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THE SPECTATOR

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War games

Air strikes on Syria won't work, says *Paul Wood*

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THE SPECTATOR
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Crown and countries

Next week, 53 world leaders arrive in London for the Commonwealth summit. It is hard to imagine a better network for the globalised age. Leaders of countries with a combined population of more than two billion will come to discuss issues of common interest. There will be a banquet hosted by the Queen — in her role as the Head of the Commonwealth — at Buckingham Palace, and a day-long leaders' retreat at Windsor Castle. A nod to history, to be sure, but if the Commonwealth was just about nostalgia the summits would have stopped long ago.

The G53 will have much to discuss. The Commonwealth has a shared language, overlapping administrative and legal systems (largely based on English common law) and a shared heritage. This leads to the 'Commonwealth Advantage', with trade between members higher and the cost of doing business much lower. The Commonwealth contains half of the world's top 20 emerging cities. It is the perfect alliance for the 21st century, and the summit comes at the right time, when Britain is making new alliances and lifting its sights to more distant horizons.

In the months before the European Union referendum, JP Morgan calculated that the nations of the Commonwealth would make a more coherent trading bloc than the members of the European Union. This isn't saying much. It found that almost any group you could imagine has more in common than the EU: a reconstituted Ottoman Empire, for example, or an alliance of countries beginning with the letter 'B'. Europe's defining characteristic is the dazzling diversity of its countries — and attempts to impose conformity end badly.

The Queen is the biggest single reason for the Commonwealth's survival

It makes sense that this organisation is headed by the British monarch, rather than purely by rotating chairmanship. The Queen has honoured the promise she made at the age of 21 to serve all the members of what she then called 'our great imperial family'. She is the biggest single reason for the Commonwealth's survival, having steered it through various crises, including apartheid in South Africa. Her service to the Commonwealth underlines the crown's function as a unifying force at home and abroad. Her leadership underlines the idea that the Commonwealth is a prestigious organisation to belong to. (And to join. The most recent member to do so was Gambia, earlier this year, rejoining after its democratic elections.)

The Queen, who turns 92 this month, no longer travels to the further-flung parts of the Commonwealth, and this could be the last summit that she attends — raising the question of succession in the future. There is no rule saying that the Commonwealth must be chaired by the British sovereign, so it's an open question. The Queen was 'acclaimed' its head upon the death of her father, George VI, in 1952. But in recent months, there has been discussion about other alternatives.

This issue can be quickly dealt with. The Prince of Wales has demonstrated his commitment to the Commonwealth, touring widely and often standing in for the Queen. He is the obvious successor, given that he would be the head of state for 15 Commonwealth realms, in addition to the United Kingdom, and he would likely be supported by the vast majority of members. It's a question that can, and should, be resolved now.

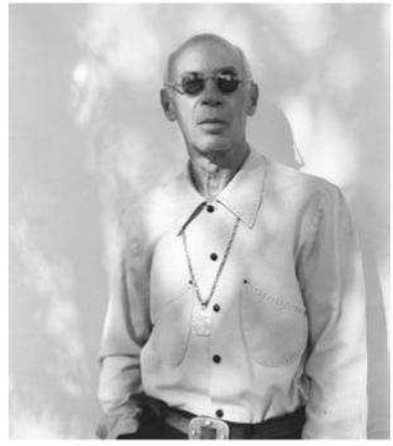
Challenging Orban

There are several ingredients for a successful democracy: the rule of law, opposition parties working without harassment, and a free press able to discuss every issue from every angle. Viktor Orban won a landslide victory in Hungary's elections last weekend, reflecting public support that is far wider than his critics allow. But was it the result of a free and fair debate?

This week, the last serious independent Hungarian daily newspaper closed. *Magyar Nemet* — and its sister radio station Lanchid Radio — have been unable to recover from financial problems which have been exacerbated by government advertising being withdrawn from troublesome newspapers and ploughed into friendly ones. Almost every national and regional newspaper in Hungary is now owned by businessmen loyal to Mr Orban.

He argues that his political power comes from a large democratic mandate. But any democrat ought to relish debate and challenges to government power. The fate of Hungary's newspapers — and its civil society groups — suggest that Mr Orban would prefer to rule unchallenged.

His real love is Trump, p12



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THE WEEK

BOOKS & ARTS

Rod Liddle is away.

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LIFE

Custody is like a Ken Loach film hijacked by Stephen King – and it's terrific
Deborah Ross, p51

I prefer the honest, upfront kick in the balls from a Girl Power kind of woman than the passive-aggressiveness of today's Geisha Generation, who just want to suffer in silence and stew in victimhood
Cosmo Landesman, p24

The President made me as famous as Melania – and I didn't have to sleep with him
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CONTRIBUTORS

Harriet Sergeant finds out how gang culture is fuelled by a brutal form of rap music on p17. She is the author of *Among the Hoods: My Years with a Teenage Gang*.

Prue Leith, whose holiday notebook is on p20, is a judge on *The Great British Bake Off* and wrote the classic cookbook *Leith's Cookery Bible*.

Andrew Taylor's most recent novel, *The Fire Court*, a sequel to *The Ashes of London*, was published last month. He reviews Jo Nesbo's retelling of *Macbeth* on p43.

Martin Gayford immerses himself in the mysteries of Leonardo on p32. He recently co-authored *A History of Pictures: from Cave to Computer Screen* with David Hockney.

Zoe Strimpel examines the 'dark underside' of maternal love on p42. She is the author of *The Man Diet: One Woman's Quest to End Bad Romance*.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK

STOP AN' SEARCH

Home

Parliament was in recess when Theresa May, the Prime Minister, agreed with America and France that the international community should respond to the chemical attack reported from Syria. It was not certain in any case that Parliament would back direct action by Britain. Yulia Skripal, who with her father Sergei was poisoned in Salisbury on 4 March, was discharged from hospital and taken to a safe place. Richard Osborn-Brooks, 78, who killed a burglar with a screwdriver with which he had been threatened, learnt that he would not be charged. He and his disabled wife had to leave their house for fear of revenge by associates of Henry Vincent, the dead man. People removed from a fence bouquets of flowers commemorating the burglar. Cressida Dick, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, deployed 300 extra officers a day at the weekend to counter knife crime as the number of fatal stabbings in London this year rose to at least 35.

