies in forests in the south east of England. The children were abused and then slaughtered, after which the devilish celebrants would gorge themselves on the bodies of these poor mites — a case of waste not, want not, I suppose. We know that Heath must have been involved because one of the women reported having heard mention of a mysterious but very important man known only as 'Ed' — well, you don't fool us with that cunning alias, Heath. And now the police are on his trail, the Wiltshire Police, because this stuff has all surfaced as a consequence of their brave investigation, Operation Conifer.

If Heath were still alive I daresay he would attempt to rebut the allegations with some laughable excuse, which would be swallowed whole only by the Establishment — who are probably themselves in a wood near you right now, murdering still more kiddies and prostrating themselves before Lucifer — and the supremely gullible. Luckily the Wiltshire police force is not remotely gullible. The copper in charge of Operation Conifer has said that the allegations of child sexual abuse levelled at Heath are '120 per cent genuine'. So you can see that the investigation is being led by a man with a brilliant and penetrating mind. If these allegations really are 120 per cent genuine, that means they are more genuine even than things which are entirely genuine. Bloody genuine, then. The police are especially delighted because some of the evidence has come from people who don't know each other — that's the clincher, isn't it? Whatever way you look at it.

You evil bastard, Heath. We thought of you as a statesman and an organist who quite liked yachting

I'm particularly interested in the testimony of these women who, when they first told the police about having been abused as girls and all the devil sacrifice murder stuff, were told, unaccountably, that they sounded doolally. That was back in 1989. I'm interested in their testimonies because of all the things I ever wondered about the evil Heath — and I did suspect, during those power cuts of the 1970s when the TV went off, that he was an agent of Beelzebub — it never remotely occurred to me that he might be sexually interested in women. How little we know.

'It says, "Check your privilege." The bastards are virtue-signalling us.'

Gullibility. I wonder if Det. Insp. 120 per cent has asked two straightforward questions of the people who have come before the police with these interesting testimonies. First: are they certifiably insane? That is, are they — as the Americans put it — crazier than a shithouse rat? And second: do they have anything to gain, financially, from making these assertions? My guess is that neither of those questions have been asked. And they have not been asked because those are not the sort of question the filth is allowed to ask any more. The rozzers must take everything at face value these days. They must not exercise their judgment — or, as the social justice warriors and the liberal reformers would put it, their prejudices. If someone comes forward to say that 16 kids were killed in a forest by a satanically-minded paedo ring involving half the British Establishment, you must not ask if they are on medication for being mental. Because if they were abused as kids, they're going to be mental, aren't they? That's what it does to you, being abused by Sir Edward Heath in a glade in Kent; it sends you round the bend. And so you have a force which is, to misappropriate the quote from Sir William Macpherson, institutionally gullible.

Not just in the area of paedophilia, either. If someone comes before the police to complain that he has been the subject of a racist insult or attack, then according to the guidance before the police, he *has* been, and that's an end to it. No latitude for judgment. He has been racially abused, end of (as Det. Insp. 120 per cent might say). Similarly, if a woman claims she was raped then the police are enjoined not simply to take her word for it, but to make sure a prosecution is brought — no matter what doubts might linger in their minds. This is perhaps one reason why conviction rates for rape are so low: the juries, the British public, are not institutionally gullible. But still, lives are ruined along the way. Lives and the reputations of people who cannot defend themselves, because they're dead.

Make way for Ubercare

Could an app help me look after my husband?

MARY DEJEVSKY

There is much to be faulted in Uber, which has branched out from delivering people into delivering meals, under the unappetising name UberEats. But even I, someone who can rarely bring herself to write the word 'sharing', as in economy, without inverted commas, am prepared to give credit where credit is due.

Uber has made private door-to-door transport accessible to far more people than before. It has thus done a lot of people a favour and hugely expanded the market, harnessing new technology to do so. It has provided jobs for people who did not have them, or who prefer to work in the semi-autonomous Uber way. It's made me, a diehard sceptic of the 'sharing' economy, wonder whether a form of Uberfication might not be just the thing to shake up our so-called 'care system' which, as I have recently discovered, is not fit for purpose.

A while back, knowing that I would be going away for a week, I set out to find help for my husband, who has Parkinson's. Of course, this was not the first time we had faced the conundrum. But it had always been possible to muddle through. A combination of gap-year nephews, super-helpful neighbours and Meals on Wheels just about sufficed. (And a special shout-out here to Meals on Wheels, a service that finds itself suddenly, and inexplicably, under threat.)

Alas, though, the condition — the disease — progresses. And this time, something more was needed. In sometimes rough and ready ways, I look after my husband with no outside help, and I am happy to do so. I am generally with him, at home or away, for 50 weeks out of 52. If only — and this was the question I asked — there were some way I could be replaced for the remaining two.

The answer, after two months of research and requests that soon escalated into pleas, was no. Two weeks before my planned departure, I received an email from a pleasant person at my husband's GP surgery, who rejoices in the title 'care navigator'. Her title alone tells you most of what you need to know. 'It seems', she wrote, 'that we have exhausted all avenues… you wanted something in place for when you go away, but I don't think that will happen unless you organise care privately.' So there we are, two months on, right back where we started.

My two-pronged approach had begun with my husband's GP and the council's 'adult services' department — which sounds a little like a porn channel, while being distinctly less keen (I imagine) to have you sign up. Have you tried, everyone I eventually spoke to asked hopefully, Parkinson's UK, your Parkinson's nurse, your GP, other voluntary organisations, Age UK?

And I could truthfully say, yes, I have tried them all. I have visited in person; my mobile phone log testifies to the cumulative hours spent on hold; to the messages left unanswered, to the universal reluctance to give full names and direct numbers or emails — though they demand chapter and verse from me every time I call.

Two half-hour visits in the daytime plus ten hours of night cover comes in at £1,700 a week

On the way, I have learned a whole new vocabulary, in which 'assessments', 'packages' and 'allocation' (or rather 'de-allocation' in our case) loom large, and everything, but everything, requires a 'referral'. I have also glimpsed a way of working in which everything is chopped up into 'tasks' which presuppose solutions — an approach singularly unsuited to chronic illness where there is no foreseeable timescale and no cure.

All this is before you meet the means test — which almost any middle-class person who has obeyed the command to 'save' will fail. Either you pay in full for the 'package' the council social workers compile, or you pay for 'private providers' (which the council strongly hints you will prefer). So it's back to sheaves of printed lists — and choices no one will help you to make lest they be held liable. The agencies also seem to run something like a closed shop; with rates rarely published in the name of competition that barely exists.

'I was found guilty by a majority verdict, but I'm hoping the minority will rise up…'

Let me give you an idea. Two half-hour visits in the daytime, plus ten hours of night cover — no nursing, no medical duties, just 'cover' — comes in at £1,700 or so a week. This is more than half my husband's Disability Living Allowance for a whole year (he remains on the old system) — and a multiple of what I can earn working part-time. Double the fees at many care homes. And they want people to stay in their own homes?

We are told the care system is in crisis, and it surely is, though not necessarily for the single reason — 'the cuts' — that is routinely given. Wasteful, confusing, patronising and — perversely — protectionist, it is ripe for precisely the sort of disruption that Uber and its ilk have brought to transport. Many of the care services, such as they are, are already private, so why not an efficient system of carers who are centrally managed and vetted, but sell their own services? Why not have pricing according to market demand, open and reliable appraisals from actual users and the sort of flexibility that new technology allows?

Uber has given both the customer and the driver power and freedom. It has given many of us the experience of having our own chauffeurs: polite drivers, super-clean cars, perhaps a newspaper, madam, for diversion, or the radio station of your choice? It's also shaken the traditional taxi trade out of its complacency. Furious London cabbies are right that the value of some of that shaking can be questioned. Is satnav really a substitute for the Knowledge, has the unregulated proliferation of vehicles not brought congestion and pollution in its wake?

But look at the benefits. And would London cabbies have started actually to round fares down without Uber? Or installed machines for card payments in months rather than years? Remember what a song and dance they used to make if you even hinted you might pay by card.

If there was ever an industry that needed to be shaken awake, it's the care industry — unresponsive, entrenched and utterly unprepared for the great masses marching towards old age. While I was preparing this article, news arrived of an Airbnb-style venture for childcare in this country and a home-care franchise in the US adapted from Uber. Also starting up over here is an Uber-style app offering university students wanting to dent their loans to help with sundry tasks around the home. All in all, Ubercare is surely an idea whose time has come.

FRENCH REVOLUTION: COULD IT BE PRESIDENT LE PEN?

WEDNESDAY 26 APRIL • ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, LONDON SW7 • 7 P.M.

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

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Journalist and
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Professor of French History
at St John's College, Cambridge

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Islam's lost Enlightenment

The Muslim world had an age of modernisation. It died in the first world war

CHRISTOPHER DE BELLAIGUE

I am quite used to people smirking into their sleeves when they hear that I've just written a book called *The Islamic Enlightenment*. The really helpful wags say they expect something along the lines of *The Wit and Wisdom of Spiro Agnew*, which was billed as a collection of all the memorable aphorisms of the former US vice-president, and contained only blank pages.

So, the Islamic Enlightenment — good for a laugh. But we're all familiar with the serious argument that lies behind the jests; that Islam has not been through an Enlightenment, a Reformation, or any of the other rites of passage that have formed our modernity, and that, ergo, Muslims and modernity are strangers. Not just strangers, but enemies: ever since Gutenberg revolutionised mass printing in the 1450s, pushing the West into the modern age, the Muslims have set their face against innovation. And to be fair, when you take into account the fact that it took some 400 years for movable type to come into general use in the Middle East, and that for much of this period the Ottoman authorities punished book-printing with death, is it any wonder that this bleak view of Muslim improvability has acquired the wide acceptance and legitimacy it currently enjoys?

In fact, rarely has there been a better time to test the belief — widespread in the Trump White House, among Europe's rising populists, and the Kremlin — that Islamic society is incapable of reforming because it hates progress. Wouldn't it be awkward if proof were adduced to show that, on the contrary, for long periods in their recent history the central and most influential lands of Islam, having been confronted by dynamic western modernity, embraced that modernity in spades and only lapsed into Islamist recalcitrance after the first world war obliterated them physically and the victorious allies tried to subjugate them politically? But this is what happened in Turkey, Egypt and Iran during the 'long' 19th century until 1914.

A key aspect of Islamic modernisation (in Egypt's case only until the British invasion of 1882) was that the lands in question acted as free, independent agents. Change was not only driven by royal autocrats like Iran's Crown Prince Abbas Mirza, who reformed the Persian military during the Napoleonic wars, but also by commoners of vision such as the Egyptian administrator and intellectual Rifaa al-Tahtawi, whose conception of progress accommodated steamships, girls' education and linguistic reform. Another secular visionary was Ibrahim Sinasi, father of Turkish journalism, who peppered the Ottoman government of the early 1860s with impertinent advice on how to deal with Greek irredentists and poured scorn on reactionaries who opposed the introduction of gaslights in Istanbul (the same innovation had met with the same reaction in Georgian London).

Islamic society on the eve of the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798 had indeed been medieval in many ways, its backwardness perpetuated by despotic government, almost universal illiteracy and the clergy's monopoly over knowledge. Now change came in a rush. The telegraph, the postal service and table manners arrived almost simultaneously, closely followed by the first polite calls for the crowned head to share power. Theatres of anatomy overturned the prophet's injunction against cutting up corpses ('though it may have swallowed the most precious pearl') and there was an increase in religious scepticism; a photograph of an Istanbul medical school around the middle of the century shows a cohort of medics posing in fezzes amid ghoulish arrangements of human remains. As for the plague, quarantine and hygiene did for this mass killer as they had in Europe two centuries earlier, while slavery was first challenged by a ban on the trade itself (insisted upon by those newbie zealots the British), and ultimately condemned by the decline of the harem, shared habitat of eunuchs and concubines.

That Islam's liberal moment came juddering to a halt in 1914 is a little-known tragedy

The growing integration of the sexes and the decline in polygamy among the new middle class were two manifestations of a broader feminine emancipation. Having begun the century as unlettered chattels of their menfolk, by the first world war a growing number of educated women in Cairo, Istanbul and Tehran were equipped to contribute to an emerging national life. They wrote for feminist journals, led humanitarian campaigns and — to the dismay of puritans — shed layer after layer of chaste Islamic covering.

In the early 1890s, Zainab Fawwaz, an Egyptian feminist, declared that there was nothing in Islamic law prohibiting women from 'involvement in the occupations of men'. This in a country where only a few decades earlier efforts to found a school for midwifery had foundered on popular hostility and the school had had to be filled with Abyssinians bought from the Cairo slave market.

That Islam's liberal moment came juddering to a halt in 1914 is a little-known tragedy. In the first decade of the 20th century, Iranian and Turkish democrats had launched revolutions establishing parliamentary systems that limited the powers of the ruler — a similar movement in favour of popular sovereignty in Egypt had been thwarted by the British occupation two decades earlier. But war laid waste to the region and the British and French chopped up much of the former Ottoman Empire into mandate-sized chunks. Egypt stayed under British supervision, while in Iran and Turkey the powers were only kept at bay by new regimes that westernised furiously along Roman lines (Mussolini was the model), not Jeffersonian ones.

One of the reasons why Islam's liberal moment was never revived was its association with an avowedly liberal West that in fact behaved anything but liberally; this confusion of message and messenger fuelled the Muslim Brotherhood and subsequent Islamist movements, while defenders of a measured westernisation such as the secular-minded Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh were rewarded for their political independence with the hostility of the West. (In 1951 Mossadegh nationalised Iran's British-run oil industry; the CIA and MI6 toppled him in a coup two years later.)

Now, amid the beastliness of Isis and its fellow travellers, and the tendency of a growing number of westerners to demonise not Islamism or the terrorists but Islam *tout court*, it seems vital to recall that hopeful century when the lands of Islam engaged lustily with modernity in the hope that something of it can be recaptured — as, indeed, it briefly looked as though it might during the Arab Spring. The alternative is to perpetuate the self-fulfilling consensus around which the Isis ideologues and our own populists unite: a story of inevitable conflict and alienation based on a historical fallacy.

'I'm drinking to forget the lunchtime drinking ban.'

Brutish Britain

Why it's time to establish a Social Highway Code

FRANK FIELD

Life in Britain has become much cruder, meaner and more spiteful practically everywhere. It can be seen in people's behaviour on the street; in those abominable neighbours from hell; in companies piling up the profits with no care whatsoever for the degree to which they are sweating their workers on terms that, until quite recently, would have been unimaginable.

The incivility of one to another can be seen most sharply and poignantly in the degree of cruelty to children which, at the beginning of my working life, would have had every alarm bell ringing wildly. Children have to be almost on the point of being murdered before they are taken into care. Outside that protection, some are subjected to brutal treatment by parents who are also brutal creatures.

Being left to go to bed hungry and to take that hunger to school the next day is now par for the course for all too many children. Lack of money or knowledge can, of course, account for some of this neglect. But not all. Some parents are happy to lie in bed while their offspring get themselves up and dressed as best they can, and set off to school without breakfast. It is surprising the degree of kindness many of these children have, given that they have had so little exposure to love and civility at home.

It wasn't always like this. For a very short period in our history, Britain was a peaceable, self-policing society. The Victorians and Edwardians made superhuman efforts to change our character. We moved from being a pretty beastly, brutal and horrible nation to one that was literally the envy of the world in the extent to which we were self-governing. Evangelical religion played a huge part in transforming the nature of our society. Trade unions, the labour movement generally, and the churches all joined in a mission to teach Christianity's rules for everyday life. In time, this rulebook became an affair of the heart for the nation.

The incivility I witness today is nothing new, but it is more alarming. We are returning to what we were historically like as a country.

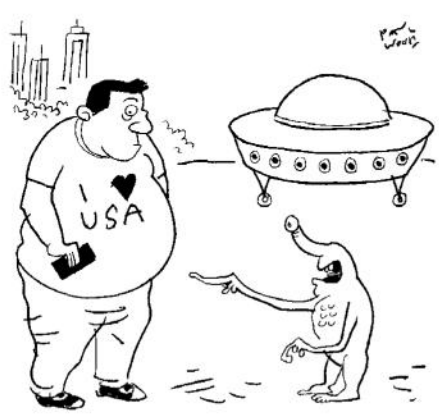
Crimes of violence against the person reveal much about the state of any society. The facts speak loudly of the fall in such crimes from late Victorian times until the 1960s, when violence and all types of crime began to surge.

Take the constituency I represent as being typical of most. Two years ago, there were more registered violent crimes against the person in Birkenhead than there were in the entire country a century ago. And that is not a misprint. Recorded crimes may look as if they have peaked, but only from the astronomical height that they leapt to from the Sixties onwards. Many of my constituents find the lack of leadership from the police so hopeless that they have given up reporting practically anything.

Geoffrey Elton, the great historian of the Tudors, commented on the society that he could still recognise in the 1960s. It was decisive in why he and his family came to Britain after experiencing life in other European countries. England, according to Elton, had discovered the secret of the need for people in modern societies to live closely together, while also retaining their separateness.

The Victorians and Edwardians changed us from a beastly nation to one that was the envy of the world

This success was due, above all else, to the nurturing of children. We are all born with original sin, defined as seeing ourselves at the very centre of the world. Good families teach us that we are, but that all other family members see themselves at the centre, too. Safely and securely we learn the rules of the game: each of us is to be given, and to show, respect.



'Take me to your leader's Twitter feed.'

But Britain is fast falling out of love with the idea of being good parents. Increasingly, infant school teachers report how, over quite a short period of time, their new pupils come to school more brutish. With the failure of families, huge and increasing pressure is put on schools to play the role of civilising children and teaching them basic skills that, not so long ago, would have been taught automatically and almost universally at home.

Our first move must be to agree a new Social Highway Code. We are not allowed to go on to the road in a car that can kill and maim people without learning the Highway Code. Similarly, we need to learn the rules of society if we are not to damage people in other ways.

In a recent Hensley Henson lecture at Durham University, I mapped out the first moves to establishing this Social Highway Code. I did so based on a number of key assumptions. There are still, thankfully, large numbers of people appalled by the collapse in a sense of decency that they witness all around them. This is a bedrock upon which we can build. Other world religions are thriving in this country. Each of them, I believe, like Christianity and humanism, has as part of its drive the establishment of a good society. It is from this group of all the religions and the humanists that we could find the basis for a Social Highway Code to which society will be able to subscribe and then automatically enforce.

I called a meeting in Merseyside this week at which the Catholic Archbishop and Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, representatives of all the other Christian denominations and, crucially, the representatives of the other world religions, plus the humanists, began the task of seeing how hard or easy it might be to construct from our various beliefs the basis of that new Social Highway Code. The need is urgent.

I have been struck by the need for such rules when trying to get antisocial behaviour countered in my own constituency. What goes on there is common in other towns across the country. A clutch of pensioners once came to see me at my surgery, all looking tired. The yobs had run across their bungalow roofs, banged on their windows at night, urinated through their letterboxes and jumped out at them in the dark. When I asked them whether they had been to the police, they looked at me in that sad, resigned way as if to suggest that I needed to get up to speed on what was happening in everyday British life.

The question we started to answer this week is: what do all the world's religions and the humanists teach us about the nature of the good life? And what are the rules that we need to take from them to build this new Social Highway Code for modern Britain?

Frank Field is the Labour MP for Birkenhead.

ANCIENT AND MODERN

All the President's yes-men

Donald Trump takes it as read that any criticism of his words or actions is an assault on the truth. The historian Tacitus, who had served Roman emperors in high office (including as consul), recognised the frame of mind and reflected on how one could maintain one's honour working for such a monster.

Tacitus saw that absolutism lay at the heart of the imperial system. To maintain it, the emperor surrounded himself with men who owed loyalty to no one but himself, and over whom he could therefore exert total control. The result was a culture of acquiescence in whatever the emperor wanted, well exemplified by the Roman senator Sallustius Crispus, who fawned that 'the circumstances of imperial rule are such that the accounts will come right only if submitted to the approval of one person'. Everyone knew who that was.

There was another consequence. Tacitus reported that the emperor Vitellius was so ignorant of soldiering that 'he always had to ask someone else'. So disastrous were the results that experienced centurions decided to enlighten him. 'But Vitellius' close advisers kept them away, since the emperor had developed the habit of regarding good advice as disagreeable and listening only to what was pleasing — and fatal.'

This desire for the pleasing brought in its train the refusal to face facts. When Rome, under Nero, suffered a disastrous defeat in Armenia, the victory trophies which had been prematurely put up were left standing. 'It was appearances that counted; the truth was despised,' said Tacitus. All this added up in his eyes to the corruption of public life on a massive scale.

So how should the honourable man survive? Fight the monster head on, try to make it see sense (as the philosopher Seneca did Nero), or keep his head down for better times? Some of Trump's advisers do offer a view of policy more balanced than that which emerges from the monster's public ravings. That, at least, suggests there is a degree of awareness of what is at stake, for them and their country. The question is whether any will survive long enough to support Tacitus' claim that 'even under bad emperors it is possible for men to be great'. — *Peter Jones*

A bookseller's duty

Why I've cancelled my signing at an anti-Trump bookshop

SUSAN HILL

To my mind, a bookshop is like a library — the only difference is that you buy the books, you don't borrow them. But both have a duty to provide books (space and budgets allowing) reflecting a wide range — as wide as possible — of interests, reading tastes, subjects and points of view. Walk into one of either and there are the thoughts and feelings, beliefs and dreams and creations and discoveries of many men and women, and that is part of their never-ending excitement.

If you are, say, a Christian bookshop, and advertise yourself as such, or a Middle Eastern bookshop, or a communist or a feminist bookshop, then by your very title you are indicating to the prospective customer that what they will find inside are books about Christianity, the Middle East, communism or feminism. If you want books about Buddhism or Japan, do not expect to find them here, is the message. Fine. The reader knows where they stand. I do not expect to go into a bookshop all of whose stock is in the Chinese language, which I do not understand, and find a book about French cookery. I know, I am being very obvious.

But if I find a general bookshop, of medium size, of course I know it cannot stock everything, though I hope it will be efficient enough to obtain anything for me. I expect to browse, and come across a book by a scientist who is a prominent supporter of the man-made global warming theory next to one by another whose view is the opposite. I expect to find books by Richard Dawkins next to those of Justin Welby. I expect there to be posters advertising the latest crime novel by Val McDermid or a war history by Max Hastings or Antony Beevor. I want to find books by experts writing from different angles. I should like to see a light romance about love in a little café next to the latest Goldsmiths Prize winner.

I do ***not*** expect this bookshop, wherever it is, city or market town, to have posters and a Twitter feed and a Facebook page telling me it is so against what the President of the United States stands for/believes/is/is doing that it is stocking only books devoted to those writers who oppose him too, and what is more, will *give them away free*. Needless to say, the opposite is also true. You will not find Donald Trump's autobiography here, or anything by those authors known to support/admire/have voted for him.

This is a form of censorship and, of all places, a bookshop (like a library) should never ever indulge in that. There are exceptions, of course. I would be most unhappy to see a shelf devoted to books promoting paedophilia as A Good Thing, nor anything erotic beyond the legally acceptable. There may be other exceptions but, essentially, censorship is unacceptable. Free thought, free belief, freedom of expression — those are among the most important values of the free world in which democracy holds sway. I do not agree with what you say, but I will defend to my death your right to say it.