Israel's Labor Party announced a 'temporary suspension of all formal relations' with the British Labour Party, while its leader Jeremy Corbyn failed adequately to 'address the anti-Semitism in the Labour Party'; Mr Corbyn responded: 'I wish they would read Shami Chakrabarti's report.' A recording emerged of Barry Gardiner, a Labour front-bench spokesman, commenting on the party's six tests to be applied to the final Brexit deal in a Commons vote: 'Well let's just take one test — 'the exact same benefits' [as we now have in the single market and customs union]. Bollocks. Always has been bollocks and it remains it.' At the same event, Mr Gardiner had referred to 'the shibboleth of the Good Friday Agreement'.

Labour and Conservative councillors in Telford agreed to hold an immediate inquiry into current and historical child sexual abuse there. Prince Harry and Meghan Markle have not invited Theresa May or Jeremy Corbyn to their wedding in May, nor indeed President Donald Trump of America or his predecessor Barack Obama. Those who have been asked include Reuben Litherland, 14, who campaigns on behalf of deaf people and Pamela Anomneze, 52, from Haringey in north London, who works to help people with mental illness through art and crafts. Tesco reported annual profits of £1.3 billion. Eric Bristow the darts champion died of a heart attack aged 60.

Abroad

President Donald Trump of the United States cancelled an official visit to Latin America to respond to the death of dozens of people in a chemical attack at Douma in the Eastern Ghouta region, near Damascus. Medical sources reported the attack and distressing pictures of dead young children emerged. The Syrian government was blamed. Mr Trump telephoned President Emmanuel Macron of France. Theresa May later spoke to them both, separately, on the telephone. Mr Trump and Mrs May 'agreed not to allow the use of chemical weapons to continue', Washington said. Russia made threatening noises. Vice-President Mike Pence flew to Peru in Mr Trump's stead. In an air attack on the Syrian government's Tiyas airbase, known as T4, near Homs, 14 people were reported killed; Syria said Israel was responsible for the attack, with missiles fired from F15 jets in Lebanese airspace. At least six Palestinians were killed by Israeli snipers on the Gaza border in one day, bringing the total killed to at least 28 in the two weeks since the beginning of a Palestinian protest.

The government of Viktor Orban, prime minister of Hungary, was returned to office with the third landslide in a row, winning more than two thirds of the seats; the right-wing Jobbick party came second with 20 per cent of the vote. Carles Puigdemont, the former president of the Catalan parliament, was released on bail in Schleswig-Holstein after being arrested on a European Arrest Warrant issued by Spain. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the former President of Brazil, handed himself in to begin a 12-year sentence for corruption.

Mark Zuckerberg, the chief executive of Facebook, wearing a tie, testified before the US Senate commerce and judiciary committees. He was questioned on the use of private data. Strikes in Germany and France meant that Lufthansa had to cancel half its flights on one day and Air France a quarter. An aide to the President of Nigeria warned Nigerians to be careful in London since, she said, nine Nigerian youths had been killed in Britain this year. The Prince of Wales visited the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu, where he said: 'Vanuatu: you are number one.' CSH

DIARY

Bernard Cornwell

If you write a book, even a novel, about Shakespeare you must at least consider the theory that Will of Stratford was not the author of the plays. The arguments for that seem nonsensical to me, but they appeal to conspiracy theorists who, a couple of hundred years from now, will probably contend that Joanne Rowling could not possibly be the author of the *Harry Potter* books because she's not a recognised authority on owls. Some years ago an amateur troupe staged *Twelfth Night* in Charleston, South Carolina. A newspaper review next morning struck me as odd because, instead of discussing the performance, the critic wrote a brilliant essay on the authorship debate, but made no judgment on who did write the plays. The last line of the review read, 'but whoever it was, he turned over in his grave last night'. Splendid.

Ken Ludwig, in his marvellously funny play *Shakespeare in Hollywood,* advances another crackpot theory of Shakespearean scholarship. The play is loosely based around Max Reinhardt's famous film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which he directed in 1934 and has the delicious conceit that Oberon and Puck, magically transported from the wood near Athens, mistakenly arrive in Hollywood instead. Ten years ago I played Max Reinhardt in a summer-stock production in Massachusetts and dared not look the actress playing Lydia Lansing in the eye for fear of helpless laughter when she demonstrated her great Shakespearian discovery. Max had advised her to 'study the text', which she did and found that Shakespeare's lines said backwards makes as much sense as saying them forward. 'You can't tell the difference!'

That joke only works, of course, because people fear Shakespeare is impenetrable. A month ago we launched the US edition of *Fools and Mortals* at the Dock Street Theatre in Charleston. Eight wonderful actors came from New York and we performed excerpts from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as well as the backwards passage from *Shakespeare in Hollywood*. After the event a high school senior (think sixth form) asked if we had 'changed the words' to make

them understandable. We hadn't, 'but I really enjoyed it!' she said.

The Dock Street, built in 1736, is America's Globe Theatre because it was the first playhouse in the 13 colonies. Like the Globe, the original theatre was demolished but it has been rebuilt and is now a beautiful space. What pleased me most is the great royal coat of arms on the proscenium arch. Charleston is proud of its royal connections, reluctant to examine its slave-owning past and ambivalent about its responsibility for beginning the Civil War. A friend of mine likes to say the city 'has been on the wrong side of every argument for 300 years'. Until two years ago, that is, when Charleston did not vote for Trump.

Can fiction cure cancer? That might seem an irresponsible question, but I was heartened by a letter I received from a man who had been diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer. He spent what he thought would be his last days reading my Saxon novels and tells me that Uhtred's fighting anger suffused him and his cancer marker dropped from 2,700 to 32, and he is now cancer-free. I'm really not taking credit for this. Not much, anyway. The same mail brought me a letter from Hamilton County Jail in Indiana. The writer, banged up for four months, asked me to reply but specified that jail regulations insisted my letter be written on lined paper. Nor could I send him a book. He could receive a book from the publisher but if, say, it was sent by a bookshop or by the author it would be confiscated as 'contraband'. Lord, as Puck says, what fools these mortals be.

I've been acting in a summer-stock theatre for a decade now and I owe the drama business for the best advice I ever received. I was playing Firs in *The Cherry Orchard* and was alone, apparently dead, on the stage at the play's end. I wondered if I should hold my breath in an attempt to look corpse-like, but Terry Layman, who played George Washington in the film *The Patriot*, dismissed the question. 'When you're dead,' he told me, 'always keep breathing.' Wonderful advice. Alan Rust, our director, recalled playing Julius Caesar in a production that demanded his corpse be carried off the stage and up one of the aisles. As he was borne towards the lobby he heard someone whisper 'But he's breathing!' What, Alan wondered, did the man think he'd paid to see? But at least they still pay to see the plays of Shakespeare, who, 402 years in the grave, is still turning, if not breathing.

Fools and Mortals is published in paperback this week.

POLITICS | JAMES FORSYTH

A new world role for Britain

Britain's imperial past distorts the debate about our place in the world, but not in the way that is commonly assumed. It is often asserted that claims about this country's international importance are a form of nostalgia. It would be more accurate to say that Britain tends to underestimate its power because it is no longer the global hegemon.

Britain might not be, in *1066 and All That* terms, 'top nation' any more. On any objective reading, however, the United Kingdom is still an influential global player. It is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the sixth largest economy in the world, a nuclear weapons state, a member of the world's most powerful intelligence agreement and a cultural superpower.

When it comes to acting on the world stage, British prime ministers can be damned if they do and damned if they don't. If the UK joins the US in military action, it is dismissed as merely the Americans' spear carrier. If it sits it out — or, even worse, is not invited to participate — then this country is branded an irrelevance. It is striking how concerned the Foreign Office has been this week about the possibility of France and the United States responding to Syria's use of chemical weapons without Britain.

One of the questions that this country must begin to answer in the next few years is what its role in the world will be after Brexit. To many of those who backed Britain's entry into the European project in the first place, the idea was that Britain would maintain its relevance by becoming one of the leading nations in the European endeavour. The fatal flaw was that this country was never keen on the idea of 'ever closer union'. It clashed too strongly with the understanding of sovereignty that had developed here since 1532 and the Act in Restraint of Appeals to Rome.

The result was that Britain was in the European Union but not a participant in its most important project: the single currency. So it became impossible for Britain to lead, in the full sense of the word, in Europe. Roy Jenkins, the only Briton ever to have been president of the European Commission, was right when he said that there are only two coherent British attitudes to the European project: fully in or out. Indeed, Britain's departure from the EU became close to inevitable from the moment that this country decided it would never join the euro.

Even outside the EU, however, Britain will remain heavily involved in European security. It is an irony of Brexit that Britain has actually become more important to the continent's security since the referendum. The election of Donald Trump has raised real questions about America's commitment to Nato. Trump might be an outlier, especially in how he expresses himself, but the frustration he is voicing about the United States protecting countries that aren't prepared to spend even the Nato minimum of two per cent of their GDP on defence is by no means confined to him.

After Britain has left the EU, European Union nations will account for 72 per cent of Nato's membership but only 20 per cent of its military expenditure. This is not a sustainable position. EU states will have to raise their defence spending considerably over the coming years. But even if that happens, Britain will have an important role to play in Europe's defence against both Russian aggression and the Islamist terrorist threat.

If the UK joins the US in military action, it is dismissed as merely the Americans' spear carrier

Encouragingly, the UK and the EU do seem to be moving towards a sensible security partnership after Brexit. The EU's stronger than expected support for the UK over the Salisbury attack was a clear sign that it wants a close relationship on these matters after Brexit. No attempt was made to show the British that the decision to leave had affected the level of EU support for them over this incident.

Britain is one of the two major military powers in Europe and it has been reported that the other power, France, wants the European intervention force that it is developing to operate outside of EU structures. This would make it much easier for Britain to participate and be another demonstration of this country's continuing importance to European security.

The EU's need for unanimity on most foreign and security matters limits its effectiveness in dealing with various threats. Take Russia: the influence of Russian money in Cyprus means it is unlikely to sign up to genuinely tough action against Moscow. In Italy and Austria, politics is structurally quite pro-Russian. In Germany, the reliance on Russian gas complicates the country's attitude towards Moscow. It is to be hoped that the reservations Angela Merkel expressed this week about the proposed Nord Stream 2 pipeline mark the beginning of a broader rethink of this project: for Western Europe to increase its reliance on Russian gas at this moment would be an historic mistake.

There is an interesting question as to whether Britain will be able to play a role outside of the EU in pushing for tougher action against Russia. The response of the Russian stock market to the US freezing the assets of a handful of Kremlin-friendly oligarchs and various senior government officials shows how vulnerable Moscow is to targeted economic sanctions. But for Britain to do this, it would first have to decide to clamp down on the dubious Russian money that flows through the City of London.

After Brexit, there is not going to be just one answer to Britain's role in the world. Continuing participation in European security will be part of it, as will a close relationship with the United States. Britain should also be an advocate for free trade around the globe. Odd as it may sound, it may well make sense for this country to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership as part of its post-Brexit trade policy.

If Britain is to continue influencing world affairs, it will have to invest in the mechanisms that allow it do so. That will mean spending more on diplomacy and defence. Britain will be a more valuable defender of the international rules-based order and a better ally to both the EU and the US if it can project force far beyond its borders when necessary.

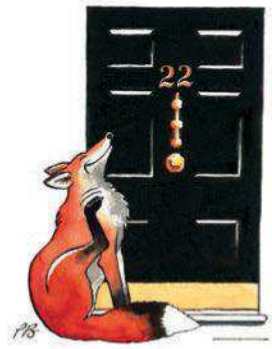
THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

The Good Friday Agreement (GFA), which celebrates its 20th anniversary this week, is not a peace, but a truce. This does not mean that it has no value. Most people in Northern Ireland wish to abide by its terms; it has helped them get on with normal life. But it does mean that difference, rather than being gradually dissolved, is institutionalised. You almost have to sign up to one side or the other. A friend sends me the diversity form of the Northern Ireland civil service which, as a candidate for the service, you must fill in. Unlike some such forms, it offers no 'prefer not to say' option. Each candidate must declare whether he or she has 'a Protestant community background' or a 'Roman Catholic' one or neither. This is done in the name of equal opportunities monitoring. But its effect is to define and manage Northern Ireland by its community division. The Agreement is, as the shadow trade secretary Barry Gardiner says, a 'shibboleth', in the exact sense of that word — a way of distinguishing between two sides. The aim is fairness, but the result is the same old struggle for mastery, which is why, after all this time, the cross-community government of the province has broken down for more than a year.