What is more, if I am a bookseller I will not agree with many of the views expressed

Free thought, free belief, freedom of expression – those are among the most important values of the free world

by some of the authors whose books I stock, but if they are legal and legally published, I will not censor those books in terms of not putting them on my shelves. I will not ban — however much you fudge the word, that is what it is — any book because I disagree with its author's stance on anything at all. I will not discourage my customers from buying such books. If they are not on my shelf I will not refuse to order them. And, above all, I am in business, and business should be neutral, for fear of offending. So I will not publicly express my political or religious views, in my shops, to my customers or on social media. I will not let my bias, whatever that bias is, interfere with my customers' right to browse and buy whatever they wish. I may only do that if I advertise myself as 'The Left-Wing Bookshop'. The Anti-Republican Party Bookshop. Whatever.

Moreover, Trump is not our President or our PM, he is America's. He was elected. Many do not like the fact, but that is democracy. A precious right.

All of this leads to an explanation of why I have cancelled a scheduled appearance to discuss my new novel at a bookshop. They have put their own political and personal views about the USA and its President before their business, their customers and what a bookshop is and must, more than any other sort of shop or business, be about.

JAMES DELINGPOLE

Killing spree of the fluffy green idiots

Who do you think was responsible for Europe's biggest environmental disaster of the past three decades; one that caused more widespread damage and killed more people than even the nuclear accident at Chernobyl?

Was it a) greedy and selfish capitalists, probably linked to Big Oil, riding roughshod over the stringent health and safety regulations our wise, caring politicians have designed to protect us and our natural environment?

Or b) an alliance of fluffy green activists, campaigning journalists and virtue-signalling politicians, united on a noble mission to save the planet from the greatest environmental threat it has ever known?

If you guessed b) then you may appreciate why we climate sceptics are experiencing such schadenfreude right now. For years we've been vilified by the powerful green lobby as nature-loathing, anti-science 'deniers' in the pay of sinister interests. Now it turns out that the real bad guys (as some of us have been saying all along) are those worthy greenies.

I'm talking about the Great Diesel Car Scandal, which has exacerbated all manner of illnesses from asthma, autism and dementia to respiratory problems, heart disease and cancer, driven city air pollution to levels sometimes higher than Beijing's, and caused tens of thousands of premature deaths across the EU.

No one has claimed responsibility for it and almost certainly no heads will roll. But this was an avoidable, completely man-made disaster: the consequence of a state-orchestrated, tax-incentivised, EU-wide drive from the early 1990s onwards to replace petrol car engines with diesel ones, organised in the belief that it would reduce CO_2 levels and thus help spare the planet from the horrors of man-made global warming.

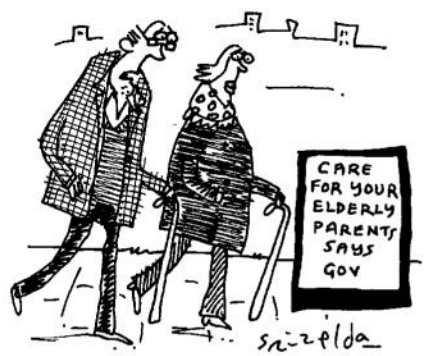
And so it has. One expert calculation says Europe's mass switch to diesel means that in the next half century, global warming may be as much as four thousandths of a degree Celsius less. Unfortunately, it also dramatically increased the production of more evidently harmful substances such as nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and particulates (soot particles), with consequences we are all now ruing.

How did our politicians ever fall prey to such lunacy? Why did no scientists warn them? And why did our fearless media not hold them to account? You know why already: because such was the clamour of the times, as it has been for at least three decades. Once a culture has made up its mind that a harmless trace gas is public enemy number one, the potential for suicidal regulatory idiocy is limitless. As one of the few who has been right pretty much all along about this, I'm not asking much. In fact the only thing I want (apart from my bronze equestrian statue, somewhere discreet, like maybe on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square) is for the people responsible to acknowledge their mistakes and begin undoing them as quickly as possible.

This, after all, was the thing that first got me interested in the whole environment/energy field. As a keen wild swimmer, hill-walker and naturalist, I couldn't understand why we were allowing our matchlessly beautiful countryside to be blighted — effectively turned into industrial zones — by ugly, environmentally destructive wind turbines. Well, one awkward question led to another, and soon, quite contrary to any life plans I'd made, I found myself being traduced by everyone from BBC Radio 4 comics to the president of the Royal Society as the very emblem of anti-environmental ignorance and wickedness.

For years we sceptics have been vilified as nature-loathing, anti-science 'deniers' in the pay of sinister interests

My grovelling apology from these people can wait: I'm really not holding my breath.



'They're right. We really should do more for our elderly parents.'

What I do feel very strongly, however, is that none of those involved in the green disasters of our time — not the BBC's pop-science presenters, not all those politicians who signed the Climate Change Act, many of whom (that's you, Greg Clark) still defend its nonsensical principles, not the toffs doing nicely out of the wind subsidies on their estates — should be allowed to save face. Their errors must be confronted now and dealt with now; not in five or ten years or 20 years, when everyone has moved on.

The other day I emailed two of the environmentalists I most respect — Matt Ridley and the Greenpeace co-founder Patrick Moore — for suggestions as to what great green causes Donald Trump could get behind to counter the inevitable eco-propaganda that he doesn't care about the planet. We came swiftly to the conclusion that almost all the major environmental problems in the world right now are the result of environmental policy.

Beside the Great Diesel Car Disaster you have: forests cut down to create 'biomass' for power stations such as Drax; primary rainforest replaced by palm-oil plantations for biofuels; upland landscapes ravaged and millions of birds and bats killed by wind turbines; birds frazzled by solar arrays; forests in America's Pacific north-west rendered sterile by legislation designed to protect the spotted owl.

Then, of course, there's the human cost: the malnutrition and high mortality caused by the greens' war on GM produce such as golden rice; food shortages and poverty caused by the diversion of agricultural land to biofuels; lower living standards created by the enforced rejection of cheap fossil fuel in favour of 'renewable' energy; fuel poverty deaths caused by artificially inflated 'clean' energy prices.

A few years ago I wrote a book called *Watermelons* with the subtitle 'How Environmentalists Are Killing The Planet, Destroying The Economy and Stealing Your Children's Future'. It wasn't a provocation. It was no more than the truth. The greens and their useful idiots in politics, business and the media have got away with doing far too much damage for far too long. They are not the good guys. What they have done is evil. It is time the guilty parties made amends.

Seeing off the Speaker

Sir: If senior Tories in Buckingham had had their way, John Bercow's career as Speaker could have been over long before he had a chance to make any 'spectacularly ill-judged' remarks (Politics, 18 February). At the 2010 election, an impressive local Tory was keen to prevent the new Labour-supported Speaker retaining the seat where the party had had an 18,000 majority in 2005. Conservative headquarters insisted that Buckingham must abide by the long-standing convention that the Speaker is returned unopposed. The local Tories should have gone ahead; there is no such convention. All ten Speakers since the war have faced opposition. Six, including Bercow, have faced independents or minor parties. Four, all from the Tory ranks, had official Labour and/or Liberal candidates against them. If the Conservatives had taken a leaf out of their opponents' book, they could have dislodged a Speaker who had moved sharply to the left in order to get his high office.
Alistair Lexden
House of Lords

House room

Sir: Your correspondent Anne-Marie Baxter (Letters, 18 February) opines that Britain has plenty of room for more housing. Perhaps she would have a few housing estates on the underdeveloped wilderness of Exmoor near her home? Here in rural Staffordshire it is two years since I saw a hedgehog, five since I saw a toad, and eight since I saw a frog. Sparrows here are down to one small flock, and I have seen none in London — not a single 'cockney sparrer' — for many years.

The question, with unlimited fecundity and technologies which have made humans as near as dammit immortal, is not 'How many houses can we crowbar in here?', but 'What sort of world do we want?' Having created, with blithe indifference, an ecology which will no longer support frogs, toads and hedgehogs, perhaps we should begin to wonder if the ecology we are creating will, one day, not support humans.
W.G. Sellwood
Stafford

Picture imperfect

Sir: My memories of my conversation with Harry Mount about Bullingdon Club photographs are different from his ('Bye bye, Buller', 18 February). No doubt I mentioned the Stalinist habit of airbrushing inconvenient persons from pictures and from history. But this had ceased long before I lived in the USSR in the early 1990s. And the picture which I discussed with him was not the famous image of David Cameron and friends in their Bullingdon battledress, but a later study of the club, featuring Mr Mount himself, George Osborne and Nat Rothschild. As I noted in my *Mail on Sunday* column back in 2008, it is very odd. I had and have no explanation, certainly not the one he attributes to me in his article.

To the left of the middle, there's a peculiar gap where somebody ought to be standing, but isn't. Curiously, there's a patch of shirtfront and waistcoat there, with no person wearing them. More puzzling still, Mr Rothschild's right trouser leg has a white lapel on it, not a usual arrangement even under the distinctive dress code of the Bullingdon. On close examination, the three seated figures at the front appear to have been stuck in place after being moved from somewhere else. Mr Mount did at one stage offer to explain to me what had happened, and we arranged to meet. But he then cancelled the meeting. I thank him for reminding me of this.
Peter Hitchens
London W8

Betting on Trump

Sir, I have always enjoyed reading Matthew Parris: his articles are always cogent, trenchant and beautifully expressed. However, he has recently acquired the habit of being invariably wrong. His offer to take a small bet that Donald Trump's state visit won't happen (18 February) is therefore worth a punt. May I offer £50?
David Hipshon
Twickenham, Middlesex

Pipe dream

Sir: I read with interest Charles Moore's comment on the verse in Psalm 42 regarding the 'water pipe' (Notes, 18 February). He asks about the original Hebrew text. The word in Hebrew is *tzinor*, which in Talmudic and modern Hebrew does mean pipe. But the word in Psalms seems to refer to a water channel — which is conceptually similar to a water pipe. This would make more sense in the context. There is supporting evidence in 2 Samuel 5:8, the only other place in the Bible where *tzinor* appears. There it was originally translated as 'gutter', but since excavations by Charles Warren in 1867, it has been thought to refer to a water tunnel which helped Jerusalem's inhabitants access their water supply from the Gihon spring.
Robert Isaacson
London NW11

How not to dance

Sir: Poor old Mark Mason, who dislikes dancing and hates being pressured to join in ('Let's not dance', 18 February). As the years advance I feel the opposite pressure. Most men of my generation shy away from the dancefloor thanks to the invention of the phrase 'dad-dancing', which is seen as terminally uncool. In fact the only thing more uncool is air-guitar playing, which Mark enjoys. When next pushed to dance he should strap on his phantom Fender and make agonised faces in the manner of Carlos Santana mid-solo. He won't be asked again.
Brian Hancill
Greenwich

Contactless cleaners

Sir: Martin Vander Weyer (Any other business, 18 February) cites a widow of 72 who manages fine without cash or cheques. Does she have a cleaner or window-cleaner, and if so how does she pay?
Peter Gregory
Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire

Why I'm glad that Unilever saw off predatory robot Kraft Heinz

I was sorry Kraft Heinz's £115 billion bid for Unilever collapsed so fast — unveiled on Friday, it was dead by Sunday. Not that I saw the aggressor as a worthy potential victor; but a longer battle would have provided great material for column-sermons on good and bad capitalism. Aha, I hear you ask, but which side is which?

Unilever is the Anglo-Dutch maker of Dove soap and Magnum ice creams. With its dual headquarters in London and Rotterdam, its multi-layered bureaucracy and its bosses who bang on about social responsibility, it might be seen as a big fat corporate proxy for the European Union — in urgent need of a shake-up. Processed-cheese-to-ketchup giant Kraft Heinz, by contrast, is a cost-slashing value-generator bolted together by two of the world's wiliest investors, Warren Buffett and the Swiss-Brazilian billionaire Jorge Paulo Lemann. If the two conglomerates became one, supermarkets would still offer their brands at the same prices; Unilever shareholders could cash out if they didn't like it; factories might close, but that's the way of the world: there's no other way to maximise profits.

Well, maybe. Except that culture-destroying mega-mergers rarely reward investors. And the business world flourishes through biodiversity in which there's still room for Unilevers that set global benchmarks and train top managers, just as there's room for disrupters and innovators. But Kraft Heinz is none of those: it is a predatory financial robot designed to chew up acquisitions and spit out the bits that underperform. The outcome of Kraft's 2010 hostile takeover of Cadbury — now just a sad name within another corporate monster, Mondelez — is all the cautionary tale we need. A good thing, then, that the Kraft Heinz crew read the weekend reactions and realised they had launched a battle they would not win.

Secondhand Vauxhall

Unilever filled the headlines, but the week's most significant takeover story was the potential sale of General Motors' European interests, including Vauxhall factories employing 4,500 workers in Luton and Ellesmere Port, to PSA, the French parent of Peugeot and Citroën. Vauxhall, like its Astra model, is an unglamorous stalwart of our thriving auto industry; its UK market share, currently 8 per cent, has been on a slow downtrend; and together with its German sister company Opel, it has lost money for GM for 16 consecutive years.

Business Secretary Greg Clark, having met PSA chiefs and his French ministerial counterpart, says Vauxhall workers have nothing to fear — which implies he must have offered PSA the same post-Brexit sweeteners the prime minister waved at Nissan. But if despite that unspecified promise it turns out UK car factories can no longer participate freely in the pan-European supply chain that makes the industry so competitive, would you bet on PSA (14 per cent owned by the French taxpayer) favouring Vauxhall for new investment when it could favour Opel or its own domestic factories? No, neither would I.

RBS: the farce continues

Ahead of its ninth-annual-loss-in-a-row announcement, RBS achieved a blip in its share price by revealing that it is no longer even trying to sell off the 307 branches that it has repackaged as Williams & Glyn. Insisted upon by EU competition authorities as a condition of RBS's 2008 bailout, with a deadline of December 2017, this project has been a business-school case-study in how not to execute change. Having spent £1.6 billion trying to unplug the new entity from the mothership, RBS abandoned hope of floating it as a 'challenger' and failed to sell it to Santander or Clydesdale Yorkshire — the only parties to show serious interest, but neither willing to pay enough to satisfy RBS's Treasury masters. Meanwhile, a comparable shrinkage was achieved by the cruder method of closing lots of NatWest and RBS branches (of which more below).

Now we learn that instead of severing Williams & Glyn, RBS will appease Brussels by offering a bundle of measures to encourage challenger banks to compete against itself in the small and medium-sized business market. Some £750 million will be spent to create an altruistic admin burden that actually takes business away from RBS, while analysts say reabsorbing the 307 ring-fenced branches could cost hundreds of millions more. What a farcical outcome.

The positive spin says this wheeze removes a barrier to the sell-off of the taxpayers' 73 per cent stake in RBS. But since the other barrier is the US probe into securities mis-selling that's expected to result in a $12 billion fine — and since the bank's shares still stand at half the price at which the taxpayer bought in — don't put your champagne on ice. RBS chief executive Ross McEwan is no fool, but he has an impossible job. Promising a return to profit by 2018, he will tell us again this week that inside RBS is a good business, perhaps several good businesses, waiting to see the light of day. I still think the only way to let that happen is to tow the hulk to the breakers' yard.

Our readers' report

Your emails on the subject of bank branch closures were so varied and extensive that I cannot do justice to them here, or answer them all personally. Instead I am pasting them together — omitting your names — to send to the admirable Dame Colette Bowe, who chairs the Banking Standards Board. At full length (10,000 words so far), our report has a clear theme: customers must try to adapt to the changing technologies and market conditions that are making branch networks shrink; but banks should and could be a lot smarter, more sensitive and more collaborative in the way they make that happen. Perhaps Dame Colette might include us in her speech to the forthcoming FT Banking Standards Conference, straplined 'Changing business behaviour for the better.'

BOOKS & ARTS

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Eduardo Paolozzi mosaics in Tottenham Court Road Tube station, London, originally completed in 1986 and restored in 2016
Laura Freeman — p44

Christian Wolmar hints that Europe's great night trains are about to be rescued by the Russians
Marcus Berkmann is unimpressed by A.A. Gill's verbal pyrotechnics

Julie Burchill reckons that Harriet Harman's dull prose makes ditchwater look like a dry martini
Lloyd Evans is convinced society has a lot to learn from prostitutes

Martin Gayford reveals the man in American Gothic to be the artist's dentist
James Walton suspects the BBC are cunningly saving on the lighting budget by making SS-GB so gloomy

BOOKS

Frontier territory

The border between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey has long been a flashpoint. Now, more than ever, says *Simon Kuper*, it's a hazardous transit realm for the homeless

Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe
by Kapka Kassabova
Granta, £14.99, pp. 379

In Ali's Café, just inside Turkey on the Bulgarian border, Iraqi and Syrian refugees spend their days drinking tea. Now and then, someone goes into the back room to give bundles of money to smugglers who have promised to get him into the European Union. Only when piano chords strike up on the radio does Kapka Kassabova realise what Ali's reminds her of: Rick's Bar in the movie *Casablanca*, a transit realm 'where the homeless of the day come in search of passage'.

The Syrian refugees literally walked into Kassabova's book. Like many ruined peoples before them, they were heading for the border she was writing about — the crossing point between Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece where 'Europe' has tried for centuries to build its wall with the East. This lazy-paced, directionless yet valuable book brings to life not just a neglected region but also one of the themes of our time: borders, open and closed.

Kassabova has the obsession with borders that comes from growing up behind the Iron Curtain. Raised in communist Bulgaria, she later emigrated to New Zealand, and now lives in Scotland. But she always yearned to see the borderlands that had been sealed to her, 'the forbidden places of my childhood'. For this book she spent years gathering the stories of ordinary border-dwellers.

Today Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria have 'three alphabets, three currencies, three versions of history'. But for most of history the border was blurrier. People on all sides descended from the ancient Thracians (almost forgotten now, because unlike their Greek contemporaries they didn't leave behind any writing). Later, Muslims, Catholics and orthodox Christians were sprinkled almost randomly around the region. In the Ottoman empire, you found the unlikeliest people all over the place.

The anthropologist Ernest Gellner famously said that the ethnographic map of Europe used to look like a painting by Oskar Kokoschka, a 'riot of diverse points of colour'. But after the multi-ethnic empires collapsed in 1918, the map came to resemble a Modigliani: neat flat surfaces clearly separated from each other.

When, in 1989, Bulgaria again forced its ethnic Turks to take Slav names, 340,000 preferred to move to Turkey

The post-Ottoman nation states achieved this through ethnic cleansing. Kassabova describes the horrors: Greek-speakers in Turkey and Muslims and Bulgarian-speakers in Greece were wrenched from their ancestral homes and marched off to 'homelands' they didn't know. They would arrive, writes Kassabova, in 'an empty house in a foreign country with the kitchen pots still warm'. Many of these people remained 'homesick for the rest of their lives'. Kassabova finds one family, displaced from Bulgaria just across the border into Turkey, who could look across the hills at their original village, until it was cleared by the army in 1948 and eventually swallowed by the forest.

Some displaced people transmitted their homesickness to their children, even their grandchildren. Every summer now, Thrace witnesses an 'ancestral pilgrimage' of people who drive across borders to visit their grandparents' houses. They are generally welcomed by the locals, who know how it feels.

Many of the characters in this book think of themselves as still exiled. Some clearly wish themselves back in that pre-1918 Kokoschka painting: Kassabova attends an Orthodox Easter service in a Turkish border town where half the congregants are Muslims. And tiny vestiges of the original Kokoschka painting survive, such as the Pomak Muslims still living in Greek and Bulgarian villages.

The region's Jews were scrubbed from the painting in the second world war. Afterwards, the border became the southern section of the Iron Curtain. Previously people had been forced to cross; during the Cold War, they weren't allowed to cross. Kassabova recounts the story of a Turkish shepherd in 1970, who, watering his horse at the border river, exchanged cheery greetings with a shepherd across the way in Bulgaria. A Turkish patrol saw him do it. The shepherd was jailed for espionage and eventually hanged himself. Hundreds of people, especially Bulgarians and East Germans, were killed trying to cross this border. In 1989, the dying Bulgarian communist regime revived the periodic ritual of forcing the country's ethnic Turks to take Slav names. About 340,000 people preferred to move to Turkey.

A closed border is a dead end, where few people want to live, and where the authorities distrust everybody. Some border-dwellers were moved during the Cold War to less sensitive regions. Others left voluntarily,

GETTY IMAGES

Pomak Muslims still live in Greek and Bulgarian villages. Left: a bride embarks on her two-day winter wedding in Ribnovo, 210 km from Sofia

abandoning their houses. The two heartland villages of the ancient Greek-Bulgarian cult of fire worship, Madjura and Pirgopulo, now each have a population of zero. In an otherwise empty Turkish village, a man and wife living alone with their sheep sigh, 'All we need is another family.'

Kassabova finds Greek villages that were 'decimated four times: by refugee outflows, the second world war, the civil war, and then the Cold War'. After all this, the region, always sparsely populated, has become possibly Europe's last wilderness. Kassabova describes a viper-filled forest straight out of the *Iliad*, and a dying village with plum trees that very occasionally feels like Eden.

When the border reopened in the 1990s, people on all sides discovered all the things they still had in common. There is a (much too long) chapter on Bulgarian and Greek villagers getting together for a fire-walking ceremony. (Kassabova has a spiritual streak, and readers will need high tolerance for evil eyes, bean readers and mystical fireballs.)

Now the border is closing again. As the Syrians and Iraqis try to head west, Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has done a deal with the EU to keep them in his country. Kassabova empathises with the refugees. In 1991, during Bulgaria's post-communist collapse, her freshly impoverished academic family sat in Sofia waiting by candlelight for emigration visas. Now, when she meets Iraqi Kurdish teenage girls stuck in a Turkish nowheresville, she feels

> everything with them: the humiliation, the injustice, the mindfuck of having to hate where you come from but having nothing new to love… The sensation of being invisible, unwanted, speechless, a disembodied soul waiting in one of history's drafty corridors.

Many of today's border peoples feel that same empathy: they see in the exhausted figures walking into exile the ghosts of their own great-grandparents.

Some of the new refugees may remain stuck in Turkey their whole lives. They will have children there, become new ethnic groups — post-2011 Syrian Turks, say. Then one day some ruler might decide to cleanse them too.

This is an occasionally fascinating but flawed book. It has no narrative drive. Though Kassabova has merged bits of her interviewees' stories, she has scarcely imposed structure or selection. She also has an odd habit of beginning a story at the end, and then continuing to the beginning. Then there is her tendency to the high-flown:

> The border forest is where destiny becomes manifest, if we linger too long. No wonder it repels and attracts like a karmic magnet. In the border forest, we condemn and absolve ourselves, again and again. There is death foretold in that, and there is immense compulsion.

Whatever.

But even when the writing isn't great, the subject is. Most books are written by metropolitans, who tend to ignore peripheries. Reading Kassabova, you get a sense of an eternal pendulum swing between open and closed borders. The latest swing has just begun, with Brexit, Erdogan's border wall, and soon maybe Trump's. Almost by accident, Kassabova has written a book for our time.

GETTY IMAGES

The star-struck Claretta, Mussolini's last love. According to her diaries, he radiated a 'god-like potency' and a 'bull-like' magnetism

The Ben and Clara affair

Ian Thomson

Claretta: Mussolini's Last Lover
by R.J.B. Bosworth
Yale, £18.99, pp. 320

As a child in fascist Italy, Clara Petacci (known as Claretta) was dutifully adoring of Benito Mussolini and the cult of *ducismo*. She gave the stiff-armed Roman salute while at school (the Duce had declared handshaking fey and unhygienic) and sang the fascist youth anthem 'Giovinezza'. Her father, the Pope's personal physician, was a convinced fascist, for whom Mussolini was the incarnation of animal cunning — *furbizia* — and the manful fascist soul. Claretta herself would have to wait before she met the 'divine Caesar'.