You can see this in the Brexit-related row over the border. In reality, the Good Friday Agreement has almost nothing to do with it, but it is passionately invoked by virtue-signallers (Hillary Clinton this week). There are three sorts of border between North and South — the migration border, provided for by the Common Travel Area which predates the EEC; the customs border, which was removed, eventually, by EEC membership; and the military border, which was a function of security needs and therefore lasted, to some extent, even after the GFA. Brexit raises only the issue of the customs border. Neither Britain nor the Republic wants such a border, so there will be one only if EU dogmatists insist that Brexit requires it.

Last month, Nikki Sievwright died. As Nikki Ross, she was a top model of the 1960s. In the 1970s, she



married David Sievwright, an officer in the 13th/18th Royal Hussars. When his regiment was posted to Northern Ireland, she enlisted in the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), the only British regiment permanently stationed in the province. According to her obituary in the *Times*, Private Nikki Sievwright was involved in an incident near the border in Co. Tyrone. Shots were fired as two cars approached a checkpoint. The UDR checked the bona fides of the cars' occupants and the commanding officer was about to let them through, but Private Sievwright was suspicious and insisted on searching the female passenger, as only female soldiers were permitted to do. She found the driver's passport in the woman's knickers, and thus discovered his real name, which was on the wanted list. Following her husband in military/diplomatic postings abroad, Nikki loved riding horses into wild places, but was banned from doing so by the British ambassador in Beirut, who said her beauty made her too conspicuous when intruding upon Hezbollah territory. There is excellent raw material here for a film, I feel, and if Nikki Sievwright had signed up for the Vietcong or the IRA, I am sure it would have been made by now. But of course Hollywood would not dream of glamorising a soldier in the UDR. Someone else should do it. It could be entitled *Greenfinch*, which is what women soldiers of the UDR (four of whom died on active service in the Troubles) were called. If the film uses — as it should — a feminist 'narrative arc', it should bear in mind the fact that the UDR was the first British regiment of which women were an integrated part. In their early days, the Greenfinches had to wear skirts and knee-length boots, which must have looked marvellously filmic with Mrs Sievwright inside them.

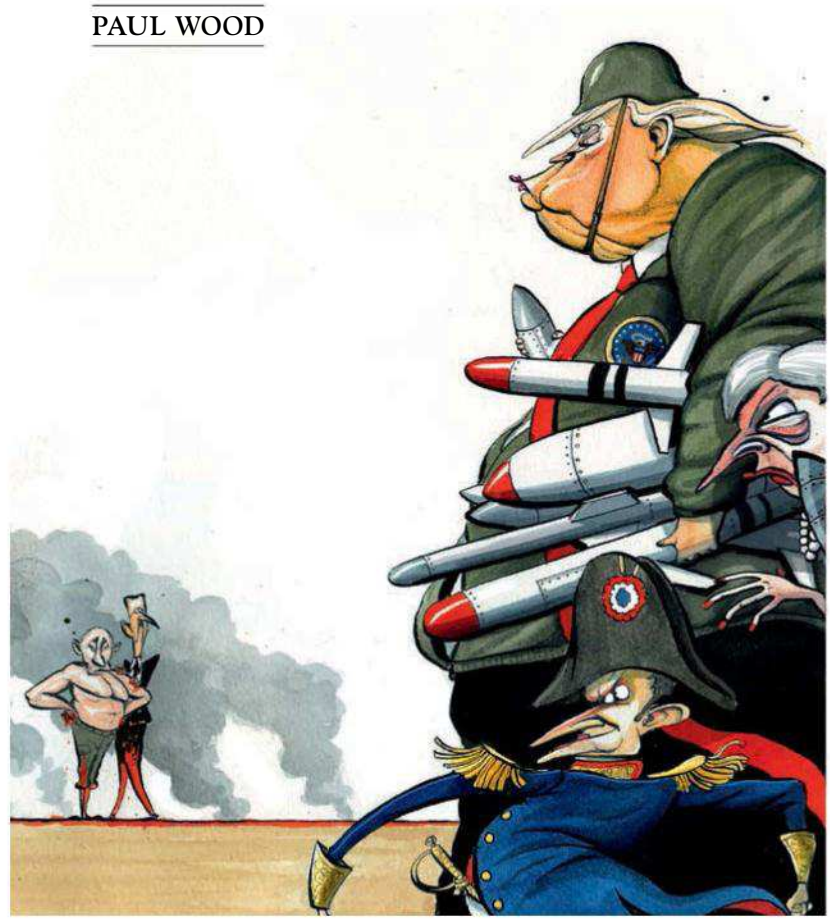
And here is another example of bravery in relation to Northern Ireland, but touchingly unfilmic. In 1989, Ian Stewart, the Northern Ireland Security Minister, was in a helicopter in the province which suddenly had to take evasive action because of terrorist threat. He fell off his seat and dislocated his pelvis. So correct about secrecy was he that he would not even tell his wife how this had happened. The doctors told him to rest on his back for six weeks, but he refused because he was steering a piece of contentious legislation through the Commons. He dismissed the injury as part of what he called 'the buggeration factor'. As a result, Stewart's health was permanently damaged and he had to leave the House in 1992, after which John Major thanked him nicely by making him Lord Stewartby. Ian died last month, but unfortunately neither I, nor his obituarists, knew this little story at the time.

In my researches for the final volume of my Thatcher biography, there is plenty, of course, about the Cold War, and its end. A constant bone of contention with the Russians was defection to the West. They were particularly furious about the MI6 exfiltration of the KGB man and British double agent Oleg Gordievsky in 1985. For several years afterwards, despite persistent personal pleas from Mrs Thatcher to Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union refused to allow his wife and small children to join him in Britain. The KGB persecuted her, and told her untruthfully that her husband had remarried. The family were not allowed out until 1991. But what is striking is that the underlying conversation about wider issues between London and Moscow was well sustained. There was friction, but no breakdown of trust. Thatcher and Gorbachev continued, in her famous phrase, to do business together, and help one another wind down the Cold War. The Skripal poisoning and its aftermath reveal that things are actually much worse today. There is no constructive relationship. The Putin regime has retained all the nastiness of the totalitarian era, but lost its policy discipline, and has even less respect for international rules.

Countdown to war?

Trump is talking tough but an air strike won't help Syria

PAUL WOOD



Beirut

'Gas!' Bodies piled up grotesquely in a stairwell. No sign of injuries. A father cradles two small children. Still, pale as ghosts. A doctor says the victims died suffocating, foaming at the mouth. One man declares: 'I could feel my lungs shutting down.' Babies getting hosed with water in a makeshift hospital. These words and images from the Syrian town of Douma filled the rolling news channels on Monday. They capture the peculiar terror and moral repugnance of chemical weapons … if it is true, as reported, that these weapons were used.

One viewer in particular was glued to cable news, as is his habit: Donald Trump. He quickly tweeted that 'Animal Assad' — the Syrian leader, Bashar al-Assad — would have a 'big price to pay' … 'SICK!' Later, his cabinet gathered around him, he was in full statesman mode: Commander-in-Chief, wartime President. As ever, it is worth quoting Trump at length when he speaks without a script. 'We are here to discuss Syria tonight. We're the greatest fighting force anywhere in the world. These gentlemen and ladies are incredible people. Incredible talent, and we're making a decision as to what we do with respect to the horrible attack that was made near Damascus … and it will be met forcefully … but we are developing the greatest force that we've ever had.'

Journalists at the cabinet photo-op weren't interested in Trump free-associating about the US military's 'incredible talent'. 'Did you have an affair with Stormy Daniels?' This wasn't as crass as it might have seemed. According to the *Washington Post*, Trump has been obsessively flicking between coverage of Syria and another breaking story: FBI raids on the offices of his personal lawyer, Michael Cohen. Cohen had paid off a porn actress, Stormy Daniels, who claims she had an affair with Trump. 'Why don't you just fire Mueller?' another reporter asked. Trump replied: 'Well, I think it's a disgrace, what's going on. We'll see what happens. But I think it's really a sad situation ... And many people have said you should fire him.'

This has fuelled speculation that Trump was moving so quickly on Syria to create the right moment to get rid of Robert Mueller, who leads the inquiry into whether Trump's election campaign conspired with Russia. Americans may be reminded of Bill Clinton's 'split screen presidency' when CNN literally had missiles arcing up through the night sky towards Iraq in one half of the picture while Clinton denied allegations about his sex life in the other. Now, one half of the split screen carries a bewildering succession of tabloid stories from Trump's reality TV presidency: Stormy Daniels versus Russia; half a dozen other women alongside Mueller, porn and poison gas, the war against the FBI and the war against Syria.

Some doctors at the scene have blamed chlorine gas; others Sarin nerve agent. Assad agreed to destroy all stockpiles of Sarin in 2013, when he was threatened with bombing by President Barack Obama. If the regime did use Sarin in the Douma attack, then Assad lied. Or, as a leading Republican hawk, Senator Lindsey Graham, put in on a Sunday morning talkshow when Syria's dictator was last accused of using Sarin a year ago: 'Here's what I think Assad's telling Trump … F you.'

Chlorine has many civilian uses and so was left out of the 2013 agreement, a crucial loophole. If this is what's behind the choking, suffocating deaths in Douma and, again, if the regime is responsible, this would be the biggest chlorine attack by government forces of Syria's civil war. The regime — and the Russians — deny it. They blame the Islamist rebels in Douma, saying that such a 'provocation' was being readied ever since it became clear the rebels were about to lose the town.

The question now is the same as that in 2013: why Assad would do the one thing most likely to bring about a US attack on his power. Perhaps this was done by a unit commander or local warlord? One recent visitor to the government side in Syria told me he was shown a document saying military units could deploy chemical shells only if the order came directly from the President. If that is true, Assad could be vulnerable to an international war crimes prosecution.

Yet it may be that the Syrian military dropped chlorine bombs in Douma because this is simply business as usual. Human-rights groups have produced credible reports of as many as 200 uses of chlorine gas by regime forces over the past few years. None as lethal as Douma, these passed with

little comment from President Trump's Twitter feed. Does anyone doubt that a regime busy torturing to death thousands of its citizens in prison is capable of killing civilians indiscriminately with chlorine? Certainly not Donald Trump.

The strike — if it comes — will be big. Last year, 59 missiles were fired at a single airfield. President Trump will have to do more than this, or he risks looking foolish. Last year, there had been a plan to hit all of the main Syrian airfields but I'm told this was blocked by the Secretary of Defense, Jim Mattis — a voice of caution in the administration despite being affectionately called 'Mad-dog' when he was a Marine Corps general. Something like this plan might be revived this time, with British and French involvement, too. But while missile strikes will make the cable-viewer-in-chief and others feel a little better after the harrowing images from Douma — cruise missiles as therapy — they are no substitute for an actual strategy. What will President Trump do the day after?

The big thing that has changed since 2013 — the first time the regime is alleged to have used chemical weapons — is that Assad has now almost completely routed the opposition. Douma, just outside the capital, Damascus, is almost the last place in rebel hands. Assad had given people there a choice: surrender or be put on buses to the distant northern province of Idlib. 'We are being ripped away from our roots,' said one opposition supporter in Douma, a doctor. He also thought that as long as Assad was in charge, no opposition supporter would be safe.

While missile strikes will make the cable-viewer-in-chief feel better, they are no substitute for a strategy

And will America stand in the way of an Assad restoration? Before winning the election, Trump was an isolationist. He campaigned against nation-building, regime change and costly foreign military adventures. In 2013, when Obama seemed about to bomb for the same reason as today — chemical weapons — Trump issued more than a dozen tweets telling him to 'stay out of Syria'. The capitals are Trump's: 'TO OUR VERY FOOLISH LEADER, DO NOT ATTACK SYRIA — IF YOU DO MANY VERY BAD THINGS WILL HAPPEN & FROM THAT FIGHT THE U.S. GETS NOTHING!'

As President, Trump initially seemed comfortable with Assad remaining: the regime was fighting Isis, after all. But he never announced that he was reversing the Obama policy. Then came the alleged Sarin attack last year and a US missile strike that no one would have guessed at, given everything Trump had said before. Did that mean regime change was once again US policy? Senator Graham asked that question of the US commander in the Middle East, General Joseph Votel. It was an astonishing exchange. 'I don't,' Votel replied hesitantly, 'I don't know that that's our particular policy at this particular point …' Graham then replied: 'Well, if you don't know, I doubt if anybody knows, because this is your job, to take care of this part of the world.'

Presumably, this is one of the urgent questions to be decided between Trump and his generals. Nicholas Heras, a Washington analyst with good links to the White House and the US military, said the new policy would probably be to 'break Assad's legs'. No one, it seems, tells the Donald 'F you.' Under this plan, Assad would be hobbled, as Saddam Hussein was hobbled after the 1991 Gulf war. 'Trump is developing a consensus within his cabinet on the way forward. You can't just do a one-off strike. It has to be strikes that cut deep at the security state of Bashar al-Assad — and which would make Russia feel the pain.'