One day in April 1932, while motoring from Rome to the seaside resort of Ostia, she caught sight of her idol behind the wheel of his Alfa Romeo. 'Follow him!' she ordered her chauffeur. The cars drew level, and Mussolini pulled over to confront his pursuer. Petacci was 20; he was 49. But to judge by her diaries — first published in Italy in 2009 as *Mussolini segreto* (*Secret Mussolini*) — the encounter was love at first sight. As the weeks went by, the doctor's daughter began to court the Duce in a decorous way, first by sending him perfumed billets-doux, then by calling him on the telephone. Before long, 'savage, ardent sex' took place daily in Mussolini's headquarters in Rome.

His vainglorious sexual boasting ('They say I've got the most beautiful body in Italy') worked on her like an aphrodisiac. Richard Bosworth, a research fellow at Jesus College, chronicles the 'Ben and Clara' affair in his absorbing new biography, *Claretta*, an addition to his previous histories of Rome and fascist Italy. Unfortunately for the 'genteelly reared' Catholic girl, Claretta was engaged to another man, while Mussolini himself was married with five children.

'I've been a racist since 1921. I don't know how they can think that I'm imitating Hitler,' said Mussolini

The grandly uniformed Dux surely looked incongruous in her bedroom with its baby-pink telephone and items of pink furniture. He had had relations (or one-night stands) with hundreds of women by now, perhaps 'as many as 400', according to the Italian journalist Roberto Olla, whose 2012 psycho-sexual biography, *Dux, una biografia sessuale di Mussolini*, provides Bosworth with some of his material.

Hitler's dealings with Eva Braun were frankly 'arid' by comparison. At first Claretta was brusquely mauled by Mussolini under his desk or on mattress-like cushions installed for the purpose. Towards the end of his 23-year-dictatorship, however, the Duce's potency inevitably diminished and he became addicted to a German-manufactured aphrodisiac pill trademarked Hormovin. Taking this prototype Viagra was, in some ways, a political act as it served to prolong the myth of the Duce as the one who never flagged. Not only did he squeeze women's breasts as if they were 'rubber automobile horns' (in the words of one of his British biographers), he routinely made for their genitals, Trump-style.

Until recently, Mussolini's sexuality has largely been ignored by historians as being unworthy of study. Yet it was central to the 'virile' cult of fascism and the Duce's image of himself as a man of power and *ardimento* — physical daring. He radiated a 'god-like potency' and 'bull-like' magnetism, according to Claretta. Her diaries, amply quoted here, record the dictator's every movement and all his words to her, no matter how cringe-making or saccharine ('I'd like to jump onto your bed like a big tomcat').

Probably, she first wrote to Mussolini on 7 April 1926, when the mentally disturbed daughter of a Conservative MP, Violet Gibson, shot at the Duce at close range in Rome. (The bullet missed Mussolini's head by a fraction, but snicked the tip off his nose.) 'O, Duce, why was I not with you?', the 14-year-old schoolgirl exclaimed angrily. 'Could I not have strangled that murderous woman?' Gibson came close to changing the fate of European history. Instead she ended her days in 1956 in a lunatic asylum in Northampton, unwept-for and disregarded. Claretta never forgot the near-fatal gunshot, and vowed to protect her Caesar-divinity from then on.

Initially, according to Bosworth, Mussolini had greeted Hitler's rise to power in 1933 warily. A racial dogma that glorified blond northerners conflicted somewhat with the fascist cult of ancient Rome (*romanità*). Nevertheless, a latent tension had always existed between fascism and Italian Jews. Zionists, in particular, were seen by Mussolini as an inward-looking supranational sect, inimical to the sturdy Blackshirt bond of race and nation. 'I've been a racist since 1921,' he told Claretta during a boating trip in September 1938, adding self-pityingly: 'I don't know how they can think that I'm imitating Hitler.'

Ultimately, Claretta's love for Benito was less romantic than 'pathetic', Bosworth concludes. In April 1945, with the Duce's defeat inevitable, Claretta was executed by anti-fascists and her body strung up alongside her lover's in Milan, not far from the site where, 26 years earlier, the fascist party had been launched. A passer-by is believed to have said: 'One thing you can say of Petacci: she did have nice legs' — a doll to the last.

It survived the Middle Ages, Henry VIII and two world wars.

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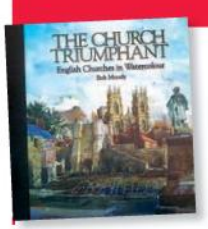

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In the thieves' den

Andrew Taylor

The Fatal Tree
by Jake Arnott
Sceptre, £16.99, pp. 336

'To get a confession from a proud malefactor, it is always better to call for a poet than a priest.' These are the wise words of William Archer, the narrator of part of *The Fatal Tree* and the notional editor of the rest. Mind you, he's biased: he aspires to be a poet, though he is at best a 'garreteer', one of the Grub Street hacks who provide better writers than themselves with lurid copy about the early Georgian underworld they live in.

Archer's world is the 'Hundreds of Drury', the streets and alleys around Drury Lane where the thieves, prostitutes and con men ply their trades. Known as Romeville in the thieves' cant that colours so much of this novel, it holds up a dark mirror to the great metropolis around it. Romeville has its own laws and customs, its own heroes and villains. Immortalised by Defoe, Gay and Fielding, it both terrifies and fascinates the public.

Archer is fictional, but most of the other main characters are not. Among them is the infinitely sinister Jonathan Wild, the self-styled 'Thieftaker General of Great Britain and Ireland', who plays each side of the law against the other to his own advantage. His feud with Jack Shepherd, the charismatic burglar who refuses to accept his authority, is one factor leading to his eventual downfall.

But the voice we hear most clearly is that of Edgeworth Bess, a prostitute who loves Jack but knows his weaknesses. In February 1726, at the start of the novel, she is imprisoned in Newgate. She dictates her life story to Archer in 'flash', the thieves' language, while she waits to end her life on the 'Fatal Tree' at Tyburn.

In parallel with her story, Archer unfolds his own, for a reason that becomes fully apparent only at the end. He belongs to the homosexual subculture that finds a degree of tolerance within Romeville. He's also a 'spruce prig', a thief who dresses like the gentry and apes their mannners.

Jake Arnott, who is probably best known for excellent novels such as *The Long Firm* about London gangsters in the 1960s, has done much more than update the work of his 18th-century predecessors. Unlike them, he shows the citizens of Romeville as people, not as folk heroes or bogeymen, and he does this without prurience or sentimentality.

In doing so, he gives us a convincing and densely textured picture of the world they live in. He doesn't spare the reader the fruits of his research. If sentences like 'I touted peery of the prig-napper by lightmans' make you feel queasy, this may not be the novel for you. The rest of us will scurry to the glossary at the end of the book.

It's worth the effort. *The Fatal Tree* is not just a sophisticated exercise in historical pastiche. Arnott explores what poor Bess calls 'the felony of love', a crime that is not on the statute book. The result is powerful, poignant and readable.

Dead poet's society

Johanna Thomas-Corr

Hame
by Annalena McAfee
Harvill Secker, £16.99, pp. 592

Alex Salmond, former first minister of Scotland, once claimed that he could always tell Scottish fiction from English. Novels, he said, reveal fundamental differences in the values of the Scots and the English.

I wonder then what he would make of Annalena McAfee's book, *Hame* — about the most Scottish work of fiction that any English novelist could possibly write. So committed is the former *Guardian* journal-

THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

George Mackay Brown appears part-inspiration for Annalena McAfee's fictional poet Grigor McWatt

ist authentically to explore every aspect of life north of the Border that she learnt to speak Braid Scots — from Lallans to Doric dialects — and crafted poetry in them. Surely that makes her more Scottish than most born-and-bred Caledonians? For what drives *Hame* is this question of national identity and whether (like gender?) it is simply a construct.

The story focuses on an academic, Mhairi McPhail, who leaves behind her hipster life in New York to move with her young daughter to the remote fictional Hebridean island of Fascaray, where she's agreed to write the biography of its most celebrated resident: a crotchety, English-hating writer named Grigor McWatt.

As she sorts through his letters and somewhat humourless compendium of island life, Mhairi questions her own motives for 'serving as handmaiden to a dead poet' (a composite of various mid-century Scots poets such as George Mackay Brown and Hugh MacDiarmid). McWatt also leaves an archive of newspaper columns in which he 'maned' (moaned) about everything from the golf-courseification of the island to young people chosing American pop culture over ceilidhs. All 'whumgee' (frivolous) forms of entertainment appalled him anyway; his own passions were poetry and Scottish nationalism, which he pursued by translating the likes of Donne, Byron, Blake and Larkin into a language dismissed by one critic as 'a sort of Woolworths Pick' n' Mix assortment of half-remembered barely spoken words from innumerable incompatible dialects across Scotland'.

Mhairi discovers that McWatt was so burdened by half a century of threats to Fascaray's cultural purity that he didn't have time to indulge in 'hochmagandy' (sex) with his muse, Lilias Hogg. The only thing he truly yearned for was 'a life of quiet toil in the service of Scots poetry' and, unfortunately for the reader, his attempts to lead such an existence proved remarkably successful.

McAfee is an elegant, knowing writer but it's a pity she couldn't step away from her exhaustive research and let her imagination take over. She's at her best describing the beauty of her island or having fun with language — but she could have had much more mischief with her characters. They become so mired in local funding applications and Scottish plumbing bothers that the story feels rather ho-hum. I longed for someone to get trapped by the Fascardian tides or inveigled into some *Wicker Man*-esque habber-galyo (turmoil). Alas, what we get is a rather predictable literary thoog a poog. I could tell you what that means, but it would spoil the novel's sole moment of drama.

A surreal caprice

Stuart Kelly

The Last Days of New Paris
by China Miéville
Picador, £14.99, pp. 224

At the start of this novella the protagonist, Thibaut, is ambushed by Wehrmacht soldiers between the ninth and tenth arrondissements. That the year in 1950 is not the strangest aspect, as he is rescued by the appearance of the Vélo, a bicycle-like contraption with a queasily organic prow. It is, in fact, a living version of Leonora Carrington's 1941 sketch 'I Am an Amateur of Velocipedes'. In this initially joyous, fundamentally chilling book, the art of the surrealists has been weaponised in the fight against Nazism. Surrealism billed itself as a liberation; now is it part of the Liberation. 'New Paris' is stalked by versions of André Breton's 'Exquisite Corpse', sunflowers from Dorothea Tanning, Grace Pailthorpe's 'Sandbumtious' and Max Ernst's 'Celebes' — abbreviated as '*manifs*' (demonstrations). The Eiffel Tower is still there, damaged, with only its top floating extant. The Nazis have difficulty fighting back. Paris is contained and they are losing the aesthetic arms race, given how imitative and second-rate fascist art is. They have, therefore, entered into an expedient pact with Hell.

Nazis in league with demons is a well-handled trope (the film *Hellboy*, the comic *Fiends of the Eastern Front*), but Miéville makes the concept his own by having it as another of their clichés; schlock-horror kitsch pitched against avant-garde innovation. He is too subtle not to build into the novella an awareness of the belligerence of early 20th-century art: the paeans to destruction in Marinetti; the infamous quote by Breton that the simplest act of surrealism is to 'fire randomly into a crowd'; and Dalí's boast that surrealism was 'destructive'. (He gets short shrift here, blessedly.)

Thibaut will eventually encounter Sam, whom he assumes is an American Special Operations officer, but who claims she is a curator, documenting the extravagances of New Paris, and there is a plan to be foiled. Alternate chapters intercut their story with the creation of the 'S-bomb' that unleashed the art. But Miéville also includes a concluding essay about the (purely fictitious) origin of the story and a guide to the works of art both vivified and vivisected throughout. It's a more capacious and nuanced version of surrealism than the recent blockbuster exhibition at Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. The book manages to be a caprice and a chrestomathy at the same time, a rollicking display of Miéville's panache and a serious study of how art can resist, and how it is inadequate as resistance. As the novel hints early on, remember what Hitler wanted to be.

The previous novella by Miéville was as stark and sinister as a Delvaux skeleton; this is a more riotous affair in both senses of the word. There is more of the precise and arcane vocabulary, more of the exuberant teratology, more of the quietly insistent politics. There are plenty of Easter eggs for second readings — the Nazi occult surgery features 'at one end of the dissection table, a sewing machine, at the other an umbrella'. Thibaut's grieving backstory does not involve Nazis, demons or ambulant artworks but Arendt-style 'banalities'. With its fractured oppositions, bad taste, demagoguery and monstrous alliances it seems all too relevant. As Breton wrote, 'the imaginary is what tends to become real'.

Telling stories

Daniel Swift

Ashland & Vine
by John Burnside
Cape, £16.99, pp. 352

John Burnside is the author of an impressive bookshelf of elegant novels and slim, precise volumes of poetry, and like all prolific writers he has certain repeated themes. Nicely, repetition is one of his themes. He writes of the tricks of memory, and the impossibility of perfectly recalling the past. He writes of absent fathers, often, and how they are remembered by their children. His poems sound like hymns, or the blues. 'Before the songs I sang there were the songs/ they came from,' begins his poem 'Death Room Blues', and ends: 'I'm half convinced that childhood never happened.' Burnside's new novel *Ashland & Vine* is a story about telling old stories again, and never quite settling the truth of a childhood long past.

Jean ends each story with a promise of what she will tell the following day – so long as Kate stays sober

In summary, it sounds a little pretentious. A student called Kate is having a moderately unhappy, druggy relationship with a film-maker in a fictional American college town called Scarsville. The film-maker is from Estonia, or at least he claims to be, and he is called Laurits. He is a classic bore: he likes to say things like 'history is written by the survivors', and makes short films which include slow shots of a woman running up a flight of stairs, or birds circling round a pier.

One day, while helping Laurits research his latest spurious project, Kate meets an older woman called Jean, and the two women are drawn to each other. They agree to meet again, and their meetings compose the structure of the book. In each short chapter, Jean tells Kate stories, of American radicals of the 1960s, the Weather Underground and the My Lai massacre. A little like Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*, Jean ends each story with a promise of what she will tell tomorrow, but Kate must in return agree to stay sober.

And yet this is a delicate, beautiful novel, filled with tender details and sharply evoked, lyrical moments. Each chapter is shaped like a short story and arranged around a set motif: the vulnerability of the body, for example, or the romance of lost causes. This is a deeply poetic form, and recalls Kate's description of Laurits's films: 'For Laurits, a story was just the string on which the real pearls were threaded. What he wanted was atmosphere, texture, weather.'

The atmosphere of *Ashland & Vine* is American. Although Burnside is Scottish, and teaches at St Andrews, the novel has a deeply American sensibility: at times it recalls the great novelist Marilynne Robinson, and lines echo the poems of Emily Dickinson. There are echoes, too, of the short stories of James Joyce, for this is a highly literary book, as well as an almost religious one. It considers the huge devotional questions that have long animated writers, about what happens after death, and what is holy in the modern world. The café where Jean and Kate sit and talk is called the Sacred Grounds, which is a terrible but revealing pun, for one of the novel's quiet obsessions is with what we may base our beliefs upon.

Acer Campestre

The field maple by the bridge to Old Ford Lane
is one of my favourites, too. Unshowy,
not peddling syrup or bragging about its colours,
but steadily marking the place where the waggoner
used to roll through the river, where now
the satnavs misdirect the four-by-foursw
who find there's only a footbridge, a waiting
pike beneath, some stories about the horse that slipped
and broke its leg, and dried remains from the floods
that covered the bridge, the bench, the whole
field from here to Gimber's End, but not the maple.

— *John Greening*

More matter with less art

Marcus Berkmann

Lines in the Sand: Collected Journalism
by A.A. Gill
Weidenfeld, £20, pp. 295

When A.A. Gill died last December, there was wailing and gnashing of teeth across the nation. I must admit this came as a surprise to me, but then I hadn't read him for many years, having developed a ferocious dislike for the *Sunday Times* too long ago now to remember quite why. My memories of him were of an outrageous show pony, a wordsmith of great talent but surprisingly little taste, who essentially wrote about himself and his wonderful life (in the guise of restaurant and television reviews) in a needy, look-at-me, sub-Clarkson kind of way. He seemed to me to encapsulate everything that was wrong with the paper he wrote for, whatever that turns out to have been.

But people were genuinely upset when he died, and not just because he was by all accounts a good egg. I suspect this is because humorous writers are much more loved by readers than editors ever suspect. When Miles Kington died in 2008, staff at the *Independent* were shocked by the intensity of their readers' reaction. To them Kington had just been this bloke who filled up a corner of the paper every day. But some people, it turned out, had been buying the paper purely to read the funny man. I'm sure the same was true of Gill. Such writers are devilishly hard to replace.

Perhaps Gill was someone who wrote so much that he simply didn't know when he was good and when he wasn't

Before he croaked, Gill put together this selection of articles, which covers the last five years of his career. The subtitle is deceptive. So much did the poor man have to write that a *Collected Journalism* would weigh several tons and be transportable only by pantechnicon. This is a more manageable volume altogether. It's split into three sections: 'Lines in the Sand', which collects his various pieces about refugees; 'Out There', which are mainly travel pieces; and 'In Here', which are more personal pieces. There is very little restaurant reviewing and nothing about telly at all.

The refugee stuff is very good: angry, passionate and profoundly empathetic in a way that would have been beyond the young Gill. Some humorous writers lose their humour as they get older, and

become pompous instead (I could name a few). Others, like Gill, learn to temper the jokes, use them more sparingly and more wisely. This section, to be honest, gets a bit much because each of his tales of refugees' pain and displacement is essentially the same, and the effect is a bit like being repeatedly hit over the head with a vast Sunday newspaper until you finally pass out. But it all needed to be said, and he says it beautifully.

The rest is surprisingly variable. Gill, we discover, never did get over the showing off. If he has an expensive holiday to go on, he needs to tell you how expensive. Celebrity friends peep in and out. Often it's the sheer quantity of words that defeats you. 'Of all Jeremy Clarkson's ruddy, intransigently stubborn, pouty, Yorkshire-contrarian beliefs, hunches and prejudices, perhaps the most obtuse and unbelievably counter-intuitive is his deep, soulful love for the French.' It may just be me, but this opening sentence doesn't make me want to read sentence number two.

Occasionally he is brilliant. His obliteration of Morrissey's autobiography is masterly. There are excellent articles about Scottish independence and the drunken youth of Humberside. His piece on Europe, written just before the referendum to annoy the Brexiteers, is a marvel. And here he is in New York with his children:

> We went to Central Park Zoo, which I never liked much. There was a poster that had a picture of a polar bear and said sadly the polar bear had died. I remember that polar bear. It had all the symptoms of anxiety and depression: rocking, pacing, trying to hail cabs at five o'clock. It was a source of shame and embarrassment for ecologically sound New Yorkers and finally the city gave the thing antidepressants, so it had the blank, dry-mouth look of every other Upper East Side lady in a fur coat.

That seems to me a perfectly weighted paragraph.

But a lot here is lazy, rambling and inconsequential. What crystallised the book for me was a notably half-cocked piece about P.G. Wodehouse. Now, I know a bit about Wodehouse, and Gill clearly doesn't. His verbal pyrotechnics fizzle and crack, but they cannot conceal a fundamental shortage of ideas. And he thought that this piece was among his best?

It struck me on reading this that I might have been right about him after all: a remarkable talent, but someone who writes so much that he simply doesn't know when he's good and when he's not. It might even be that he was the worst person in the world to edit a book of his own journalism. Maybe someone else should have done it. Maybe someone else is doing it, in which case I await that volume with no little excitement.

PAUL STUART

Jess Phillips — like a clever, funny friend telling you what gets her goat

The plight of women in Labour

Julie Burchill

A Woman's Work
by Harriet Harman
Allen Lane, £20, pp, 416

Everywoman: One Woman's Truth About Speaking the Truth
by Jess Phillips
Hutchinson, £14.99, pp. 256

We're told not to judge books by their covers, but faced with these two it's hard not to. Harman's is one of those thick, expensive tomes which, understandably, politicians write when they've had enough earache and, unbelievably, publishers keep buying for vast sums, despite the fact that

In Harriet Harman, the masochistic madness of a do-gooding socialist female is laid bare

a fortnight after publication you can pick them up cheaper than an adult colouring book in a remainder bin. The old saw that 'all political careers end in failure' might now better be: 'All political careers end with a book on Amazon going for less than the price of the postage.'

In the run-up to lift-off, Harman sought to sex up her selling point by performing a sort of abbrieviated, civic-minded Dance of the Seven Veils, revealing a double-whammy of sexual indignities at the hands of powerful men, and demanding that the next Doctor Who be female. Sadly, the combination of the two things — not complaining about real assaults then, and being stroppy about an imaginary character now — make her look as bogus and bossy as far too many female Labour MPs already have a reputation for being. Even the title conjures up an unappealing image of a tutting busybody aching to run rings round men just for the sake of it rather than from any burning desire for social change.

Like the awful Diane Abbott, Harman is one of those thoughtful, serious-minded Labour women who seems to come alive when saying silly, thoughtless things. She even has the Voice — that more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger Sunday-school drone which remains convinced that if it keeps repeating itself in ever slower permutations, opposition will do the decent thing and crumble. Brexit, of course, was the ripest raspberry ever blown in the face of such wheedling arrogance. Still, it's hard not to warm to her sharp-nosed, clear-eyed young face on the front cover, peering bravely into a future of policy reviews and quangos galore. Sadly her writing style is so dull it makes ditchwater look like a dry martini — if you had to guess the MP author, you might hazard John Major in his pedantic pomp — and this is rendered comical by the three dynamically named sections of the book: 'Upheaval', 'Transformation' and 'Challenge'.

With almost three decades on the front bench, twice acting deputy leader and the first Labour woman to feature at Prime Minister's Questions, Harman is the definitive Nearly Woman — as are all capable Labour women, trapped in a party which having signed up to the brotherhood of man seems quite happy to ride roughshod over their sisters, forever promising them jam tomorrow so long as they themselves pick the fruit, boil the berries and write the labels. At a time when the Conservatives are on their second female leader and Labour are led by a man who seems as impervious to sexism as any other weirdy beardy from Real Ale Society to mosque, Harman's book seems especially poignant. But I must say that any sympathy I had for her went out of the window in the first 40 pages when, having already suffered physical and verbal gropings from lecturers, employers and comrades without complaining about it, she gets stalked by

a nutter whose case she has been bothering the poor police about through her job with the National Council for Civil Liberties. 'He was menacing and angry. Having been his solicitor, I was fully aware of every detail of his record of violent crime. I knew that he didn't just threaten violence, he carried it out' — and yet she doesn't tell the coppers for years, until he actually threatens to kill her. 'As I tipped out the carrier bags full of just some of the letters I'd kept, the police were aghast that I'd done nothing about it before.'