Could one option be to introduce permanent no-fly zones in Syria where the regime's writ does not run, just as in northern Iraq from 1991 to 2003? But this might imply a long-term commitment of US troops, even nation building in those areas given over to the opposition. It was only last month that Trump said the US was pulling out of Syria 'very soon': 'Let the other people take care of it now.' Trump's base wants him to stick to that. The Fox News host Tucker Carlson said on his show that only 'Islamist crazies' would gain from bombing. 'Overthrowing Assad's regime would result in chaos, the genocide of Syria's Christian community and the deaths of American troops.'

Trump could face bigger problems than sniping from Fox. If the attacks are as big as expected, it may be difficult for the Russian forces, there supporting Assad, to get out of the way. Russia has warned it will shoot down American missiles. Trump tweeted in reply: 'Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and "smart"! You shouldn't be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!' The prospect of World War Three starting in Syria now seems less far-fetched than it once did.

Trump's attitude to Russia is another puzzle of the past few days. Not so long ago, he was strangely reluctant to criticise Vladimir Putin for anything. Now, he rushes to say that Russia's leader was personally responsible for Assad's 'crimes'. This was evidence that Trump was not a Russian agent, his supporters tweeted, 'collusion' with the Kremlin a hoax. Alternatively, it might be that Trump is an emotional man, driven by instinct as much as logic. 'It was a personal and visceral reaction to the images coming out of Douma,' said Heras. 'This has become a grievance against Assad and Putin. He said, "Don't do it again." It's personal now.'

But if it's personal, the reaction may last no longer than a news cycle. If Trump now responds with a huge strike, then walks away — a 'fire and forget' policy — then last week's attack will serve to demonstrate that Assad's position as Syria's dictator is now assured. The country would be carved up: the regime in Damascus, the rebels in a northern enclave. The rebels, anyway, are divided among themselves, fighting each other as much as the regime — there is no government in waiting for the US to support. It is a formula for perpetual war, no end to the fighting. Poor Syria. The only certainty is that many more civilians will be killed.

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST
Paul Wood and James Forsyth on Syrian war games.

As a boy I lit fires

As a boy, I lit fires;
threw stones at windows; broke glass;
I laid bricks end to end; hid in trees;
until dusk came, I was lookout.

Tonight I'm on watch, an old man
breaking glass, lighting a small fire.
Unseen in a tree-lined city,
I lay words end to end in straight lines.

—John Gohorry

'On second thoughts, I'll give porridge theft a miss.'

BAROMETER

Disapproving chorus

Derbyshire's Chief Constable told the all-male Derbyshire Constabulary Choir to sever all police ties unless it takes women. How strong is the male choir tradition?
— A directory compiled by the Cotswold Male Voice choir lists 238 active in England and one on the Costa Blanca. There are other police male choirs in Avon and Somerset, West Mids, South Yorks, the Met, Kent, Hants, Gloucs, Torbay and Durham.
— Cornwall has the most, with 39 male voice choirs. London and Brighton both have gay male voice choirs.
— The Welsh Association of male voice choirs lists 91 members, up from a founding 26 in the early 1960s. Northern Ireland's association lists 26 and the National Association of Choirs lists six in Scotland.

Travelling banned

The government said it would tackle illegal traveller sites after 4,000 caravans were found encamped in this way. How many travellers are there in Britain?
The 2011 census counted **58,000** people identifying as gypsy/travellers.
39% were under 20 compared with **24%** for the whole population.
8% were born in other EU nations.
64% identified as Christian.
60% had no formal qualifications.
47% were economically active against **63%** for the whole population.
Only **24%** lived in caravans, with **61%** occupying houses or bungalows.

Monet spinner

The National Gallery was criticised for charging £22 for an exhibition of Monet's work, although the rest of the gallery is free. How much do you have to pay for art?

Uffizi, Florence	**€20.75 (£18)**
New York Metropolitan	**$25 (£17.75)**
Louvre, Paris	**€15 (£13)**
Hermitage, St Petersburg	**$25 (£17.75)**
Museum del Prado, Madrid	**Free**

Lingua Franca

President Macron began a campaign to make French a world language — then used the phrase 'bottom up'. How big is his task?

	NATIVE PLUS 'LEVEL 2' SPEAKERS
English	**1.39bn**
Mandarin	**1.16bn**
Spanish	**661m**
Hindustani	**544m**
Arabian	**422m**
Malay	**281m**
Russian	**267m**
Bengali	**261m**
French	**229m**
Portuguese	**229m**

Source: SIL

En marche

The Trump-Macron bromance has stepped up a gear over Syria

FREDDY GRAY

Remember the never-ending handshake? It was 14 July 2017, Bastille Day, and Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump opened their formal relationship as leaders of their respective countries by interlocking palms and refusing to let go. They kept at it for a good 30 seconds. They didn't release even as Trump began kissing Macron's wife.

It looked like the beginnings of a bitter rivalry. But Trump and Macron weren't clashing. They were flirting. The night before, the two men — plus wives — had had an intimate dinner in the Eiffel Tower, and they bonded. A great bromance had been born.

For all his posturing, Macron treated the US President like an emperor in Paris. Later this month the Macrons are going to Washington, and Trump will return the favour by honouring them with his administration's first full state dinner. Macron and Trump now dance cheek-to-diplomatic-cheek, as George W. Bush and Tony Blair once did. Theresa May can only look on, wondering what might have been.

This week, President Trump — facing all sorts of domestic problems and a possible trade war with China — decided it might be handy to divert attention abroad and talk tough to the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad over the reported use of chemical weapons. So he called Macron, who is having his own difficulties on the home front, and they decided on a 'strong, joint response' against Assad.

The French president, who used to work for Rothschild bank, understands how to deal with billionaires. He knows that to keep 'em keen you have to treat 'em mean. The Bastille Day shake-off was in fact Trump's attempt to get even. A few weeks earlier, during a photo-op at a Nato summit in Brussels, Macron had gripped Trump's hand so tightly his knuckles turned white. He also ostentatiously blanked Trump on the blue Nato carpet, then boasted about how he had owned the President in a 'moment of truth'.

Then, after Trump withdrew from the Paris climate accords, Macron pulled a preposterous inverse-Trump move, calling a press conference and telling the cameras that his mission was to 'make ze planet great again.'

None of this hurt Trump — quite the reverse. It merely picqued his interest in that cocky young guy who runs that country called France. He flirted back at Macron by telling him, publicly, that his 65-year-old wife was 'in such good physical shape'. And while in public the two leaders played at hating each other, in private they formed a bond. Macron the globalist darling may have presented himself on his campaign trail as '*l'anti-Trump*', and Trump as the anti-globalist, but, *au fond*, they both worship power and money, and they have both realised that they need each other.

When Trump announced his intention to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Macron, reportedly after calls with the White House, decided to tell the Arab world to accept it. He dispatched his deputy national security adviser Aurélien Lechevallier to Ramallah to instruct the Palestinians as to the merits of Trump's Middle East vision. 'The plan might turn out to be bad but don't blow it up right now,' Lechevallier told them. Thanks, said the Palestinians.

Now, on Syria, Trump and Macron have agreed that something must be done. Both men have been influenced by Mohammad Bin Salman, crown prince of Saudi Arabia, who has been on a charm tour of Britain, America and France. Salman is understood to be desperate to stop Iran's expansionist ambitions, and Assad is allied to Tehran. This week Macron hosted the prince at another lavish dinner in the Louvre. He showed MBS around a new Delacroix exhibition in the museum: Delacroix, Macron's aides stressed in case the reporters didn't click, was 'known notably for the famous painting of Liberty Leading The People'. The one with the naked woman — boobs not burkas, get it?

What Macron appreciates as much as Trump is that in the internet age, leadership is performance art. In a way, perhaps, that means that America's special relationship with France in the 2010s is less dangerous than the UK-US alliance of the 2000s. Whereas Blair and Bush consummated their friendship with a full invasion of Iraq, the new Franco-US entente cordiale can thrive with just public declarations of support, and perhaps the odd missile hurled at a bad guy.

THE SPECTATOR

ECONOMIC DISRUPTOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS

In partnership with

Julius Bär

Julius Baer and the quest for innovation

Julius Baer and *The Spectator* are delighted to join forces in the search for the Economic Disruptor of the Year — a competition that will salute the UK's most innovative businesses and bring fascinating stories of market breakthrough to these pages.

Both partners in this enterprise have their own stories to tell too. *The Spectator* has been disrupting national debate since 1828; and the international private bank Julius Baer offers a pioneering history of financial entrepreneurship.

Julius Baer himself was born in Germany in 1857 and moved to Switzerland to become a partner in a banking house in Basel in 1886. Ten years later, he was offered partnership in a small Zurich bank headed by Ludwig Hirschhorn, a relation by marriage. In 1901 he became its only full partner, and gave it his name. In 1980, Julius Baer & Co became one of the first Swiss banks to list on the stock exchange, but it still maintains the family values of the business Julius created. His great-grandson, Raymond Baer, is honorary chairman today.

Julius Baer's original business was largely in foreign exchange but rapidly expanded into industrial finance — for Switzerland's fast-growing engineering and railway sectors, for example — and into wealth management for business owners. In modern times, the bank extended its reach around the world, including the milestone acquisition of Merrill Lynch's non-US wealth management business, which made it one of the largest wealth managers in Asia. Yet Julius Baer also remains a rare example of a tightly focused independent private bank and the core of the business remains the creation of bespoke solutions for private individuals, many from entrepreneurial backgrounds.

Martin Vander Weyer

Julius Baer's London office celebrates its 50th anniversary this year — and the bank has launched a radical expansion outside London, with hubs in Manchester, Leeds and Edinburgh. That signals strong beliefs both in the long-term potential of the UK wealth market and in the value to the economy of the high-growth businesses and their owners that are the bank's prime target clients. As Julius Baer International chief executive David Durlacher put it: 'We have a very strong vision and we have an instinctive sympathy with businesses that bring new and positive thinking to the UK marketplace. There's a lot of wealth creation happening across the whole of the UK — and we see Brexit providing additional opportunities. The current political landscape encourages businesses to think differently, to develop in ways that haven't happened in the past. The UK punches way above its weight in intellectual capital and creativity. That gives our entrepreneurs huge potential to be disruptive. And they're the people we're here to help.'

The Economic Disruptor Awards will enable both Julius Baer and *The Spectator* to engage with entrepreneurs, connect them with each other, and celebrate their successes. We're especially eager to identify businesses that, like Julius Baer, started local but aim to go global.

We're hoping to discover exciting ventures all over the UK. In the run-up to the National Awards ceremony in November, we'll publish a series of articles on 'The Lifecycle of An Entrepreneur'. If you've got a great story to tell us about your business, don't hesitate: the entry form for the awards is at www.spectator.co.uk/disruptor and the closing date is 1 May 2018.

www.spectator.co.uk/disruptor

Meeting the Mooch

Anthony Scaramucci on the method behind Trump's madness

FRASER NELSON

When Anthony Scaramucci announced that he was writing a book about his time with Donald Trump, the joke was that it should be entitled 'Ten Days That Shook the World'. This, he says, does him an injustice because he managed 11 days as White House communications director before being fired — after a lava flow of stories that seemed extraordinary even by Trumpian standards. But he remained loyal to the President, and has been speaking in his defence ever since. This book promises to reveal one of the deepest mysteries in American politics: how Trump's mind works.

'I'm almost done with the manuscript,' he says, fresh from a meeting with his publishers in New York. 'Obviously, my short stint in the White House won't be a major drama. The book will be about the President's personality. Almost like a disc-operating manual: how the President thinks, how he works, what he likes to do stylistically. About his negotiation style, trade policies, where he stands politically. And why he's going to continue to beat the pants off of his political adversaries who still haven't figured him out.'

Those who rail against Trump, he says, play straight into his hands: he loves to wind up his detractors so they lose their composure. He offers an example: a presidential tweet last week referring to costs being 'bourne' by the American taxpayer. 'There are actually people in the media who think he doesn't know how to spell the word "borne". They don't realise that he's trying to light their hair on fire, he's trying to incite them.' They rise to the bait every time, he says. 'When he says that "My button is bigger than your button and my button works", they don't appreciate the angle that he's approaching them from.'

He sees this as Trump's great gift, his superpower. The President is not a great reader, and is said to struggle with autocues. Others have speculated that he might suffer from undiagnosed dyslexia. But Scaramucci argues that, just as some blind or deaf people have a heightened sense of smell and touch, Trump has compensating powers over the spoken (or tweeted) word. That he can dominate the news agenda with a few outlandish phrases, allowing him to reach millions of Americans directly. And becoming, as the Mooch puts it in the title of his forthcoming book, 'the Blue-Collar President'.