Here is the masochistic madness of do-gooding socialist feminism laid bare — and Labour wonder why women vote Tory! While we're on the subject of perverts, instead of unreservedly presenting the NCCL as a heroic 'thorn in the side of government' forever fighting for the rights of the little man, Harman might have seen fit to mention that, during her time there, they also granted the Paedophile Information Exchange formal affiliate status at a time when this vile lobby group was suggesting that the age of consent be lowered to ten. A little *mea culpa* might not have gone amiss. Still, it's in the nature of the great and the good not to admit to anything which might reveal them as the entitled, woolly-minded mediocrities they generally are, and Harman — despite her admirable work for women's rights — is no exception.

Jess Phillips's book couldn't be more different. Instead of cool, classy, monochrome photography, there's a rough sketch of the Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley which is so slapdash that the words JESS WAS ERE — LOLZ wouldn't look out of place. But the cover words from J.K. Rowling — 'Jess Phillips is a heroine' — paint a thousand pictures, and I imagine will make this book move quite a bit quicker than the aforementioned dour doorstop.

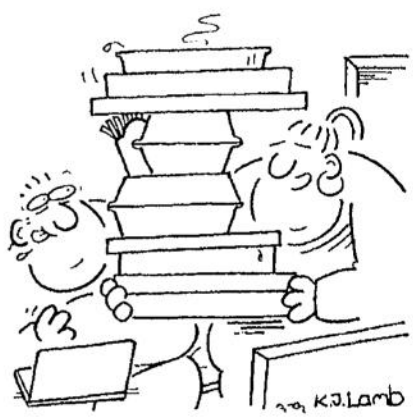
Phillips is the anti-Harman; whereas the well-born lawyer preached women's equality and suffered sexual terrorism in silence, the gobby Brummie appears never to have had a thought that wasn't roundly expressed, especially when it comes to the liberties little men take with visible women. 'You will never be popular' are the first words of the book, spoken by none other than HH herself to our humble heroine just a few months after she arrives in Westminster. For those of a profoundly shallow set of mind, such as myself, this encounter will evoke images of leading lady attempting to put down ingenue from endless Hollywood showbiz flicks. But Jess is nothing if not sisterly: 'I'm not messing — I feel a proper div saying this — but I felt something in my heart… I kid you not, I felt some sort of baton passing.'

Generally, when politicians try to be matey, the result is excruciating, and you wish they'd just sod off back to their ivory tower. But this book really is like reading a transcript of your cleverest, funniest friends talking about what's getting their goat at that point where the prosecco has made them sparkly and before it makes them silly. Not to denigrate the talent of Lena Dunham and Caitlin Moran, but *Everywoman* has all the laughs theirs have with a backbone of real glinting anger which has not had to manicure and mutate itself in order to maintain a cool media career.

Phillips works for the people of Birmingham Yardley, not some entertainment tycoon, and her passion to serve them above all (witness her recent vote for Brexit, although a Remainer, because her constituents were in favour) makes her a far better writer than she would be if angling for clickbait was her primary source of income. Her brazen bumptiousness will appal some and delight others; an MP for only two years, she has yet to have her rough edges smoothed over; and while this is generally an excellent thing, reading her book can sometimes feel a little like having the bolshiest girl in the playground shove you up against a wall and shout in your face until you're saved by the bell.

Jess Phillips can sound like the bolshy girl in the playground shouting in your face until you're saved by the bell

But I never could resist a bolshy broad. In my time I've had to review loads of books which I couldn't stand. This was the first which I dreaded going back to because there were so many funny and wise things on each page that whittling them down into a review seemed impossible. It's very good for the sisterhood that Phillips likes Harman — but it's very good for admirers of wit, wisdom and wicked humour that she's nothing like her at all.



'I've got us a TV dinner, followed by an iPlayer dinner, followed by a Facebook dinner, followed by a Twitter dinner...'

Let me take you through the night

Christian Wolmar

Night Trains: The Rise and Fall of the Sleeper
by Andrew Martin
Profile Books, £14.99, pp. 248

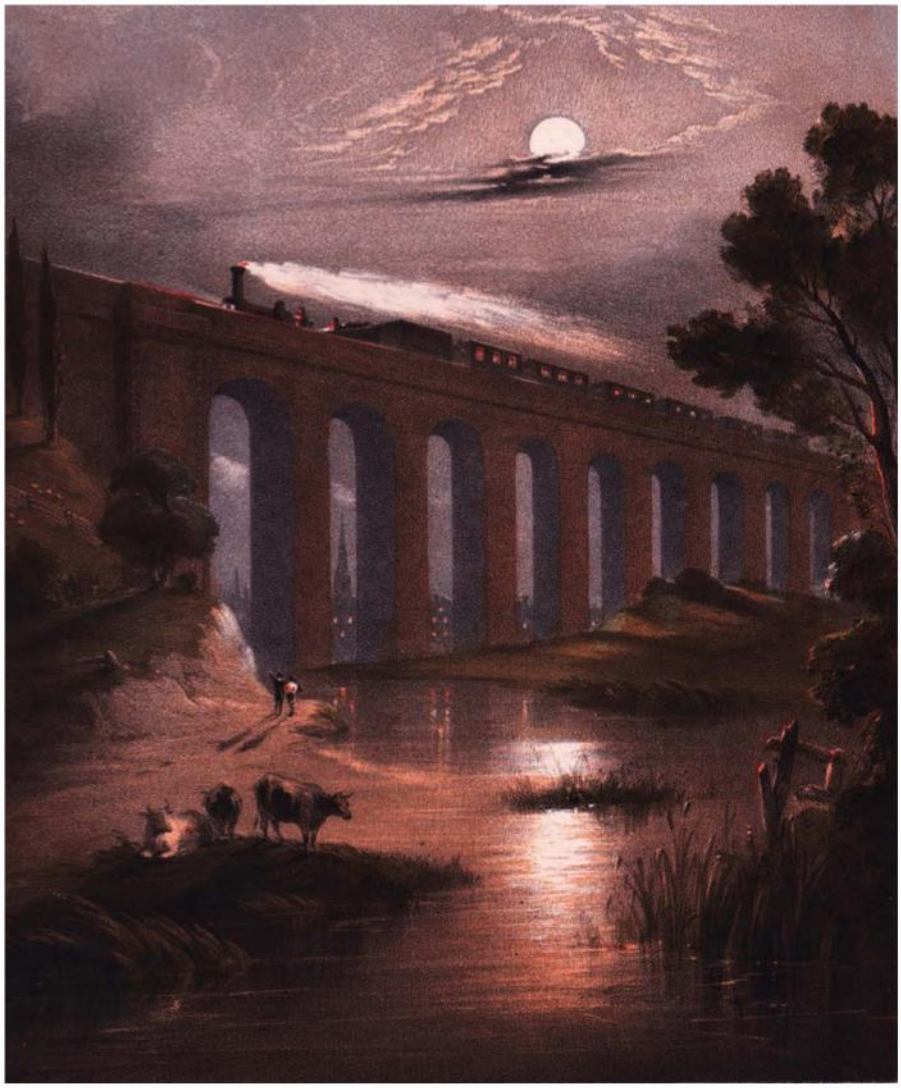
As a child, I used to travel with my mother from London to Cannes, a journey that took slightly under 24 hours. The strangest part of the trip was the three or four hours in Paris, where the train trundled between the Gare du Nord and the Gare de Lyon along the Petite Ceinture, giving us a view of rundown parts of Paris which tourists never normally saw. Sometimes we would cheat and take a cab, giving us a couple of hours off the train, during which we enjoyed a relaxed *steak frites* in the Train Bleu restaurant with its elaborate *belle époque* decor.

I often wondered why the train meandered so long in Paris, and Andrew Martin now provides the explanation. Our carriages from Calais would be linked to others at the Gare de Lyon, which then became the eponymous Train Bleu, and which travelled overnight through to the Côte d'Azur before terminating at Ventimiglia, just over the border in Italy. Waking up to the red rocks of the Esterel mountains is a sight still seared in my memory.

The Train Bleu was part of a whole network of trains that crisscrossed Europe with passengers deep asleep to the tagadaga-tagadaga rhythm as their coaches thundered across the tracks. There was, Martin explains, a key difference between couchettes and sleepers — the latter were equipped with a washbasin in the compartment, though rarely a toilet (but occasionally a discreet sign mentioned that '*sous le lavabo ce trouve une vase*').

Martin, in a laconic style that never becomes maudlin, describes many of these wonderful journeys, but laments that most of them are no longer possible. The railway companies of Europe have been taking a Beeching-scale axe to their night trains because they are heavy loss-makers, given that they cannot compete in price with the low-cost airlines.

Most notably, the Orient Express has gone. It had, in any case, like many of the other surviving trains, become a shadow of its former self. Martin is particularly good at describing these night trains in their pomp, when they were the best, and sometimes the only, way of getting round Europe reasonably fast. However, the service declined markedly from the 1970s, and what had been a service aimed at Europe's elite became a very mundane one. My experience on the Orient Express in 2006, three years before



TRANSCENDENTAL GRAPHICS/GETTY IMAGES

The romance and drama of the night train is captured in Charles d'Albert's illustration

it was finally killed off, was typical: the only food available was the worst crustless white plastic cheese sandwich I have ever eaten. A desperate raid of the automatic machines on Strasbourg station yielded only nuts.

Oddly, it is partly the European Union which has, in two ways, helped kill off so many night trains. First, it favoured low-cost airlines with hidden subsidies and a relaxed regulatory environment; then it broke up the railways, forcing them to identify loss-making services such as the night trains. Therefore, while the EU has been reducing trade barriers and deepening the single market, cross-border railway services have been greatly reduced. Brexit will hardly help us, though it is heartening that we have two surviving services, serving Cornwall and Scotland, and the latter is about to receive a complete new set of modern carriages.

Martin's pessimism is partly because he confines himself too much to Europe, failing to mention other great overnight rail trips of the world, many of which still thrive in a world of high-speed trains and low-cost airlines. The *crème de la crème* is, of course, the six-day journey on the Trans-Siberian between Vladivostok on the Pacific coast and Moscow; but Amtrak, the state-owned railway in the USA, runs a series of very comfortable long-distance overnight trains and you can still enjoy the sleeper between Hanoi and Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City).

'On the Orient Express, I had the worst crustless white plastic cheese sandwich I have ever eaten'

You do not have to be a trainspotter to enjoy this book. It is social history, a kind of epitaph to a way of travel that seems to be lost, at least in Europe. Martin wrote the book, he says, as a lament — but actually, he ends on a positive note. The Russians, it seems, have come to save us. Martin points out that they have just ordered 200 sleeper coaches, principally for domestic use but also on various European routes. Already RZD, the Russian state railway, runs a sleeper train between Moscow and Nice, though the fare is aimed more at your local oligarch who does not like flying than the backpacker who fancies a few days on the Riviera. There are even rumours, he writes, that the Russians may take over the French sleeper trains, which were nearly all — including the popular services to ski resorts — scrapped last year. The trains may mostly be loss-makers, but Putin won't mind that if it means a way of putting two fingers up to his European counterparts.

Conning the connoisseurs

Jack Wakefield

Rogues' Gallery: A History of Art and its Dealers
by Philip Hook
Profile, £20, pp. 282

Rogues' Gallery describes itself as a history of art and its dealers, and Philip Hook, who has worked at the top of Sotheby's for decades, is well versed in his subject. Sadly for the prurient, this is not an exposé of the excesses of the market from one of its high priests; and Hook says that where possible he has avoided writing about the living. It is hard not to feel a bit disappointed. For an alarming moment in the introduction, it seemed as if he was preparing to write an academic treatise about how dealers influence art and taste.

The book does start as more of a conventional history of art-dealing, but it quickly gets into its stride, rattling off the lives of the great dealers of French impressionism and European and American modernism in an engaging style spiced with mordant humour. Peter Wilson fleeces an intoxicated billionairess from the Sotheby's podium, while the Marlborough Gallery director Frank Lloyd leans on a client like this: 'You can change your décor, you can change your wife, but you won't want to change this Bacon once you own it.'

The collective biography is a good idea. Different dealers, and indeed different markets, influence art in different ways. More problematically, the book covers both dealers who represented artists and those, like Lord Duveen, who traded secondhand masterpieces. Perhaps it is impossible to extricate the two types of dealing but the questions raised by each are very different. Nevertheless, one part of the story is the same: art's centre of gravity moves from Europe to America and the last rogue in Hook's gallery is Leo Castelli, the dealer most identified with pop art. By this stage, not only has the art been shipped to America, it has also become American. This seems to point to a depressing truth: that beyond dealers and even beyond artists it has

GETTY IMAGES

Paul Durand-Ruel, who created the market for impressionism, commissioned Renoir's 'Dance in the Country', painted in 1883

always been the same invisible hand pulling the strings: the economy.

The first dealer to realise the potential of America seems to have been Paul Durand-Ruel, and if it is appropriate to talk about a hero in this book then Durand-Ruel is the man. He is the model for all the later art dealers: fixing prices, hiring public relations men and sucking up to museums. Hook draws an interesting parallel between Durand-Ruel and the Belgian-born impresario of the London art market, Ernest Gambart, 17 years his senior. Gambart sold spectacular paintings by Lord Leighton and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema of an idealised and often silly antiquity to mighty Victorian industrialists for vast sums, but he made even more money from selling prints after the paintings and tickets to exhibitions. Yet for all his success in enriching himself and his stable of artists, his version of art-dealing, and the reputation of the art he sold, was all but extinguished by the success of Durand-Ruel, who created the market for impressionism. Perhaps the entertainment value of art for a penny a peep was destroyed by the cinema, but the author also suggests that Gambart sold spectacular subject matter (irrespective of artist) whereas impressionism sold the artist.

Either way, this clearly worked well for the art market both then, and as it does now. Impressionists make up a much bigger volume of work than academic artists and the market needs volume. Many of Hook's rogues were passionate about modern art, with great personal collections of their own, but it certainly suited the bottom line. Meanwhile, the use of spectacular showmanship to sell expensive art was reinvented by the auction houses, and specifically by Peter Wilson, chairman of Sotheby's, who pioneered the dinner-jacketed evening sale as an entertainment to rival the opera. Here he is clearly presented as a crook, with the ear of Wilson's now-ancient younger colleagues; so this is as close as Hook gets to giving out insider knowledge.

It is a shame that Hook chose not to continue his narrative into living memory, past Castelli's championing of pop art, past the rise and fall of Japan (which he doesn't cover), up to the explosion of contemporary art prices. He does allude to that market briefly at the end, pointing out the mega-galleries with global presence that camouflage themselves as museums. But if he had covered the 2008 Damien Hirst sale at Sotheby's it would have elucidated his principal question of the relationship between art and the market. That year, while Lehman Brothers was collapsing, Sotheby's was directly marketing £111 million of Hirst's work to successive ranks of the international rich.

'You can change your doctor, you can change your wife, but you won't want to change this Bacon once you own it'

Durand-Ruel and his successors all used their taste to make the market in art. But a century later a non-discriminatory marketplace was trying to get rid of dealers altogether. And did this global marketplace affect the art that was sold in it? Of course it did. It allowed it to be meretricious rubbish.

All human life is there

Mark Mason

Reading Allowed: True Stories and Curious Incidents from a Provincial Library
by Chris Paling
Constable, £14.99, pp. 320

This book kept reminding me of Robin Williams in *One Hour Photo*. Just as his character spied on customers' private lives while developing their pictures, so Chris Paling gets to know the readers at the library where he works. Unlike Williams he doesn't follow them home at the end of the day (in fact some of the female librarians have the opposite problem), but Paling's anonymous, functional role lets him observe without being observed. He sees the woman with two small children who takes out *Is Daddy Coming Back in a Minute?,* explaining sudden death to children in words they

can understand. The 'effete, shaven-headed man in a well-cut suit' who angrily discusses his new shrink on his mobile phone. The woman who snaps at her husband to hide the tube of Anusol he's just bought, then orders: 'Now choose your books.'

What makes Paling so suited for the role is his career as a novelist. Transferring the 'show don't tell' rule to this work of non-fiction, he simply reports on events and lets his material do the work. We meet the regulars, from the table-seeking students who surge in as the doors open 'like a crowd at a Harrods sale', to Mrs Stone, who 'resembles both in sight and odour a compost heap over which a tarpaulin has been thrown'. She's returning *French Women Don't Get Facelifts: Aging with Attitude*. There are several wonderful appearances by Trish, one of a group of adults who attend the library every week with their carers. On one visit she points at a Kiss CD, its cover showing the band in their usual make-up, and asks Paling: 'Is he a cat?'

Much of the dialogue is worthy of Alan Bennett. A woman states she's been a library member 'for donkey's horses'. A man describes someone he knows as 'an habitual turps-nudger'. Another is pleased about having remembered his glasses: 'Luxury. Being able to see. Like getting an extra roast potato.' In fact, at one point, Bennett himself is quoted: 'I have always been happy in libraries, though without ever being entirely at ease there.' As Paling points out, 'It's hard to envisage anywhere that Bennett would ever feel entirely at ease.'

We're also taken behind the scenes. Staff empty the overnight returns box with caution — 'you never quite know what you'll find in there' — while the 'grey-faced, cadaverous man' who delivers the boxes of books each day would, in another life, have been 'the collector of corpses for a funeral director'. Trev from Facilities faces regular challenges: '"Jumpers! How do you get a jumper down a toilet?"' One morning several of the staff are nursing hangovers, 'which is perhaps why the xylophone hammer has gone missing in Children's'.

The dialogue is worthy of Alan Bennett. A woman states she's been a library member for 'donkey's horses'

Many of the customers are rude and selfish. Lurching Betty, for instance ('physically, she brings to mind John McCririck, fully blinged'), who pushes to the front of the queue. Paling displays superhuman levels of patience, always wanting to cut the public as much slack as possible. 'Mr Jones is an unsympathetic character,' he writes of one regular, 'but perhaps deserves sympathy. He's isolated and wages wars with his neighbours and the council. The war in his head will go on until somebody helps him to win it.' The librarians often assist those using the computers. One man is typing his CV, in which there is a gap of nine years. 'I'm tempted to ask the reason,' writes Paling, 'but I don't because I think I already know the answer.'

Peppering the narrative are bookmarks left by readers in the volumes they return, such as a shopping list on the back of a receipt: 'Bread, quinoa, rice, bank, teeth.' There are also stories from libraries around the world. At least three US states have banned *Fifty Shades of Grey*, while in the 1990s California introduced 'multicultural crayons' for use by children as they drew people — each box contained more than a dozen colours 'designed to more assiduously resemble different racial tones'.

But my favourite fact concerned the writer Edgar Lustgarten, who died of a heart attack in December 1978. Some (such as Richard Ingrams) maintain that he was walking along the street at the time, but let's stick with the version that says it happened in the reference section of Marylebone Library. Why? Because according to that account Lustgarten went out reading *The Spectator*.

ARTS SPECIAL

Snap, crackle and pop

Poetry, animals, perms and Bovril are all part of the sparky history of electricity, writes *Richard Holmes*

WELLCOME LIBRARY, LONDON

As you go into the new Wellcome Collection exhibition, *Electricity: The Spark of Life*, you might have in mind a sentence from Mary Shelley's original electrifying novel *Frankenstein*; *Or, the Modern Prometheus*: 'I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet.'

A copy of the 1831 edition of her book, with its startling anatomical frontispiece, awaits you, among many other wonders. The exhibition, a collaboration between the Wellcome, the Teylers Museum of Haarlem and the Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester, is packed with electrical instruments, together with models, artefacts, books, film loops and pictures. It displays a vast historical panorama dating from the ancient Greeks — a terracotta plate from Campania showing an electric torpedo fish, 630 BCE — to the late 20th century, with a sporty two-minute movie of pioneering electric cars from the 1960s.

Yet your first impressions might be a bit muted, a bit low-voltage. Despite the sparky promise of the title, the danger is that nothing much will actually light up; that there are no great euphoric flashes, no cheering gleams or sinister glows. There is a Cuthbertson electrical discharger of 1800, consisting of two brass and copper globes mounted side-by-side on an insulated mahogany stand, but you will wait in vain for an actual spark to crackle between them. There is also a Martinus van Marum electrostatic generator of 1787, capable of discharging 300,000 volts and producing a two-foot spark, but it is only a fold-out illustration. There is an original Edison carbon filament incandescent lamp bulb from 1879, but it does not switch on. There is even an Archer electric kettle of 1900, but it does not boil.

However, as one of the dedicated curators, Ruth Garde, shrewdly admonished me, you would be wrong 'to switch off your own imagination'. The Wellcome exhibition obviously aims at a different kind of illumination.

The essential approach is historical and explanatory: the history of a developing technology and, more subtly, that of an evolving idea or dream.

The great early scientific question was this: what did the extraordinary invisible power called 'electricity' (from the Greek, *elektron*, meaning amber, which you rub to release this mysterious stuff) actually consist of? If you think you know the answer to this, try explaining it clearly to a sceptical child — not what it does, but what it is. By the 18th century, various different explanations and types had been identified. Obviously, there was lightning. Then there was 'animal electricity'. Electric eels, for example, could produce a lethal 6,000 volts. A dramatic engraving illustrates the terrified rearing horses being used in a river to discharge these deadly shocks, as recorded by the explorer Alexander von Humboldt in South America.

What did the extraordinary invisible power called 'electricity' actually consist of?

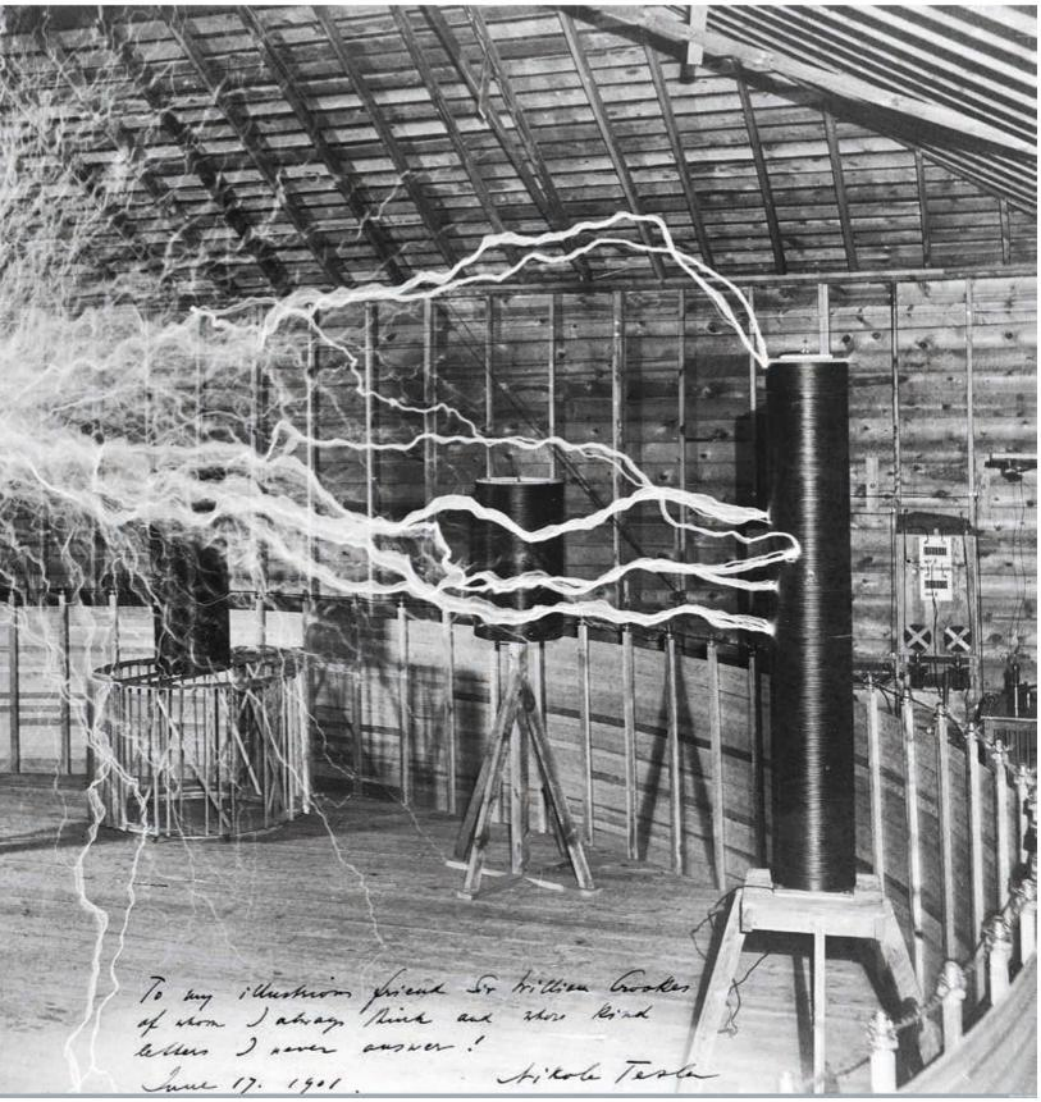
From the mid-18th century there were electrostatic generators, made from rapidly revolving discs or globes, based on the friction principle (the same principle as running a comb through thick, soft hair).

Finally, there was the great scientific breakthrough, Alessandro Volta's neat and ingenious chemical pile, invented in 1799. This used a series of small zinc and copper plates, stacked together like playing cards and immersed in a bath of weak acid, to produce something quite new: a steady supply of chemical electricity, through a 'live circuit' with two poles, negative and positive.

These early voltaic piles, which in principle and size were very similar to the modern car battery, would eventually produce the electrochemical revolution in Britain, both practical and theoretical, pioneered first by Humphry Davy, and then developed by Michael Faraday (using electromagnetism) and James Clerk Maxwell (using pure mathematics).

A strange and influential series of experiments in the 1790s by Luigi Galvani explored the difference between 'animal electricity' (supposedly bringing back to life the kicking legs of a dead frog) and chemical electricity.

Galvanism was soon followed by the risky experiments of Giovanni Aldini, who in 1803 performed a notorious public experiment at the Great Windmill Street surgical theatre, London, attempting to bring back to life an executed criminal, George Forster. He used carefully applied high-voltage electricity charges to the dead man's spine, rectum and heart. Reportedly, 'One eye opened.' Aldini wrote a book about his experiments, *Galvanism* (1804), whose hideous illustrations are displayed. He spread the idea that



It's electrifying: Nikola Tesla in his lab, 1901

'animal electricity' in the human body could be considered as the fundamental 'life force' and even perhaps the 'soul' itself. This initiated a great 'vitalism' debate among the surgeons, natural philosophers and poets of the day. From all this, Mary Shelley's own literary experiment, *Frankenstein*, emerged in a small, anonymous edition of 1818.

Shelley's novel had innumerable literary and theatrical spin-offs, such as the Drury Lane melodrama *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein* (1823). The stage directions indicate electrical explosions and flashes from a hidden laboratory at the back of the set, and Mary Shelley herself records how 'hubbub ensued' in the audience, and many women fainted.

The idea of sinister scientific menace, balanced against beneficent power and potential, runs throughout the exhibition, as symbolised by a photo of the original Sing Sing Prison electric execution chair (*c*.1950), set against an original example of a late-19th-century 'electrotherapeutic chair', in comforting mahogany and purple velvet. Both were designed to cure, so to speak, a whole panoply of human ills. A similar dilemma is presented by a display of international pylon designs — so different in France, or New Zealand, or Canada — but each trying to face up to the same uneasy question: boon or blot on the landscape? Or necessarily both?

Aldini used carefully applied high-voltage electricity charges to the dead man's spine, rectum and heart

Electricity was nowhere more genuinely liberating than in the modern kitchen, and the tea towel celebrating the 'Electrical Association for Women' makes its sober domestic point alongside a hilarious clip of Buster Keaton's *The Electric House* (1922). Some 20th-century domestic applications were wildly speculative. They include 'a woman modelling the latest permed hairstyles' (1923), with a huge crown of gleaming overhead cables attached to her skull, halfway between Ridley Scott's *Alien* and Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*.

We also learn in passing the curiously provoking fact that Bovril (love it or hate it) was originally marketed as the essence of cows ('bov') containing a mysterious energy element ('vril'). It turns out that the latter term was lifted from an entirely imaginary electrical substance, Vril, invented by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in his science-fiction novel *The Coming Race* (1871).

Electricity has had a sparky life in literature. Coleridge went to Davy's lectures to renew his stock of metaphors. Keats defined imagination as Negative Capability. Walt Whitman's euphoric poem from 'Leaves of Grass' (1855) begins, 'I sing the body electric', and virtually defines a new idea of personal liberty. These, too, are part of the electrifying story.

Electricity: The Spark of Life *is at the Wellcome Collection until 25 June.*

Square off: Mies van der Rohe's Mansion House Square

Architecture

Building block

Hugh Pearman

What a strange affair it now seems, the Mansion House Square brouhaha. How very revealing of the battle for the soul of architecture that reached maximum ferocity in the late 1980s and which still echoes today. Where developers now jostle to build ever taller, fatter and odder-shaped City skyscrapers, this was a time when it took 34 years to get just one building built. An ambitious bronze tower and plaza by the German-American modernist pioneer Mies van der Rohe was finally rejected in favour of an utterly different post-modern corner block (with no plaza, but a roof garden) by Sir James Stirling. Both were shepherded by a man in search of his personal monument: the property developer Peter, now Lord, Palumbo.

The story is retold in a new exhibition and cluster of talks and debates at the Riba gallery which examines the work of both architects and the improbable history of the affair. The saga began in 1962 when the 27-year-old Palumbo, then working with his hugely successful bombsite-developer father Rudolph, first asked the ageing Mies to design them a building for a site to be carved out of existing good Victorian buildings facing the side of the Mansion House. It finally ended in 1996 when the replacement Stirling building, Number One Poultry, opened. Both architects had died in the meantime, Mies at 83 in 1969 and Stirling — unexpectedly, as the result of a botched operation — in 1992, aged only 66. It must have seemed that the project was cursed, and not just by conservationists.

Dapper, precise Miesian modernism was quite the corporate thing in the early 1960s but had gone out of fashion. Palumbo commissioned the design in the full knowledge that it would take years for him to assemble all the plots of land needed to build it. Fatal error: just as he was finally ready, in 1984, Prince Charles (with whom Palumbo was a polo-playing chum) launched his new role as a traditionalist scourge of modern architecture with a full-frontal attack on it. 'It would be a tragedy,' he said at a dinner meant to be celebrating architecture, 'if the character and skyline of our capital city were to be further ruined and St Paul's dwarfed by yet another giant glass stump, better suited to downtown Chicago than the City of London.' This was dynamite: the public inquiry into the scheme was in progress. Charles effectively killed Mies's Mansion House Square. That meant not only no tower, but also no square: this would have been the only large civic space

JAKE ATTREE

Hope Hill from Saltaire

oil on board 81 x 81 cms 31¾ x 31¾ ins

As poetry is everywhere for those capable of finding it, so are subjects for paintings. Jake Attree finds both and moulds them into cool, calm episodes of deep reflection: paintings which are powerhouses of thought and feeling which will continue to give out energy and inspiration long after the work of more flashy contemporaries has exhausted itself and lost all relevance.

Andrew Lambirth

22 February – 10 March 2017

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in the City. But then Wren had also failed to do the same thing on the same spot following the Great Fire of London.

Palumbo swiftly regrouped and signed up 'Big Jim' Stirling, who was a very different, gamier kind of architect from Mies. The post-modern (po-mo) building that resulted, which was neither a tower nor a square, was delayed by further conservationist protests and a second public inquiry. Charles didn't like Stirling's offering either — 'a 1930s wireless set', he sniffed in 1988. But by then his one-liners were losing their force. Stirling won, but the delays meant that by the time 'Number One Poultry' — named after one of the streets it faced — opened it was not only posthumous and monumental, but monumentally unfashionable.

And today? Architecture is in a pluralist phase. There is no commanding ideology or style. Po-mo has swung back into fashion — No. 1 Poultry is now itself a listed building, at a higher grade than the Victorian group it replaced. We can also see the merits of Mies's Mansion House Square scheme,

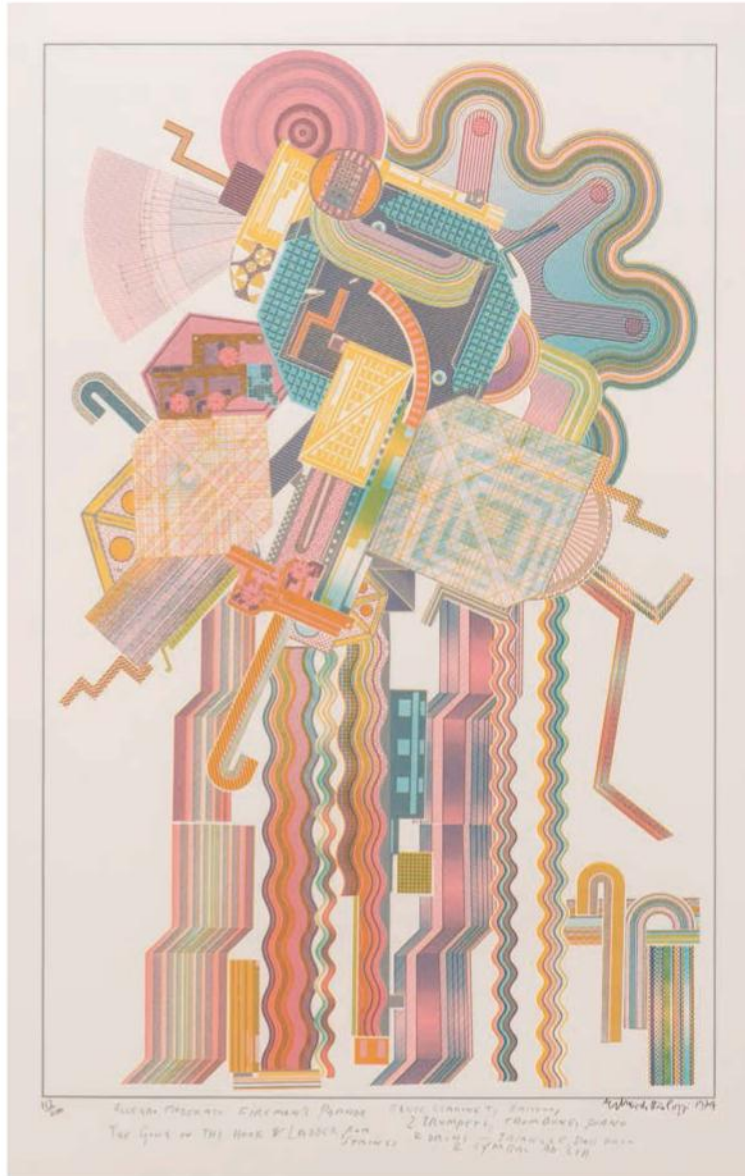
Prince Charles effectively killed Mies van der Rohe's Mansion House Square

complete with very high-quality models seen for the first time in decades. It is a thing of wonder as much for the square as for the tower. Whether or not it would have turned out well — the square itself was an uneasy compromise with existing roads — it has attained lost-masterpiece status.

The exhibition looks into these very different architects' way of working. Mies was the ultimate auteur while Stirling, famously arrogant, bloody-minded and charming, solicited all manner of design ideas from others in his office, which you see bound into ledgers in this show. There's also a model of No. 1 Poultry that Stirling's assistants mischievously had made into a wireless set. And there's his 1988 letter offering to return his Royal Gold Medal for Architecture (awarded by the Queen in 1980) on the grounds of her heir's hostility. Palumbo talked him out of sending it, but Stirling insisted it be archived. His knighthood was announced just 12 days before he died. Palumbo, made chairman of the Arts Council and a baron by Margaret Thatcher, finally sent in the bulldozers in 1994.

Weird times, eh? All for a patch of land in the City that had been built and rebuilt endlessly since Roman times but which had hit a moment of aesthetic indecision and inertia. At the time nobody knew what architecture was going to become, stylistically. For different, rather more pleasurable reasons (anything goes) we still don't.

Mies van der Rohe and James Stirling: Circling the Square *is at the Architecture Gallery, Riba, from 8 March to 25 June.*



TRUSTEES OF THE PAOLOZZI FOUNDATION, LICENSED BY DACS

'Allegro Moderato Fireman's Parade' (from the Calcium of Light portfolio), 1974–76, by Eduardo Paolozzi

Exhibitions

On the make

Laura Freeman

Eduardo Paolozzi
Whitechapel Gallery, until 14 May

Rudolfo Paolozzi was a great maker. In the summer, he worked almost without stopping in the family's ice-cream shop, making gallon after gallon of vanilla custard. In the slack winter months, when the shop made its money on cigarettes and sweets, he built radios from odds and sods. It was on one of these homemade radios that he heard Mussolini's declaration, on 10 June 1940, that Italy, the country he had left for Scotland 20 years before, had entered the war. That night a mob attacked the ice-cream shop at 10 Albert Street, off Leith Walk in Edinburgh. The family lived above the shop and later, Rudolfo's son Eduardo, then aged 16, would remember how it had been before and what the men had done.

'The carefully arranged shop windows usually had been "dressed" by a visiting confectionary representative — with sundae dishes holding ice creams fixed in perpetuity on some composition material and chocolates made of composition materials in glass bowls filled with crêpe paper. In the shop itself on glass shelves backed by mirrors were glass jars containing the real things. In very little time this world which had existed for a decade and a half was reduced to splintered wood and small pieces of broken glass.'

Eduardo Paolozzi was on the side of the makers: the confectionary man who styled the windows with crêpe and cardboard, his father who had built radios and helped him with model airplanes. Together they had built Meccano and a Trix Twin Railway engine with a battery motor.

Aged 20, studying at the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford during the war, he sketched heads after Dürer and Rembrandt in the Ashmolean Museum and African sculpture at the Pitt Rivers, but realised that what he wanted, all he wanted, was to 'make things'. The Ruskin didn't offer sculpture so he transferred to the Slade in London. Living in digs at Cartwright Gardens, eating rationed bacon and pasta shells sent by his mother, he began making with a fierce concentration.

A pair of photo-lithographs of 'The Sculptor's Studio' (1977) hang in the last room of the Whitechapel Gallery's Eduardo Paolozzi retrospective. They show a workspace crammed, skirting to rafters, with models, tools, materials, scraps and rubbish. Cluttered, but with a sense that its owner could find you anything you wanted, from a plastic frog to a bronze head of Wittgenstein.

Everything interested him. Asked on *Desert Island Discs* in 1990 about his mania

Paolozzi collected cigarette cards, broken combs, bent forks, bits of bark, kitchenware from Woolworths

for collecting 'junk', he replied defensively: 'I'm very selective about the kind of junk.' He collected cigarette cards, clock parts, broken combs, bent forks, bits of bark, kitchenware from Woolworths and magazines given to him in Paris by the wives of American GIs. He talked of the cuttings he pasted in his scrapbooks as being 'like exotic and rare butterflies mounted in the Natural History Museum'.

You have a sense of this in the Whitechapel's early rooms, as Paolozzi flits from idea to idea — Picasso, abstraction, the figure — and medium to medium — concrete, plaster, screenprint, film. He tries his hand at a printed fabric for a cocktail dress sold by Horrockses Fashions (1953), and later a djellaba tunic for Lanvin (1971) and bone-china plates for Wedgwood (1968/9).

Paolozzi was not a slim man — blame the ice cream and pasta shells — but you do have to run to keep up with him. While you're admiring the homely wool of the 'Whitworth Tapestry' (1967), he's on to sheeny-shiny chrome-and-aluminium 'Silver Sixties' sculptures. He rejected the label 'pop artist'. Donald Duck and Goofy may grin from his screenprints and Mickey and Minnie Mouse share an Eskimo-kiss nose-to-nose in the 'Whitworth Tapestry', but Paolozzi was clear: 'If I am called a "pop artist" then people expect to see soup tins.'

You see him in the Whitechapel exhibition having a joke about such labels. In his screenprint 'Avant garde' (1971) each letter of the phrase is filled with a monster pulling a googly face. He invented his own word, 'Bash', which stood for 'Baroque All Style High'. It didn't catch on.

Paolozzi was garrulous, a prolific writer of letters of complaint, untitled poems, unfinished novels, explanations and exculpations of his work. The curators Daniel F. Herrmann and Cameron Foote have been reticent. I'm usually for minimal gallery texts, but in the case of Paolozzi, as he 'shuffles' — his word — between one scheme and the next, you want guidance. As he dashes ahead, you need someone to help you play catch-up. The catalogue, if you can stretch to £30, is superb.

But making is nothing, said Paolozzi, without looking. When he taught ceramics at the Royal College of Art in the 1980s, he wrote this report: 'Finding the courage to be truly creative, finding the courage to be truly disciplined, realising that endless hours of just "making" leads inevitably to some form of mediocrity, finding the discipline to go to the Tate and enjoy Blake or stare at cubism, learning that an hour at the National Gallery can be more influential than a trip to the Crafts Council — that is what we must instil.'

American psyche

Martin Gayford

America after the Fall: Painting in the 1930s
Royal Academy, until 4 June

The latest exhibition at the Royal Academy is entitled *America after the Fall*. It deals with painting in the United States during the 1930s: that is, the decade before the tidal surge of abstract expressionism. So this show is a sort of prequel to the RA's great ab ex blockbuster of last autumn. It might have been called, 'Before Jackson Began Dripping'.

Not much in this selection, though, can compare to the power of the abstract

The show might have been called 'Before Jackson Began Dripping'

expressionists at their peak in the Forties and Fifties — not even an early work by Pollock himself. But it does include a couple of masterpieces by Edward Hopper, plus several pictures so brashly over the top as to be quite interesting, several others that are simply terrible — and one of

Fisherman's Wharf

Just married, forty-five years ago
Exploring San Francisco,
You in your poppy-red coat, my camera
Aimed across the water
At Alcatraz, we were side by side, then,
Laughing, all of a sudden
You ran ahead. Turning to wave back at me,
It was as if you had intended to say
Don't just stand there, come on.
This is our happiness. Join in.

I was so in love with how you ran
From me, knowing you would turn
Like that, and even now the bright
Passionate kiss of your coat
Despite its bleached surroundings
Has not faded, though while I sit watching
This treasured, antique home movie
Without you it's as if already
You had known what I still can't say
And were waving goodbye.

— John Mole

COLLECTION OF MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK. MRS. SIMON GUGGENHEIM FUND, 1943

'Gas', 1940, by Edward Hopper

the world's most familiar images.

The last is Grant Wood's 'American Gothic', a picture that almost everyone recognises — even if they are unable to recall the title or the name of the artist. It serves as shorthand for the pioneer spirit — devout, po-faced, plain-living and doggedly industrious — that was becoming quaintly archaic even when Wood painted it in 1930.

For that reason, plus its memorability, 'American Gothic' is a favourite with cartoonists. Peter Brookes of the *Times* has used it to brilliant effect more than once, most recently with President Trump's head on the farmer's body, Nigel Farage — fag in mouth — as the wife and Theresa May's head impaled on the fork in the middle.

The original turns out to be almost as much of a collage as that parody. Wood got the idea from seeing a 19th-century wooden house in Iowa. He then set about imagining the kind of people who might have lived in such a dwelling. His sister posed for the woman, his dentist for her husband (once one learns that it is hard not to read his expression as a professional stare at a decayed molar).

The result of this cutting and pasting is odd: the wife's head looks as if it's been stuck on to a flat cardboard cutout; her body has no volume at all. Nonetheless, it is a great deal more compelling than the other pictures by Wood on view, which tend to look like illustrations from children's books or views of Toytown with lollypop trees and model houses. Wood was associated with the style dubbed 'regionalism' — an artistic equivalent to isolationism that focused on small-town and agricultural America — but these works have an air of unreality that verges on the European surrealist idiom.

Hopper's 'Gas' gets deeper into the mystery of America than Grant Wood ever did

That's true of several exhibits that are striking, but not in a pleasant way. Ivan Albright had been traumatised by his experiences in the first world war. Subsequently, he depicted figures with flesh like that of newly disinterred corpses, which gives his 'Self-Portrait' (1935) a horrible fascination. This was the decade of the Depression and the New Deal, but most of the overtly political pictures are clumsy or — as in the case of Peter Blume's 'The Eternal City' (1934-7) with Mussolini as a glaring, green-faced jack-in-the-box — crass.

Several exhibits hint at the future course of art in the US. The comic-book realism of Paul Cadmus and Reginald Marsh anticipates pop; so, in a different way, does the energy and precision of Charles Demuth and Charles Sheeler. The latter's 'Home, Sweet Home' (1931) is a neat essay in an enduring transatlantic aesthetic: sharp-edged, flat-patterned and naturalistic all at the same time.

Edward Hopper, however, easily outclasses all the competition. 'New York Movie' (1939) makes every other attempt at social realism in the show seem crude. And 'Gas' (1940) — with its illuminated petrol pumps and solitary attendant with dark forest in the gathering dusk — gets deeper into the mystery of America than Grant Wood ever did.

Graphic art

Comic effect

Peter Hoskin

Future Shock: 40 Years of 2000AD
Cartoon Museum, until 23 April

Borag Thungg, Earthlets! If those words mean something to you, then congratulations — you are leading a good life. If not, then you owe it to yourself to pay attention. They are the words of greeting that Tharg the Mighty, the extraterrestrial editor of *2000AD*, has spoken to the British sci-fi comic's readers for the past 40 years.

And 40 years is right. *2000AD* enters its fifth decade this year, and various celebrations have been planned to mark the occasion. Among them is an exhibition at the fantastic Cartoon Museum in central London, where 85 pieces of original artwork are on show for our delectation.

It's an exhibition that does exactly what it should: show off the great variety of *2000AD*. Plenty of space is occupied by the square shoulders and squarer jawline of the comic's most famous character, the future lawman Judge Dredd,

Ronald Reagan has his neck sucked on by a bounty hunter with vampiric tendencies

of course. But there's also room for the Romanov rogue Nikolai Dante, the hulking barbarian Sláine, the girl-next-door (so long as next-door is space) Halo Jones, as well as for Ronald Reagan having his neck sucked on by a bounty hunter with vampiric tendencies.

It's not just the characters, but the art itself. *2000AD* has always been home to diversely brilliant illustrators, many of whom are then snapped up by DC Comics and Marvel. And so, in one corner, the exhibition gives us Massimo Belardinelli's precise, Kirby-esque compositions of Dan Dare battling the storms of Jupiter. While in another, it features Kevin O'Neill's angular Nemesis the Warlock battling our very sanity. The chunky inkwork of Carlos Ezquerra is there alongside fully painted pages by Greg Staples. *2000AD* has never really had a house style.

And yet every artwork in the exhibition still has something recognisably *2000AD* about it. It's more a house attitude: subversive, exuberant and uninhibited. The end result, for readers, is a happy version of the sensory overload, or 'Future Shock', that citizens suffer in Dredd's Mega-City One.

This does, however, make the job of picking out highlights rather difficult. For me, the best bit was probably seeing a few pages by my favourite regular *2000AD* artist Henry Flint. Other old-timers may thrill at Mike McMahon's opening double-page spread from the final chapter of the Cursed Earth saga. Newcomers might enjoy how skilfully this exhibition reduces 40 years of comics into something that can be managed in a lunchbreak.

'Inferno' by Massimo Belardinelli

Some of the exhibition's finest moments are almost accidental. Most of the artworks have speech bubbles, captions and corrections literally pasted on to them — because that is how comics are made. But only one has a crisps logo (KP Griddles) glued to its top, along with the promise of a free packet for those who follow the instructions later in the issue. It's a reminder that *2000AD* is a publishing operation. This is art for newsstand sales' sake.

That's no bad thing. In fact, it's what makes *2000AD* so astonishing. As the Cartoon Museum's exhibition shows, this is art that deserves to be framed and admired, yet it was actually made to be combined with more art and words, processed into ongoing stories within ongoing stories, and somehow printed, without fail, on a weekly basis. Tharg the Mighty must be mighty indeed. *Zarjaz*!

'SS-GB' takes the commitment to the crepuscular a lot further than most

Television

Occupational hazard

James Walton

Rival law-enforcement agencies arguing about which of them should investigate a murder has, of course, been a staple of crime dramas for decades. Rather less common, though, is for the agencies in question to be the Metropolitan Police, the Gestapo and the SS.

SS-GB (BBC1, Sunday), based on Len Deighton's novel, poses the undeniably interesting question of what this country would have been like in 1941 if Germany had won the Battle of Britain. Its primary answer is that — in every way — it would have been very murky indeed. Again, plenty of crime dramas over the years have created a suitably noirish atmosphere, while cunningly saving on the lighting budget at the same time. But this one takes the commitment to the crepuscular a lot further than most: if it wasn't for the CGI swastika flags hanging from London's most famous buildings, there'd be almost no colour at all. The programme's look is also matched by its sound, with the cast, led by Sam Riley as Archer of the Yard, seldom raising their voices above a laconic whisper — although they do sometimes fall below one.

But murkiest of all are, not surprisingly, the ethical issues that come with living under occupation, as we're invited to entertain the uncomfortable thought that collaboration may not always be avoidable, especially if you're a policeman.

Admittedly, there's not much moral ambiguity in the depiction of our new German overlords, who on the whole range from the smilingly sinister to the unsmilingly sinister. In particular, Dr Oskar Huth — the SS man called in when a seemingly routine London murder turned out to have links to the British Resistance — is only a monocle away from the sort of German officer we all grew up watching, with his full-length leather overcoat, his scrupulous observation of the difference between 'shall' and 'will', and his habit of brusquely ending conversations with the single word, 'gentlemen'.

Our new German overlords range from the smilingly sinister to the unsmilingly sinister

Faced with Huth, Detective Archer understandably chose to remain largely expressionless. The trouble was that he remained largely expressionless with everybody else too. I think Riley's idea is to suggest buried emotional turmoil — but if so, it's buried so deep as to leave virtually no trace of its existence.

And for too much of the time, a similar woodenness was shared by the direction and script, which have still to make life under occupation feel like a fully realised dramatic world rather than just a backdrop. Needless to say, nobody expects a drama set in Nazi-occupied Britain to be a romp. Nonetheless, Sunday's episode was in danger of going about its business with such plodding solemnity as to be a bit dull — which a drama set in Nazi-occupied Britain really shouldn't be either.

There were a couple of signs that all is not yet lost. A potentially intriguing plot is slowly taking shape, with the bloke who was found dead in his Shepherd Market flat obligingly leaving behind any number of old-school clues, including a half-burned letter in the grate and a train ticket that appears to connect him to some sort of secret weapons laboratory. Meanwhile, those ethical issues look like growing even more satisfyingly murky, with the Resistance clearly capable of ruthlessness too. Even so, if the much-hyped *SS-GB* is ever going to fulfil its promise of combining a proper thriller with a properly imagined alternative history, it needs to raise its game significantly in the weeks ahead.

Now, one enjoyable emotion that I find gets increasingly rare as middle age tightens its grip is hero-worship — which is why it was so cheering to feel it again while watching *Tom Waits: Tales from a Cracked Jukebox* (BBC4, Sunday). The programme began with an optimistic caption about its desire to reveal the real man behind the music. Yet, if Waits duly proved too mysterious for that to happen, the mixture of clips, old interviews and an impressive selection of talking heads, was more than enough to provide a

stirring reminder of how brilliant he's been for so long — and how irresistible his music, his lyrics and that famously gravelly voice sound even when it's not two o'clock in the morning and you're not sipping bourbon.

In fact, I'm now developing a theory that no other singer-songwriter — certainly not Bob Dylan or David Bowie — has been so unfailingly good on every album (and almost every song) of a career lasting more than 40 years. Essentially, Waits's work has fallen into three phases: normal songs in a normal voice; normal songs in a mad voice; and mad songs in a mad voice. All are great — but, if you're new to a man who's never quite cracked the mainstream, I'd recommend starting with phase two, the four albums from *Small Change* to *Heartattack and Vine*. (You can address all letters of thanks to me at *The Spectator*.)

Theatre

Let's talk about sex

Lloyd Evans

See Me Now
Young Vic, until 4 March

A Clockwork Orange
Park Theatre, until 18 March

What does it take to become a prostitute? Youth, beauty, courage, sexual allure, a love of money, a need for hard drugs, an addiction to risk? None of these, according to this fascinating show written and performed by London sex workers. What prostitutes need is the right mindset: humane, adaptable, tolerant, altruistic. Sex work is one of the caring professions. And it attracts operatives of any age, creed or physical configuration. An elegant 67-year-old rent boy explains, with touching humour, that his clients tend to be married men who just happen to be interested in fellatio. 'Will you put your penis inside my body?' a shy punter once asked him. 'Yes, that's more or less what I do.' He works in the afternoons. In the mornings he has a cleaning job.

Often the sex itself is peripheral. A dominatrix expresses pity for her alpha-male clients (City grandees and high-court judges), whose high-powered jobs leave them isolated at work, and surrounded by anxious faces and fawning attitudes. They seek respite by inverting their status from master to slave. So they hire her, a pantomime she-monster, to insult them, thrash them and spit on them, often in the lunch hour. The dominatrix has tips for women considering a career in S&M. Always get your slave to steam-clean the sex toys during the session. And carry nail scissors at all times in case he gets inextricably tangled in a leather harness.

The show is marred by some laborious staging effects towards the end, and the closing 20-minute section, where the sex workers deliver their philosophical banalities, deserves to be cut. But there are flashes of unconscious poetry here too. A middle-aged crack addict describes how she fell in love with a tormented young man. 'There was death behind his eyes.' They married. They were happy. But his suicide was her ruin. 'I thought my love killed people.' Later she describes how she cared for a widowed invalid by giving her a tab of ecstasy and taking her for a trundle in her wheelchair. The trundles were a great success. One of the sex workers argues with simple eloquence that politicians and clerics have, over the centuries, inflicted untold horrors on mankind. But prostitutes have offered nothing but comfort and healing. And yet they're the ones vilified by the politicians and clerics. Very little theatre work is important or valuable. This is. Here's a show that may help shift attitudes

Sex work is one of the great caring professions

and neutralise prejudices. It reveals that society could learn a lot about moral honesty, and spiritual generosity, by taking a lesson or two from the people it calls 'whores'.

In 1962 Anthony Burgess wrote a pretentious book about thugs. A decade later Stanley Kubrick turned it into a picture, probably his worst. After its release some criminals claimed it as the inspiration for their violence. Kubrick immediately halted the film's exhibition in Britain, his adopted home. Popular rumour established that a 'government ban' had been put in place and this glamorous falsehood turned the dud into a hit. And that's how *A Clockwork Orange* became one of the most over-rated publications in the English language. This version, by Action To The Word, certainly captures the book's brutality, narrowness and perverted chic. Alex, a gay thug, assembles a gang of gay thugs. They accost some gay men. Everyone beats each other up. Alex is arrested and tortured by a deluded shrink who believes aggression can be purged by exposure to violent imagery. Released from jail, Alex finds his old gay chums, who are now working for the cops. Everyone beats each other up.

As a piece of theatre this is extremely hard work. All the characters are shallow and revolting and the show keeps insisting on the view that narcissistic aggression is the only strain of human behaviour worthy of our attention. The cast of handsome youngsters appear to have been chosen for their catwalk looks and Mr Universe physiques rather than for their acting skills. The performances are rigid, cold, declarative and inflexible. But so is the script. There's no room for subtlety, warmth or variety here. The one and only joke (somebody misnames the Home Secretary 'the minister for the inferior') is delivered at the decibel level a drowning trawlerman might use when signalling his position to a rescue helicopter. Which slightly ruins it. Undoubtedly, the production is beautiful to look at. Fans of the Cure will relish its references to the lurid stylings of 1980s pop videos. I have a feeling I wasn't the ideal spectator. Around me at press night were dozens of play-goers watching in open-mouthed rapture. (All men, as it happens.) And is a theatre the best place for this show? Performed at the climax of London fashion week it would delight a crowd willing to applaud its superficial dazzle, its pumped-up masculine vitality and its faintly fascist aesthetic.

Radio

Olden but golden

Kate Chisholm

This weekend Brian Matthew will present his last-ever *Sounds of the 60s* show on Radio 2. Now 88, he's been in charge at breakfast time on Saturdays since 1990, his gravelly voice deepening and getting hoarser with the years. You could tell he was well past his clubbing prime, or for that matter being able to dance along to Bryan Ferry. Yet this has never mattered. Matthew's band of devoted listeners have cherished his weekly two hours on air precisely because of his age. It has meant he was there when those classic Sixties' records were made. He met the Beatles in their prime, and Dusty Springfield, Steve Winwood, Alan Price, Sandie Shaw. He knows exactly who was in what band when because he saw them performing on stage back in 1966 or visited them in the recording studio. When he adds the back story to a song or album, he's not reading from the sleeve notes or a script prepared in advance by a diligent researcher, but coming up with facts embedded in his memory.

Knowledge, experience, authentic taste, though, are not enough to make a great radio DJ — someone who we will come back to week-on-week, and not just for their choice of music. There's an essential but intangible extra quality shared by Matthew and those other great names on 2's honour board — Terry Wogan, Jimmy Young, Desmond Carrington. Call it connection, maybe, or lack of self-consciousness, or the imagination to translate the microphone into a person, to look beyond the studio and their own self-image and know their audience, really know them as individual people, not just a blank statistic.

Take Jo Whiley, for instance, who hosts the evening show on Radio 2. These past few weeks she's been my radio companion while driving home after yet another exhausting day. Time after time I've been through 4,3, Smooth, Capital (my car's too old for digital) rejecting most of the voices I've encountered as too irritating, intrusive or demanding, the

music too bland or abrasive. But I've found myself sticking with 2 and with Whiley, not because I particularly care for her choice of songs — I don't think I've ever rushed home to check out a singer or band she's introduced me to. But there's a warmth about Whiley that feels genuine, not put on for the listener, a casual but not careless friendliness, a feeling that she's talking straight to us person-to-person as if we were in the pub (I sense she prefers a pint to a glass of Chardonnay). And because of this you trust her taste in music, even if it's different from your own. So thank you, Jo, for easing many an hour.

On the World Service, Valley Fontaine confessed her surprise when she discovered back in 2008 that the future president of the USA, Barack Obama, was married to a woman whose skin was darker in tone than his own. He's an exception, she says, among prominent black men. Her programme, *Black Like Me* (produced by Lynsea Garrison), investigated colourism, or shadeism, or prejudice against individuals with a darker skin than your own, a form of discrimination that is usually confined to the same ethnic group. Fontaine herself is the dark-skinned daughter of Caribbean parents and grew up in London, a city whose diversity, she says, was not (and still isn't) reflected on the billboards you pass in the street. As a young girl she was told by a friend that her skin 'looked dirty'.

It's not a subject the black community really cares to discuss, says Fontaine, but it's been around since the height of the slave trade when to be darker-skinned probably meant you were 'fresh off the boat', and therefore closer to Africa and by definition less civilised. The 'brown paper bag test' became a feature of aspirational black society in America, the bag held up against your face to see how dark-skinned you were. Access to membership of clubs and some churches was barred to those whose skin was too dark or whose hair could not be combed.

'It's not a comfortable conversation,' said Fontaine, and this was not a comfortable listen as we heard so many women telling stories of how as children they were not invited to parties and told it was because they were too dark-skinned, or being taken into a room by a gang of boys while at school, the lights switched off, and then told they couldn't be found in the dark. Sadie, from Tennessee, has darker skin than her mother and knew even as a child that this was not a good thing. Her mother told Fontaine, 'I want her to feel comfortable in her own skin. She's just as pretty on the outside as any other woman.' But the statistics show that darker-skinned women earn less money, find it harder to marry well, and are given longer prison sentences. That's why Michelle Obama has been so important as a role model to black schoolgirls, especially. She shut people down with the way she carried herself, the way she spoke. A strong, black, confident woman, who just happens to be dark-skinned.

Opera

Tough love

Michael Tanner

Le Vin herbé
Wales Millennium Centre, and touring until 25 April

Madam Butterfly
Wales Millennium Centre, and touring until 29 April

Frank Martin is one of those composers whose work seems to survive only by virtue of constantly renewed neglect. His quite large body of work is well represented in the CD catalogues, but rarely performed in the UK. One of his most powerful works is *Le Vin herbé*, though his fully-fledged opera on *The Tempest* also deserves revival. Welsh National Opera, ever adventurous, has mounted a staged version of *Le Vin herbé*, and despite its being more of a cantata than an opera and in English. The text is based on Joseph Bédier's version of the Tristan myth, so some reference to Wagner, in discussing it, is inevitable. Written at the end of the 1930s, Martin's piece is deliberately non-Germanic, though clearly anyone writing a work with *Tristan* as a model at any time would be mad. Nonetheless, for any literate opera lover, thoughts of Wagner's masterpiece are inevitable. Indeed, *Vin* may be one of those rare works that need to be experienced in relation to a preceding one. For whereas much of the allure of *Tristan und Isolde* is due to its pervasive ambiguity, romantic love presented as both the only thing ultimately worth existing for, and as the deepest source of anguish, *Vin* makes no bones about the unmitigated misery of love. Its last words warn us about 'the injustice, the grief, the pains, all the pangs of love'. Its lovers fall in love by accident, drinking of the fatal potion, whereas Wagner's are already desperately in love, the potion merely a trigger.

Vin makes no bones about the unmitigated misery of love

Vin presents the story through a combination of, and alternation between, narrative and reflection on the one hand, and dialogue and action on the other, in proportions roughly similar to those of a Truffaut film. In director Polly Graham's and designer April Dalton's staging the chamber ensemble are at the centre of the stage, and behind them there is a raised walkway with stairs at either end. When Tristan and Iseult unite it is on the walkway, and — I think against the mode of the work, though effectively — Tristan hastily removes his tie and jacket and untucks his shirt, while gently easing Iseult out of her long white dress, leaving her in her petticoat. The two lovers are admirably sung by Caitlin Hulcup and Tom Randle, but powerful as Randle is, it seemed to me that he acted in a style incongruous with the rest of the piece. He goes in for a full-blooded performance, as if in the other *Tristan*, writhing, staggering, and so on in a way at odds with the prevailing statuesque quality of the performance — but he is affecting.

The musical idiom of *Vin* is individual without being unmistakable, as is much of Martin's oeuvre. It owes a good deal to the Stravinsky of the neoclassical period, but also to Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Hieratic might be one word for it. Under the assured baton of James Southall, and rightly without an interval, *Vin* is 95 minutes of absorption and reflection, giving us something to contemplate rather than to experience. If that sounds austere, it is, but it is also very worthwhile, as the intensity of concentration from the audience made clear. See it while you can.

The next evening in Cardiff I saw another, far more famous and harrowing opera on the subject of love's dreadfulness, Puccini's greatest opera, *Madam Butterfly*. This is a work that I am convinced one should not see too often, because its surface allure is so appealing that one might go to experience that at the expense of the deep agonies which Puccini unflinchingly presents. This WNO production, originally by the GDR director Joachim Herz, I first saw in 1978, but it has weathered well. The set is a matter of over-arching foliage, and the house has many sliding panels that create or eliminate separate rooms. The main difference in this dramatic production is that it incorporates some of the music which the composer cut after the fiasco of the opening night. In Act One there is much more of Butterfly's relations, including the irksome drunken uncle, than survived for the second run in Brescia and success; many phrases in the love duet are slightly different; and, most intrusively, the last act has not got Pinkerton's pathetic aria of self-reproach — indeed he leaves the stage singing 'I'll get over it' (in Italian). His American wife Kate has a much more positive role in the action, even singing Cio-Cio-San's 'Triste madre! Triste madre!' and thus just about ceasing to be the most nugatory character in all opera.

The title role is sung, in the second cast, by Linda Richardson, who still has a lot to learn about the role, but was sufficiently in command of it to show that she may become one of its leading contemporary exponents; and the same goes for the burly Pinkerton of Paul Charles Clarke, jolly and shamingly callous. Conductor Lawrence Foster, an Enescu expert, tended to dwell on ravishing orchestral details rather than the grand shape, and WNO's orchestra responded with familiar fine playing. I was moved, but not shattered; quite a relief.

Carry on screaming: Nathalie Baye as Martine in 'It's Only the End of the World'

Cinema

Pump up the volume

Deborah Ross

It's Only the End of the World
15, Key Cities

Xavier Dolan's *It's Only the End of the World* is one of those angst-ridden dramas focusing on what is commonly referred to as a 'dysfunctional family' as if there might be any other kind and it isn't just a question of degree. This family certainly doesn't hold back. This family has everyone shouting at everyone else for 95 minutes, blurting out brutal truths that might equally be brutal untruths (hard to tell). It has not been rapturously received. It was jeered at Cannes (even though it won the Grand Prix) and has been described by various critics as 'insufferable' and 'intolerable', which can only make you think that they haven't seen an *Avengers* film for a while. But if it is a failure — if; I haven't fully decided yet so bear with me — at least it fails promisingly, with spirit, and with a stellar cast turning the volume up to 11, 15… 38!

Some background: Dolan is the French-Canadian wunderkind of art-house cinema. As writer/director he's helmed six films and won two of the top prizes at Cannes. Also, according to Wikipedia, he is an editor, producer, actor, voice actor, costume designer… and is still only 27. Shaming, I know. (Do you think I could catch up on the costume design, at least? If I start sewing right now? And stay up night after night?) But whereas he's mostly written his own scripts — *Mommy* (2014), which won the Jury Prize at Cannes, is outrageously brilliant — this is an adaptation of the 1990 play by Jean-Luc Lagarce, who died of Aids at 38.

Here, our main character, Louis (Gaspard Ulliel, total dreamboat), is 34, gay, a famous playwright, and is returning home after a 12-year absence to tell his family he is dying, although it's never specified of what exactly. Dolan has assembled the most stellar cast. Nathalie Baye plays Louis' self-dramatising mother. Léa Seydoux is Suzanne, the younger sister he scarcely knows, who is hungry for his attention. Vincent Cassel is Antoine, the older brother who is all anger and rage, while Marion Cotillard is his wife, Catherine. She does, at least, have some softness about her, but what is she doing with Antoine? Who bullies everyone but her especially. No idea.

If the film is a failure, at least it fails promisingly, with a stellar cast turning the volume to 11, 15... 38!

We don't have much idea about much of anything. Time and place are vague. We are only told this happened 'somewhere, a while ago already'. All I can say with certainty is that from the moment Louis tips up, the volume is turned to 11, then 15, then 37, and possibly 82. 'Stop screaming!' Suzanne even screams at one point. Everyone shoots each other down. Apart from Louis, who says little, and instead drifts around as if in some kind of dazed trance. (I felt my own scream coming on and it went: 'Louis, say what you have to say!') Catherine, meanwhile, seems to instinctively comprehend why Louis has returned. Why? How? Because …nope, no idea.

It is all intensely claustrophobic. It's set during a heatwave. The camera is held close to everyone's face and when it does pan out, it's to visual metaphors which, I'm forced to concede, are hopelessly trite, like the cuckoo clock in the hall, marking the passage of time, and which will have its own moment. (Alternative title for this film: *One Flew Out of the Cuckoo Clock.*)

It's frustrating, I suppose, because we don't get any sense of what has happened to these people until now, and what has made them as they are. I don't expect films always to explain themselves, but I do expect the occasional flicker of insight. Yet, all that said, it's still supremely watchable, as you hang on in there, hoping, hoping, hoping for catharsis, and it's fun witnessing such a cast going at it hell for leather. I've decided it probably is a failure, but that you haven't heard the last from Dolan. And now I must sew.

NOTES ON …

Wetherspoons

By *Henry Jeffreys*

Of all the stories I've heard about the fallout from Brexit — families divided, work jeopardised, friendships ended — the saddest was someone on Facebook who declared that he would never again visit a Wetherspoons because the proprietor, Tim Martin, pushed for a Leave vote. This seemed to me the definition of cutting your nose off to spite your face; imagine turning down cheap beer because of the EU! But it also disrupts one of the fundamentals of a liberal society: that you do business even with those whom you disagree. Voltaire marvelled at this concept on his visit to the London Stock Exchange: 'Here Jew, Mohammedan and Christian deal with each other as though they were all of the same faith, and only apply the word infidel to people who go bankrupt.'

But it's then long been fashionable to sneer at Wetherspoons. Perhaps it's because they sell such cheap beer. In London a pint in Wetherspoons will cost you less than two thirds of what you'll pay in the place with gastro pretensions up the hill. They can offer these prices because they have massive buying power: more than 1,000 pubs around the country. It's a far cry from when Tim Martin bought his first pub in 1979 and decided to name the company after one of his old teachers who couldn't control the class — which was how Martin felt about trying to run a pub.

GETTY IMAGES

Good beer, cheap

It has to be said, those prices do mean that you get some colourful characters in a Spoons. The one in Liverpool Street station is particularly intimidating, full of loud men with shaven heads having a few before their trains back to Billericay. In a cavernous converted bank or cinema — typical Spoons venues — you're not going to get the burble of conversation, the crackle of an open fire and the landlord's wife's shepherd's pie.

So by the standards of that mythical pub we all have in our minds, Wetherspoons falls short. But then so do 99 per cent of pubs. Most are owned by chains. One of the biggest, Mitchells & Butlers, also own Nicholson's, Harvester and All Bar One. Many pubs that look independent aren't: our local in Blackheath, the Hare & Billet, is owned by the Metropolitan Pub Company. But being part of a chain doesn't stop your average Wetherspoons from being something of a drinker's paradise. Whereas until recently many pubs considered doing real ale a chore, Wetherspoons have always prided themselves on their selection. The food isn't bad either (I recommend the curries and the meat pies). In a strange town, a Spoons can be a refuge.

As with all chains, there are good Spoons and bad. The best have a sense of community lacking in more upmarket neighbours where the regulars have been priced out. I experienced the full magic recently at the Brockley Barge in south-east London. The beer, of course, was good and cheap — but even better was the atmosphere. There were postmen enjoying a post-work drink, students, old men eking out their pensions and chubby girls drinking pinot grigio by the bucketload. People were smiling and talking to each other. Maybe I'd had too much discount real ale, but that night I felt like Voltaire at the London Stock Exchange. However you voted in the referendum, can we at least agree that being able to buy a pint of Timothy Taylor's Landlord for £2.50 is a wonderful thing?

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INTRODUCTIONS

My client is an elegant, slim, extremely attractive fair haired woman who most men would feel proud of. Whilst living in the Cotswolds she also loves spending time in London and frequently visits the theatre, opera and galleries etc. She has travelled extensively in the past and has recently returned from a bridge holiday in Spain and still enjoys travel. Widowed some years ago she is looking for someone from a similar background, intelligent, well-spoken, privately educated, fit and active with a good sense of fun. Age range 70s. With NO FEE involved, this is a simple genuine request, contact HEATHER HEBER PERCY to find out more.

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'The Professor is the most distinguished male feminist in these islands since John Stuart Mill'
— Bruce Anderson, p62

LIFE

High life
Taki

From my chalet high up above the village, I look up at the immense, glistening mountain range of the Alps, and my spirit soars. Even youthful memories receding into sepia cannot bring me down from the high. Mountains, more than seas, can be exhilarating for the soul. Then I open the newspapers and the downer is as swift as the onset of an Alpine blizzard. Television is even more of a bummer. Last week I saw Piers Morgan tell an American TV personality — a big-time Trump hater — whose face looks exactly like a penis how strange he found it that two people like Bush and Blair, who lied about the war and caused more than a million Iraqi and thousands of American deaths, were hardly vilified for their crimes compared with the stuff being hurled at Trump after only four weeks in the saddle. The penis (Bill Maher) shouted and raved at Piers, who laughed it off.

But is it a laughing matter? That Bush, Blair and the neocons are walking around free and even telling us how wrong we were to back Brexit? How does Blair dare open his mouth? Mind you, it's worse in America, where the FBI, the Justice Department and the intelligence agencies were complicit in a conspiracy to leak the contents of a private conversation in order to bring down the national security adviser and embarrass Trump. They should be prosecuted and exposed, but like Bush and Blair they will not be. This is the deep state, one that is not best pleased with the election results, and one that will play very dirty in cahoots with the lefty media.

Last week my sensei Richard Amos came to visit after a trip to Japan, and we talked about the busted flush that is the regressive EU, and the wonder of Japan. The country has been in a financial crisis for 30 years, yet prices are the same as they were when Richard was there as a 20-year-old going through hell in karate instructors' classes that were as tough as anything that special forces have to deal with. Japan has low crime, even lower immigration, a homogeneous population, and always a great respect for the old and the traditional. In other words, the direct opposite of what Europe and the West stand for. More Europe means more immigration and more crime and more alienation.

Richard, now in his early fifties, went back to a class given by an 88-year-old sensei, who smiled, bowed and gingerly attacked him without saying a word. Needless to say, Richard kept him at bay, but respectfully. He visited old dojos, sparred with various old-timers — and some not old at all — dined and drank with them and left with a heavy heart. Japan is probably one of the most pleasant countries to live in. Good manners and respect are the key to a civil society, not inclusion and diversity. I can't wait to return to Tokyo with him this coming autumn and seek out two senseis I want to fight with: Wada San, 68 years old and present champion in the 60-and-over category, and the 88-year-old who attacks without warning. What fun: it will make me feel 75 again.

We rose early, took our time after breakfast, then hit the dojo. Kicks, punches galore, always looking for a perfect posture and balance. Then we sparred, hard. After that there was lunch in the sun on my terrace. In the afternoon, we went back to the gym, this time for kata training and, of course, kumite, which means fighting. Four hard sessions in two days made me feel like a new man. There is nothing like karate training to make one feel well. Perhaps cross-country skiing comes close, but what do you do when a mugger, or a wise guy, starts trouble? Put on your cross-country skis?

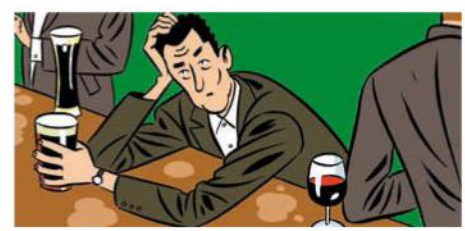
I've installed a makiwara behind my chalet, a makiwara being a wooden stand topped by straw where one hardens one's knuckles and wrists by punching non-stop. There is one for the legs, too, this being my own invention. But back to Japan: it has very little illegal immigration and is officially closed to people seeking blue-collar work. But many Japanese industries are suffering from labour shortages that have helped put a brake on economic growth. Hence some fundamental assumptions about immigrants have had to change. A government-sponsored internship programme allows the mostly Chinese workers to gain skills, the purpose being to square the circle between Japan's labour shortage and its ban on low-wage immigration.

One of the reasons countries such as Japan and Switzerland work as well as they do is that neither country automatically confers citizenship — or rights, for that matter — on anyone who has managed to enter, legally or illegally. One needs to earn the right, otherwise you're out. The fat cats in Brussels haven't the guts to declare that there is no free lunch, because having enjoyed only free lunches throughout their life it might make them sound hypocritical. But no sooner had the Chinese arrived in Japan than they started to bleat about low wages and bad treatment. They remind me of the migrants I saw in Athens last year, from Afghanistan and Somalia. They were complaining about their Greek hosts. But I know very few Greeks who asked the migrants to visit Greece, even in transit.

Ah, how nice it must feel to criticise hard-hearted folks like the poor little Greek boy while sitting in a comfortable office spewing out drivel about the brotherhood of man.

'I want to put on a brave face.'

Low life
Jeremy Clarke



I stepped off the train in Barcelona at 7.30 in the evening and followed directions to the hostel. The February night air felt almost balmy. I found the street easily enough — a busy thoroughfare of bars and independent shops. The hostel entrance was an ancient door in the wall. Next to it was a button to press before speaking. The door swung open to reveal a glorious marbled and tiled entrance hall with an old-fashioned cage ele-

vator that had ceased going up and down a long time ago. Marble and tile continued all the way to the top. The hostel manager and his girlfriend were leaning over the stairwell to guide and welcome me.

He was called Pedro and she was called Lucinda. They'd liked the sound of my voice when I buzzed up to be admitted, they said. Did I smoke? Yes, I said. I did. The manager was triumphant. 'We knew we would like you! And do you smoke weed?' I said yes, I had been known to smoke weed. 'Come and look at this, man,' he said. Pedro led me into his and Lucinda's bedroom — which I was welcome to use at any time, he said, and for whatever purpose — and he showed me about three ounces of skunk in a wooden box. He gathered up a handful of buds, pressed them to his face, inhaled exultantly, and invited me to do the same. Then he set about rolling a joint.

They sat on the bed and I sat on a divan and we smoked the joint to complete the check-in process

He made the spliff with tremendous love and care but the completed item was surprisingly lopsided. Before he lit it, we agreed that perhaps it was best if we first sorted out payment and key allocation. So we did that. Then Pedro and Lucinda sat on their low bed and I sat on a divan and we smoked the joint to complete the check-in process.

After the second revolution of the joint a wonderful empathy sprang up between the three of us. After the fourth, everything I thought, looked at, said and heard struck me as either highly significant or wildly funny. After the fifth, my personality disintegrated. All of my life, I now realised, I had presented a persona to the world that had absolutely nothing behind it to back it up. I had no opinions, beliefs, morals, or character. I was a liar and a fake. My voice was fake. Even my laugh was fake. Worse still, I was certain that these thoughts were transparent to Pedro and Lucinda, who now seemed to me to be the wisest, kindest and most intelligent young people I had ever met.

Pedro rolled one joint after another. It took him about five strong joints to get properly stoned nowadays, he lamented. Did I know that cannabis possession was legal in Barcelona? I didn't, I said. And did I know, he said, that the world was ruled by extra-terrestrial lizards in human form called Illuminati? And that these Illuminati controlled thousands of cloned robots designed to infiltrate the worlds of film, finance and government? And that most of the Hollywood stars are clones? Tom Cruise, anyone? Brad Pitt? I looked at Lucinda. She was nodding enthusiastically. 'Of course, man!' she said.

Then this tall, sensitive-looking man, languid, a bit shy, pencil-thin beardy-arrangement thing, grey bouffant hair, possibly Indian, came in. This was the hostel owner. He introduced himself as Ahmed but I was too wrecked to commit any more names to memory. I called him either Rachid or Racine. He looked like a Racine. He'd stopped by to smoke weed with us for a while and meet the new guest. Pedro passed him the wooden box with the weed in it and all the makings, including a grinder. Racine received it with alacrity, as though he'd been looking forward to it.

'So what brings you here to Barcelona, my friend?' Racine said conversationally while his fingertips did intricate things with cigarette papers. 'Because I am depressed,' I said. I added that I was on a month-long rail trip to try and change my outlook. 'Everybody is depressed,' said Racine, lowering his voice confidentially. 'The whole world is depressed. How could it not be? In this world depression is a sign of sanity. The question is not whether you have depression but how you choose to handle your depression while you are alive.' He spoke with kindness but I also detected a definite note of didacticism, and now a fresh delusion gripped me, which was that I had checked in to some sort of mental-health clinic run by Scientologists.

I excused myself and went and stood out on the small balcony overlooking the street to smoke a fag. A clock on the wall of the Happy Day English School directly opposite said 8.15. It felt like months, but I had been in Barcelona for only three-quarters of an hour.

Real life
Melissa Kite

Unexpectedly re-available is a very good phrase. I have often seen it applied to house advertisements and thought how fabulously impertinent it sounds, so I am asking the agents to attach it to the description of my flat now that it is back on the market after a right old hoo-ha with the buyer from hell.

Unexpectedly re-available is a grammatical tongue-twister, and a euphemism that manages to be both enigmatic and facetious at the same time.

I also like it because it speaks to me on a personal level. I have been unexpectedly re-available countless times and I wish I had thought of saying so whenever I went on one of those dreadful dating websites. Unexpectedly re-available, due to time wasters.

Well appointed, in good decorative order. Traditional yet versatile. Well cared for and tastefully improved over the years. Now in need of some modernisation.

Since the builder boyfriend went from semi-permanent fixture to permanent yet again — once more 'on' after being on-off for more than five years — I suppose you might heave an exasperated sigh and say that, in fact, I am more accurately described as 'expectedly re-unavailable'.

He sent me a lovely Valentine's card this year, actually mentioning the word love, although he signed it from him and the dog to take the edge off it slightly.

Earlier that day, I had pricked his conscience by telling him I loved him in a text, after Ellie Goulding came on the radio singing 'How Long Will I Love You'.

'Oh! I do love him!' I thought, as the tears burst from my eyes in a surprising torrent and streamed down my face. So I texted to say so. And he sent a text back: 'Well, that's nice, isn't it? And I love you even though you are a pain in the arse.'

I am more accurately described as 'expectedly re-unavailable'

I wiped away tears. 'Yes. You're a thorn in my side and I'm a pain in your arse,' I texted, as Ellie Goulding sang 'How long will I love you?/ As long as stars are above you…'

The funny thing was, I didn't mention the song at all, but the card he gave me that night, signed by him and the spaniel, said that they loved me more than the stars.

I do believe in serendipity, or something guiding the universe that shows us through magical coincidences that It is there and that, despite the obvious horrors of the world, all is basically well and will be well. You may say this is silly, religionistic nonsense, but as it is the one optimistic streak left in me, I think it is best I hang on to it.

What is meant to be will be, I tell myself. If I didn't think that, I would have gone mad after losing the buyer who three months ago promised me a quick cash purchase of my flat.

She wanted the kink in the kitchen floor plan corrected asap. But asap didn't even come into it. A deed of variation is required and that needs the signature of the owner of the flat upstairs, who is also the freeholder. He keeps knocking on my door to tell me he has asked his lawyer for an appointment and he is definitely going to meet up with him at some point to start discussions about this laundry cubby-hole at the back of my kitchen under his garden stairs, which is not on the official floor plan — you know, so we can be sure there are no issues before he signs the corrected plan.

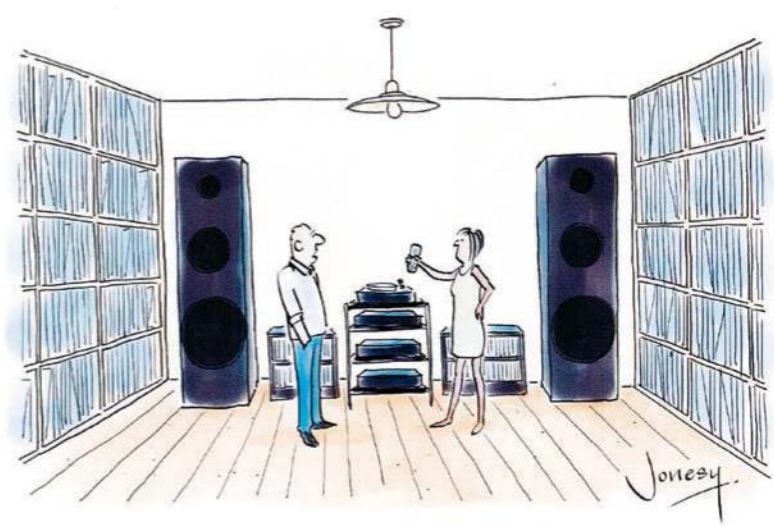
Yes, I think. Like the issue of him possibly owning the blasted cubby-hole and wanting to sell it to me for £50,000 or brick it up, knowing my luck.

In any case, the flat is back on the market. Will this mean I lose my dream cottage in the country? What's for you won't go past you, I tell myself. Someone wiser than me told me this, of course. I didn't invent it. I can't claim to know anything particularly useful after 45 years on this planet, except, perhaps, how to make pesto sauce from scratch and jump a horse over a nine-bar gate. There seems to be an ever-diminishing need for both these things, sadly.

But as fate would have it, the chap from whom I am buying the dream cottage has had a spot of bother with his purchase too, the agent told me, when I rang to fess up about my amazing disappearing cash buyer.

He is now in a chain, after initially thinking he would not be. He is waiting on the girl he is buying from to buy somewhere else before he can move in.

I think this means the dream cottage is still on the 'meant to be' list.



'But I don't want all of this condensed into something as small as that.'

Bridge

Susanna Gross

If there's one tournament I'd really like to play in, it's the Cavendish in Monaco, the largest money bridge tournament in the world. Last Sunday, the winners of the main auction pairs, the Bulgarians Diyan Danailov and Jerry Stamatov, scooped the players prize of €16,000, and whoever bought them for €12,000 won €100,000. But it's not just the money: what really sets this tournament apart is the thrillingly high standard.

Even great players sometimes err — at this level, though, the smallest slip-ups are pounced on without mercy. This deal grabbed my attention while I was watching online — the same contract at three tables, a defensive mistake at each:

Dealer North **Neither vulnerable**

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

West	North	East	South
	Pass	pass	3♣
dble	5♣	pass	pass
dble	all pass		

At table 1, Zia Mahmood was declarer. West led the ♠K. Zia ruffed and played a diamond. West (Piotr Wiankowski) hopped up with the ♦A (*why*?). Zia ruffed the spade return, drew trumps, cashed the ♦K, came to hand and tabled the ♦J, pinning East's ♦10 and promoting his ♦9. An unmakeable contract made. At table 2, Dror Padon got the same lead. This time, when he played a diamond, West played low, but East (Justin Hackett) played the ♦8 under dummy's ♦K and then, on the ♦7, followed with the ♦2. Dror ran the ♦7; West won with the ♦A, and Dror later pinned East's ♦10 as Zia had done. At table 3, Piotr Tuczynski was declarer. The play went the same way, and East, John Hurd, also played the ♦8 then the ♦2! (Tuczynski erred, however, by ruffing the ♦5 in the hope the ♦Q would drop.) What was the ♦8 — ♦2 all about? Reverse count, I guess. How costly to give count automatically!

Chess

Blazing Sadler

Raymond Keene

Matthew Sadler's retirement from full-time international chess is one of the great losses to the British game. Occasionally, the one-time prodigy emerges, usually to make a massive score in a rapid or blitz event in the vicinity of Holland, where he now works and lives. It is also fortunate that he still competes in the Four Nations Chess League.

This week's game is a Sadler victory against a former two-times World Championship candidate, Jon Speelman.

Sadler-Speelman: 4NCL 2017; French Defence

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Qd7 The usual move here is 4 ... c5 with an immediate challenge to the white pawn centre. Speelman may have chosen the text in the erroneous belief that Sadler would have been less well prepared for it. **5 a3 Bxc3+** Paradoxically, Black may be better off retreating with 5 ... Bf8 which makes no concessions in terms of surrendering the bishop pair or weakening the dark squares. An example is Kasparov-Ivanchuk, Horgen 1995, which (with the substitution of 4...b6 for 4...Qd7) continued 5 ... Bf8 6 Nf3 Ne7 7 h4 h6 8 h5 a5 9 Bb5+ c6 10 Ba4 Nd7. In this game, Kasparov's attack ultimately foundered against the impervious nature of the black fortress and Ivanchuk went on to win an historic victory against the world champion. **6 bxc3 b6** Black's strategic plan becomes evident. His queen defends along the seventh rank, meanwhile Black hopes to trade the light-squared bishops when the pawn configuration will even give him the advantage if he survives to the endgame. On top of this, Black also prepares to castle queenside, thus evacuating the king from White's attack on the opposite side of the board. The only drawback to this ideal scheme is that it consumes a vast amount of time, which Sadler is quick to exploit. **7 Qg4 f5 8 Qg3 Ba6 9 Bxa6 Nxa6 10 Ne2 0-0-0 11 a4 Kb7 12 0-0** *(diagram 1)* This position has been seen many times before but Sadler makes it look like a forced win for White.

Diagram 1

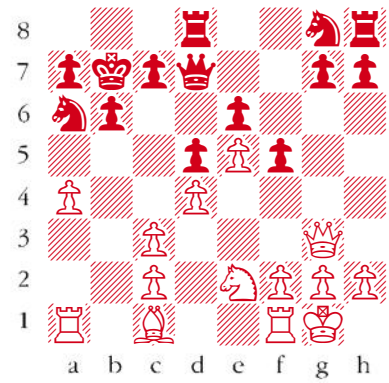
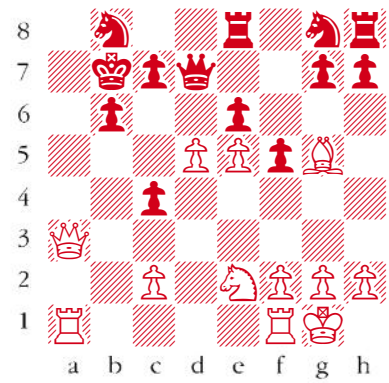


Diagram 2



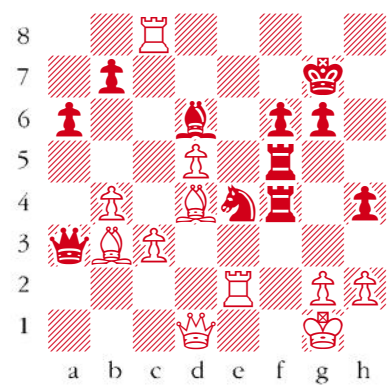
12 ... Nb8 12 ... Qf7 is the main move but after 13 c4 dxc4 14 Qc3 Ne7 15 Qxc4 Nc6 16 a5 White has a huge attack. **13 a5 Nc6 14 axb6 axb6 15 c4** This chips away at the centre while also opening a line for the white queen to transfer to the a-file. **15 ... dxc4 16 Qa3 Nb8** 16 ... Na5 17 Bd2 Ra8 18 Rfb1 is dismal for Black as, indeed, is everything else. **17 Bg5 Re8 18 d5** *(diagram 2)* **18 ... Qxd5** 18 ... exd5 19 Qa8+ Kc8 20 Nd4 wins. **19 Rfd1 Qe4 20 Nc3 Qc6 21 Qa8+ Kc8 22 Qxc6 Nxc6 23 Ra8+ Nb8 24 Nb5** Now Ra7 is coming. **24 ... Re7 25 Rxb8+ Black resigns**

PUZZLE NO. 445

Black to play. This position is from Morozevich-Sadler, Reykjavik 1999, a game from Sadler's heydey, when he was regularly beating the best players in the world. How did he finish off?

Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 28 February or via email to victoria@spectator.co.uk. There is a prize of £20 for the first correct answer out of a hat. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Last week's solution 1 Rh8+.
Last week's winner R.F. Tindall, Great Shelford, Cambridgeshire.



Competition

You're toast

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 2986 you were invited to submit a poem about a deadly foodstuff.

My inspiration for this assignment was the appalling news that toast can kill you, which is yet another depressing indication that everything good is bad for you. Or perhaps, as Max Gutmann suggests in the closing couplet of his winning entry, it's safer simply to regard all food as a potential enemy.

Honourable mentions to Mae Scanlan and Jennifer Moore, and £25 each to the winners. D.A. Prince scoops the bonus fiver.

Amanita phalloides!
Yes, my darling, just for you —
hunter-gathered when your need is
homely soup to add them to.

Fresh and creamy-clean, so wholesome;
don't they tempt your appetite!
Mushrooms feed your hungry soul; come
this soup is exactly right.

Shun the supermarkets' offering —
carbon footprint, packaged, stale;
these are handmade personal profferings
like the stuff of fairy tale.

Not for me, alas — my diet:
but I'd have some if I could.
Still, you'll love it when you try it.
This will really do you good.
D.A. Prince

Some foods are dangerous — e.g.
The pufferfish, fesikh, ackee,
Bullfrogs, blood clams — but none of these
Disgusts like Casu Marzu cheese.

Remove a Pecorino crust
And flies swarm in to slake their lust
And lay their eggs and raise their young
Who'll lace the cheese with maggot dung.

The hard-core Casu Mazu buff,
The addict, cannot get enough.
He gladly eats — and never squirms —
Intestine-perforating worms.

The Brussels bureaucrats can't stand it
And, pusillanimous, have banned it,
But anyone can beat the ban
Who knows a man who knows a man.
Basil Ransome-Davies

Their restaurant was a cause of strife
For Alice Higgins and her wife,
Since Alice loved to cook, while Honey
Saw their goal as making money.
At last they had a major tiff
And Alice gave her love a biff,
So Honey took a frozen joint
And thumped her back, to make a point.
Alas! Poor Alice took it ill
And broke her head upon the grill.
The newly-widowed Honey gasped
And dropped the brisket she had clasped.
So Honey had to learn to cook
By reading a prodigious book

And Alice, with her dainty taste,
Was not allowed to go to waste.
Frank Upton

Worse than the song of sirens, worse than gold,
Few earthly things match its destructive lure.
Who can walk past a place where it is sold
And not succumb to lust that has no cure?
Or when Nigella sings with angel voice
How easily it's made, with what attraction,
We are at once deprived of any choice,
Our single goal, to taste its sweet perfection.
Though it be hell for teeth and woe for weight,
This pleasing poison robs us of restraint;
Once it is seen, escaping is too late,
It has the awesome power to break a saint.
The greatest joy arises from so little,
That sweetest of enticers: peanut brittle.
Frank McDonald

Fruit gets doused with killer spray.
Junk food makes you rot away.
Any sugar that you taste
spoils your teeth and bloats your waist;
diabetes may ensue.
Pizza is no good for you.
Drinking coffee makes you quiver.
Alcohol impairs your liver.
Butter, poultry, eggs and cheese
clog and harden arteries.
Nice lean red meat — not the answer —
brings on colorectal cancer.
High blood pressure? Too much salt.
Weight gain? Maybe bread's at fault.
Those who'd live long lives conclude
they should stay away from food.
Max Gutmann

'What ails you, Lord Scandal? Why look
you so pale?
I fear you've been over-indulging on ale.'
'Not ale mother, haggis, my stomach, it churns
And oh how it burns, mother, oh how it burns!'

'Who cooked you the haggis, Lord
Scandal, my child?
Your face is so pale and your eyes are so wild.'
'My sweetheart, she cooked it, with Scot's
sausage meat
And mushroom sauce — added, she said, as a
treat.'

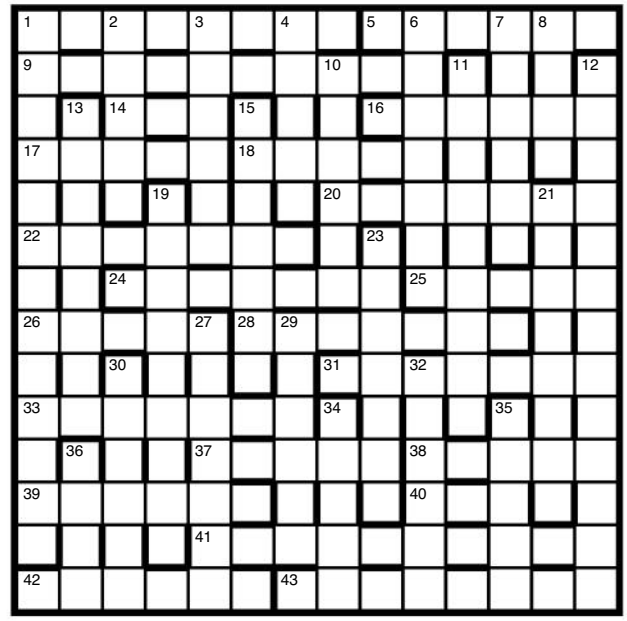
'Did you talk about Scotland, Lord
Scandal, my son?
Did you talk about Scotland my wee
bonnie one?'
'Aye, I favoured Brexit and made
my views known
But she wanted Scotland to go it alone.'

'I think you are dying, Lord Scandal, I do,
Your tongue is on fire, your lips have
turned blue.'
'Aye, Mother, the sauce — it was death caps I ate,
I shouldn't have argued but now it's too late.'
Alan Millard

NO 2989: GETTYSBURG REVISITED

You are invited to submit a version of the Gettysburg Address as it might have been given by a prominent figure on the world stage (alive or dead but please specify). Please email entries of up to 200 words to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 8 March.

Crossword
2298: NOW
by Fieldfare



The unclued lights (one of two words), correctly paired, are of a kind and are defective in the same way. Elsewhere, ignore an accent.

Across

1 Indecision of poet shortly to tour America (8)
5 A band restrains it likewise (6, two words)
14 Judge half a fool (3)
16 Shrewd to capture rook in tight opening (6)
18 Fold in applicant's heart (5)
20 Accumulate leave, by the way (7)
24 To put it another way, some drank, but the ... (7)
25 Slip at intervals in fear or worry (5)
26 Increase cost at first by an arm or a leg (5)
28 A priest at home in Paris, ready (7, three words)
31 Wearing mask, European has a solid meal (7, hyphened)
33 Problem: teacher, tense, falls back in spasm (7)
37 Provide for insect needing energy to soak up sun (5)
38 In old lens, Christian's head not visible (5)
39 Dye: nice or nasty? (6)
41 Ambassador's position around university strangely uncertain (10)
42 Remove moral flaw from man in power? (6)
43 One collapsing is brilliant afterwards (8)

Down

1 Tonic pacifies lunatic having breakdown (13)
2 Householder's special pin (5)
3 Being born ascetic (6)
4 Caught aroma of southern cheese dish (5)
6 Executed gangster, criminal alien (7)
7 Linen that is taken off to remain behind (6)
10 Evoke endless happiness (6)
12 Say the correct recipe for sea pie (13, hyphened)
13 Machine operator, having time, beginning to leaf through schoolbook (8)
15 During lifetime, you are militaristic (7)
21 Unable to travel today in Kent, row follows (8, two words)
23 Turning up with net, sea goddess (7)
27 Child has cane at home for nothing (7)
29 Class apparently not so busy? (6)
30 Travelling entertainers around, one short, at our party (6)
32 Declaration in one of a few letters read out (6)
35 Swagger, given way to get over tedious course (5)
36 Drive son away from cutter (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 13 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 2298, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

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Email .....

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SOLUTION TO 2295: JUICY

The shared name was PERRY (18), shared by GRAYSON (28) Perry and Perry MASON (2). GP, whose alter ego is CLAIRE (3), is a TURNER (32) Prize winner. PM is a lawyer created by Erle Stanley GARDNER (27); Della STREET (10) is PM's secretary and Paul DRAKE (37) is his private investigator. PERRY was to be shaded.

First prize Frank Anstis, Truro.
Runners-up Les Verth, Newton Mearns, Glasgow; Chris Butler, Borough Green, Kent.

Status Anxiety

Will my inner party animal roar back to life?

Toby Young

According to a front-page story in the *Times* earlier this week, your personality *does* change over the course of your lifetime. A study carried out by Edinburgh University found that the personalities of a group of people in their seventies had changed significantly since they were schoolchildren in the 1950s. Traits like perseverance, self-confidence and originality changed 'beyond recognition', according to the study's leader Dr Mathew Harris. He was surprised, because the conventional wisdom among social psychologists is that these characteristics remain stable over a person's lifetime.

At first glance, my own personality would appear to bear out these findings. Between the ages of 14 and 40 I was something of a hell-raiser. My main focus was getting into glamorous, star-studded parties, and I reached the summit of my ambitions when I landed a job in the mid-1990s as a caption writer for *Vanity Fair*'s monthly gallery of D-list celebs out and about in Manhattan. Not a particularly distinguished career for the son of a Labour party panjandrum and a BBC radio producer, but it suited me down to the ground.

I styled myself '*Vanity Fair*'s nightlife correspondent' — a bit of a stretch, but close enough to guarantee admission to even the most swanky of soirées. I spent my evenings hopping between events in a Lincoln Town Car, usually sandwiched between two female companions.

I interrupt my companions to ask if they know of any casinos nearby. They look at me very oddly

Fast forward 20 years and I'm a respectable father of four and an education policy geek. The last time I went to New York was to visit a school in Queens. Where did it all go wrong?

But when I think about how I've changed, it feels less like I've had a personality transplant than the emergence into the foreground of characteristics that were latent for the first 40 years of my life. I went through phases of being more serious — in my last year at Oxford, for instance, when I became interested in political philosophy — it's just that my frivolous, Dionysian side kept reasserting itself. However, unlike most of my party-loving companions, I always felt a niggling sense of guilt that I wasn't doing something more worthwhile. I spent my youth running as fast as I could to escape the clutches of my liberal do-gooding parents, but never quite succeeding. It was as if I was on a very long piece of elastic and, when it was at full stretch, they began to reel me back in. I'm now employed as the chief executive of a charity, which is exactly what my father did.

So does that mean the apple hasn't fallen far from the tree and I was always destined to become my father? I think the truth about personality lies somewhere between these two poles. Our traits aren't completely set in stone from an early age, but nor are we blank canvasses either. Quite often, we have it in ourselves to become something different, and we can either resist that or embrace it. When we do, it can feel as if we're exercising free will, but at the end of the process, when we are middle-aged, it feels almost inevitable that we have ended up the way we have.

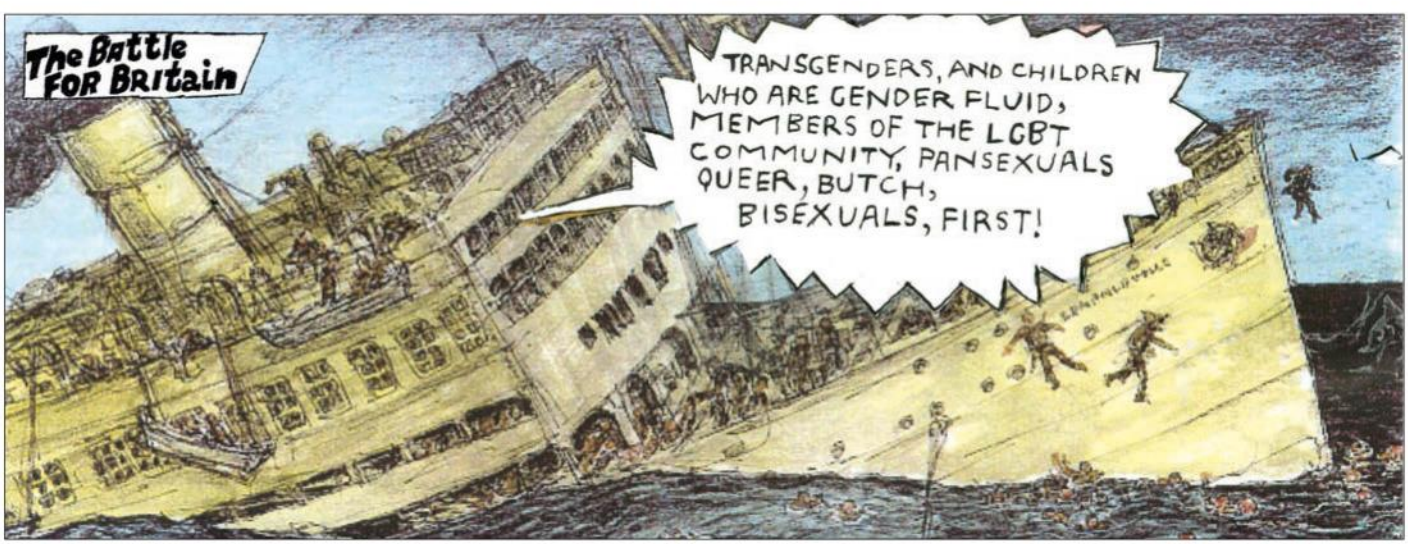
I should caveat this by saying that I probably have 25 years left and it's possible that my party-loving self may come roaring back to life. There are moments when I'm attending education conferences, chatting to fellow wonks in the bar after dinner, when I get a glimpse of the person I used to be. It's a feeling of freedom, of the oppressive need to be sensible being lifted, and I interrupt my companions to ask if they know of any casinos nearby. They look at me very oddly, as if a complete stranger has suddenly accosted them, and the conventional social restrains soon envelop me.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Edinburgh study is that some characteristics *were* stable over the course of the subjects' lifetimes. According to Dr Harris, these were conscientiousness and stability of mood. That tallies with my own experience, and it's telling that those two characteristics are more measurable than those which are said to have changed, such as originality.

My suspicion is that the study's findings have been exaggerated and the conventional wisdom about how much our personalities change in our lifetimes is broadly correct.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH



The Wiki Man

Thank God for overpriced lawyers!

Rory Sutherland

When you buy a house in Britain, there is an extensive and well-established series of checks you must perform to ensure the property is suitable for habitation. When undertaking a survey, you should ensure that the boundaries of the property conform to those recorded at the Land Registry, and that the property does not lie on a flood plain or risk structural damage from coastal erosion or subsidence. Unfortunately, there seems to be no mechanism to protect householders from the worst possible eventuality — which is to find out that you have a lawyer living next door.

Wherever you have a shared wall or fence, there exist countless opportunities to be a bit of an arsehole — suing your neighbour about an overhanging branch, or claiming damages to your greenhouse from falling fruit or invasive roots. For most of us, thankfully, the cost of engaging a lawyer outweighs any potential gains from arseholery, so we simply don't bother. But if you are a lawyer already, that constraint does not apply: you can be an arsehole for free in your spare time. There is a petrol station not far from where I live where you can't use the outdoor cash machine after about 9 p.m. because a retired barrister nearby complained that the beeping of the keys somehow interfered with his human rights.

Lots of things need to be expensive to stop people overusing them. The legal system is one

There are lots of things in life that need to be expensive to prevent people overusing them. The legal system is one such thing. It's so expensive that, unless I find myself faced with a possible ten-stretch in the nonces' wing of Wakefield Prison, I'll generally give the legal fraternity a miss. But this is still preferable to a world in which everyone could issue legal proceedings against each other for a few pounds and a few minutes' work. In such a place, the most litigious crackpots could prevent almost anyone from doing anything.

Yet I am sure right now that someone in Silicon Valley has an exciting plan to 'democratise' and 'disintermediate' legal services. Artificial intelligence, I fear, will in ten years' time make it very cheap and easy simply to instigate litigation online. All these developments completely ignore the fact that, in a complex society, easy doesn't always mean good. There is an optimum amount of friction which the system needs in order to work.

Driverless electric cars will cost almost nothing to run, and you won't get tired or bored driving them. The net result will be that the roads will be unusable by anyone who is in a bit of a hurry or whose journey is important. Every road will be gridlocked by total idiots, or retirees, who have nothing better to do than sit in traffic watching daytime television, probably while drunk.

The typewriter, and with it the typing pool, is another example of a useful inefficiency. Speaking to people who worked at Ogilvy & Mather in the 1960s, I was told that any young man who wished to make a success of his career was well advised to spend at least an hour or so each week Terry-Thomasing around the women in the typing pool. If you did not make friends with them quickly, it was more or less impossible for you to produce a memo in less than a fortnight. Today, in our age of email overload, it strikes me that this was a brilliant arrangement. It meant that if you received a memo then, it probably came from someone senior, or else a junior person whose message was sufficiently important to burn a few earned favours in its creation. Now any fool can send anything instantly. Bill Gates described his vision as 'business at the speed of thought'. This, in fact, accurately describes a nightmare.

Rory Sutherland is vice-chairman of Ogilvy Group UK.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED

Q. I've listened to the radio to deal with insomnia for years (Dear Mary, 18 February) and your suggestion of single earphones does not work well. They hurt your ear — when they haven't fallen out of it. The answer is either a Roberts Radio Pillow Talk speaker (flat, sits under pillow, clearly audible through pillow) or a Sound Asleep Speaker Pillow (haven't tried myself but has 49 good reviews on sleepypeople.com). Both cost £14.99.
—F.C., Newbury.

A. Thank you for sharing your findings.

Q. Our 15-year-old daughter has, on paper, nothing to complain about. We both love her passionately and have only her best interests at heart. Moreover, we live in some luxury in the heart of a district of London considered cool by teenagers. Nevertheless, she is impossible to be around, snapping our heads off at the slightest pretext. (We've ruled out drinks or drugs and she doesn't have an eating disorder.) She's not an only child, so that's not the problem. (Her siblings are still happily at the boarding school she insisted we let her leave.)We realise the moodiness may be hormone-related and will pass, but in the meantime, Mary, what do you advise?
— Name and address withheld

A. London is pullulating with attractive male undergraduates with nowhere to live after their first year in halls. Recruit an appropriate young man and invite him to pay a peppercorn rent to live in one of your other siblings' bedrooms during term time. You will find that, once there is a 'fanciable' witness living on site, the domestic atmosphere will improve dramatically.

Q. I'm extremely fond of an elderly relation who likes me to give him lunch in my club when he's in London. I enjoy his company enormously, but as the years have passed he's become increasingly incontinent as regards the amount of saliva he expresses while talking. We always sit in the same bay window, which illuminates his spit vividly before it splatters on to my Dover sole. How should I tackle this, Mary?
— Name and address withheld

A. Arrange for the waiter to leave a small menu or the wine list propped in front of your plate. This will serve as a shield against the spittle. Explain your behaviour by saying that you are considering the pudding wines. Your relation will assume that you are trying to conceal the prices.

Q I have a van load of furniture coming over from Northern Ireland. The removal men are being paid handsomely. What is the etiquette on tipping them?
— M.W., Wilts

A. These men deserve £20 each for their efforts. It will be in your own interest to see the smiles on their faces as they trouser the notes.

Drink

Cats and clarets

Bruce Anderson

Call me a sentimental old whatever, but watching a four-year old hearing *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers* for the first time, read by someone who could do the police in different voices, took one as far from the Waste Land as is possible. It also made me think about moggies, which brought back memories of a trip to Kabul. Outside the Portakabin where we were billeted, there was a notice: 'Please do not bring cats into the living quarters.' No one puts up an instruction like that without the expectation that it will be disobeyed. One can imagine why, and how very British. It is to the credit of the brutal and licentious, living in cramped conditions, exposed to constant danger, that they had sentimentality left for local felines.

A few of those were prowling near the entrance to the cabins. Although they did not look starving, they were not overnourished. But I am sure that they often benefited from military generosity. Camp Bastion would be a good posting for an Afghan cat. Anyway, we were eating our evening meal, which included a curious piece of sausage-type meat, of a reddish colour. Was it animal, vegetable or mineral? Perhaps we were being offered renditioned carcase broiled on depleted uranium. I chucked mine in the direction of a cat. After sniffing the offering as intently as an oenophile assessing a newly poured wine, the animal put its nose in the air and stalked off, with the air of a Belgravia Siamese rejecting inferior smoked salmon. The sausage was clearly corked. To a chorus of 'If even that cat…', most of my colleagues immediately discarded theirs.

After such a contribution to equality, a chap is entitled to a decent glass of wine

I should have brought the sausage back for Professor Branestawm to analyse. This is a scientific friend of mine, who is also the most distinguished male feminist in these islands since John Stuart Mill. He has six daughters, who were each given a kitten. There was a rule: cats did not spend the night in the house. Feline cunning added to feminine wiles: one can imagine how strictly that rule was obeyed. The cats have taken after Moppet and Mittens rather than that wimp Tom Kitten. All good mousers and ratters, they relish hunting rabbits and have seen off foxes.

The girls' education did not consist only of fluff and fur. Their father insisted that, at least until O-level, the core curriculum should include Latin, physics and maths. But there was little need to keep them up to the mark. Academically, they thrive, as in other respects. In the interests of diversity and the environment, the Professor decreed that the girls must learn to shoot. All have, proficiently. In every respect, this household triumphantly refutes the claim that the number of daughters a man has is in proportion to his wickedness in a previous life.

After such a contribution to equality, a chap is entitled to a decent glass of wine. The other evening, he produced a '95 Léoville Barton. Mature, harmonious as the 'Pastoral' in the hands of a great symphony orchestra, it would surely be hard to surpass. But a '97 Margaux succeeded. As so often, the 1855 classification was vindicated. The first growth was an even higher peak. I have always insisted that whereas you drink a Pauillac, you undress a Margaux. This wine justified that dictum. It had femininity, structure, subtlety and power. It proves a point which the Professor's daughters can take for granted. A girl can succeed in a man's world.

But there may be an exception. In Bordeaux, the house of Latour still towers over the landscape, that most masculine of clarets. Although it is not always the greatest wine of the year, it does win the blue riband more often than not. We finished with a '99, the highest peak, still shrouded in mist. Grandeur awaits, but that wine needs several years. If they are good girls — or perhaps even if they are naughty ones — the Professor's daughters might be drinking that wine in decades to come.

'Did you remember to lock up?'

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Curry favour

The number of things I don't know is infinite — or infinite minus one, if such as number exists, since I discovered something the other day: the most unlikely origin for a common phrase. I could hardly believe it at first.

A perfectly current idiom in English is to talk of people *currying favour*, in the sense of 'ingratiating themselves'. I knew that *currying* here had nothing to do with the kind of curry we eat with rice, the name of which we borrowed from Tamil in the 17th century.

I supposed, right enough, that the *currying* of favour was the sort done with a curry-comb when rubbing down a horse. The horsy *curry* came to us in the 13th century, from Old French *conrei*, meaning 'preparation'.

I wasn't ready, however, for the *favour* to be a false friend too. But history shows that the *favour* in question was originally *favel*, 'a chestnut horse'. *Curry favel* was the way it was written from the 15th to the 17th century.

Suddenly, for me, all meaning had been emptied from the idiom. Why should rubbing down a chestnut horse mean 'ingratiating oneself' any more than another random phrase such as *scorching the cheese* or *blowing the doormat*?

Favel, as a horse-colour, is a variant of *fallow* (as in *fallow-deer*), and *fallow* is related to the Latin *pallidus*. The *equus pallidus* was ridden by Death in the Book of Revelation: Death on a pale horse. But the idiom *currying favour* has nothing to do with rubbing down the horse of Death.

The Favel referred to is the name of the hero of a medieval tale, the *Roman de Fauvel*. He is the equine version of Reynard the Fox. Fauvel the horse, thanks to Dame Fortune, exchanges his stable for a palace and is thus admired and flattered by worldly folk, lay and clerical. Those who want to flatter him make sure they curry Fauvel. Eventually Fauvel wins in marriage Lady Vainglory.

It is even possible to buy a recording of music found in the early 14th-century manuscript of the tale. I did not know anything about that until this week — but how little we do know of the words we use so easily.

— Dot Wordsworth

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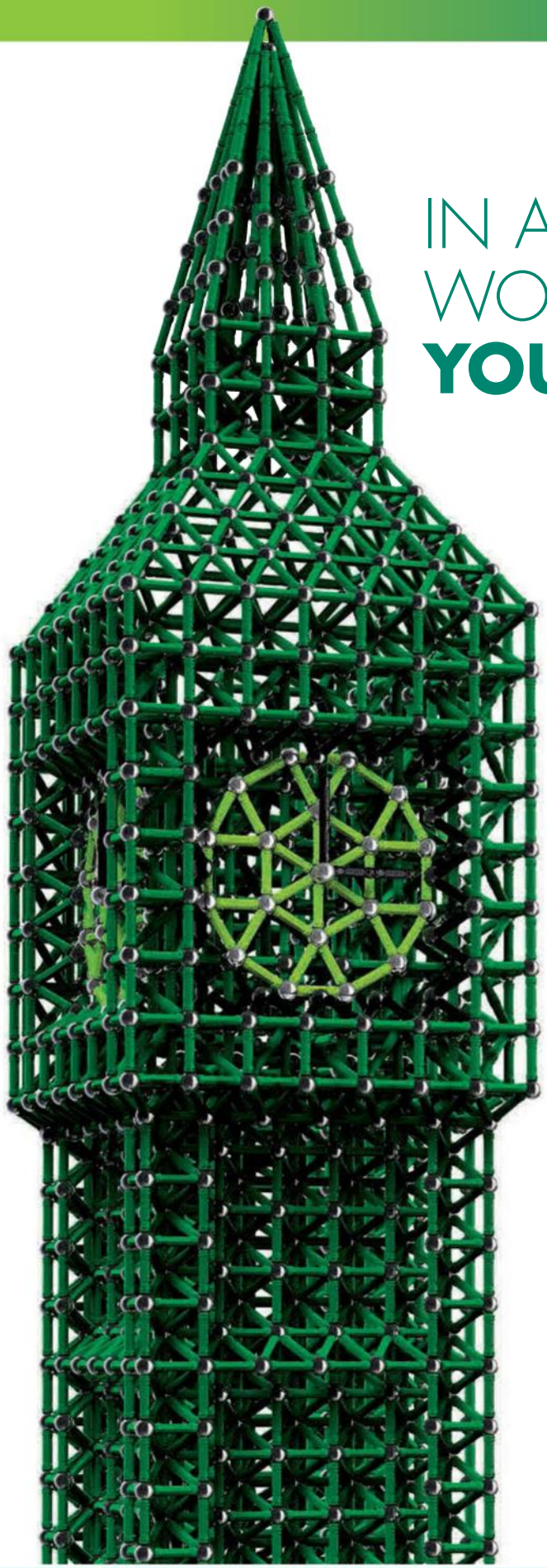

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