Scaramucci is the archetypal Wall Street slicker: a 54-year-old millionaire with a taste for the high life — and the spotlight. When he was appointed White House communications director, he became a one-man fountain of headlines. On day two, his estranged wife gave birth to their son (it emerged that she had decided to divorce him a few weeks earlier). He vowed to purge anyone caught leaking ('I'm going to fire everybody'), yet the next day called a reporter to denounce his White House rivals in the most colourful terms. He thought it was off the record but it was written up with no expletive spared. His mistake, he tells me, was to speak candidly to a journalist whom he had regarded as a family friend. And to 'throw a couple of curse words in'.

'I saw this billionaire living in a glass tower who was somehow in direct touch with people I grew up with'

He is still deeply wary of journalists. We first met last autumn, and I've been pressing him for an interview ever since. I was interested not so much in his now familiar tales of mishap but his theories about what method lies behind the Trump madness, and the forces that took him to power.

His story starts with his father, a former crane operator in Long Island, who earned enough to give his family a comfortable upbringing. But this job, he calculates, now pays about a third less in real terms than it did back then. 'My parents were in the aspirational working class,' he says. 'Similarly situated people now feel like they're in the desperational working class.'

Only two candidates at the last US presidential election understood the depth of this despair, he says: Trump and Bernie Sanders. And only one of them made it to the ballot paper. 'I saw this billionaire living in a glass tower next to Tiffany's who was somehow in direct touch with people I grew up with. I thought it was fascinating,' he says. 'If I was to be critical of myself, I had been steeped in too many China World Economic Forums, hanging around in an echo chamber of confirmed biases. Talking to super-smart people, but after a while you start to disconnect from neighbourhoods like the one I grew up in.'

Almost all of Trump's rivals, he says, suffered from this disconnect. 'They were using a 35-year-old playbook of American politics. Homogenising their language, not paying close attention to what was actually going on in the middle of America.' And what was going on, he says, was the failure of an economic system — which had started to threaten the political order. 'If you look at world history, you see that democracy has been a fragile experiment. Pericles and the founders of Athenian democracy were trying to empower people only in order to prevent their revolt. Today we have these high ideals — say the words of Locke, J.S. Mill or Thomas Jefferson — but the political rights we talk about are founded on economic principles. When people are feeling economically desperate, they will call for change.' Trump, he says, is the vehicle of this change.

'You also have to understand that disposable income in the US is up. Businesses feel better, there's more buoyancy and optimism in the business community, there's greater job creation, you've got very low unemployment numbers,' he adds. 'Americans have classically and typically voted with their pocket books. So this is a guy that will be impossible to beat, I think, at the time of re-election.'

Trump's recent threat of tariffs on Chi-

nese products, he says, will also be good for the American worker. I ask how a Goldman Sachs banker and a believer in free markets can be comfortable with protectionism, and the notion of a trade war.

Scaramucci doesn't see it as a trade war. 'Long ago, the United States made a decision that goods and services would flow freely into our country if they were from the developing world, but we accepted higher levels of tariffs on goods flowing from us to them. So you had uneven trade deals, and we called it free trade,' he says.

'China entered the World Trade Organisation as a developing nation. Eighteen years later, I'd say China is a fairly developed nation. Its economy is the second largest in the world. All the President is saying is that this strategy, this imbalance, has had the effect of hollowing out the American middle and lower classes. It has definitely diminished wages in the US, and created a rust belt. We've lost 70,000 or 65,000 factories since the signing of Nafta, and so all the President is saying is that we need symmetry in these deals now. We need to protect the American worker.'

And it's working already, he says. 'President Xi last night agreed to reduce the tariffs on the auto imports. They have a 25 per cent tariff on our cars, we have a 2.5 per cent tariff on theirs. He has agreed to reduce his tariff.'

'She says, have you fixed the bathroom door yet?'

So he sees Trump as a man of trade peace. 'The move Xi made is indicative of that, because it sends a message that he's ready to abort a trade war. That would have never happened under Obama or under a new Clinton administration, so you have to give the guy some credit, right? And by the way, look at the negotiations on North Korea. I predict that there will be a very satisfactory outcome there as well.'

'The President made me as famous as Melania – and I didn't have to sleep with him'

What about Syria? Here, Scaramucci isn't quite so confident. In general, he says, Trump is disinclined to use the military. 'He may be abrupt in his negotiating style but he wants a diplomatic solution over everything else.'

I put to him that Bashar al-Assad might have carried out the chemical weapons attack on precisely this assumption, betting that Trump would fire a few missiles, then leave him alone to continue the slaughter. 'Yes, that's probably what he's thinking.' Is that a problem? He won't say. 'It's easy to be critical from a distance. But I'm way less critical of our public officials than I was 15 years ago,' he says. 'I now have more appreciation for what they're going through.'

Being sacked didn't affect his friendship with Trump, he says. 'I'm a big boy. I've been fired before. There are people that I have fired that I have wanted to keep a good relationship with.' And he sees certain upsides to the whole drama. 'The President made me as famous as Melania and Ivanka — and I didn't have to sleep with him or be his daughter. So it's all good.' And it will be even better once he completes the sale of SkyBridge Capital, the $11 billion hedge fund that he founded.

And would he go back to the White House for a second time? He'd never say never, but sees no possibility of his being asked. 'I think that I had a voice that could have really helped the President long-term. But *c'est la vie*.'

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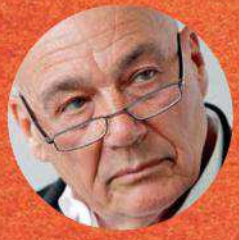

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THE SPECTATOR

Music and murder

A brutal form of rap is driving knife and gun deaths

HARRIET SERGEANT

A young man in a grey tracksuit and silver mask looks straight at the camera. He is flanked by others in black anoraks, heads jabbed sideways, moving to the beat. The young man raises his hand and curls it into the shape of a gun. 'Bang, bang, I made the street messy. Bang, bang and I don't feel sorry for his mum.'

Last year 80 people were stabbed to death in London, a quarter in their teens. Fifty have died already this year. The Met Commissioner, Cressida Dick, deployed 300 extra police at the weekend after six separate knife attacks last week, five of the victims being teenagers, one a 13-year-old boy.

Welcome to the world of UK drill rap — the music behind the explosion of teenage deaths on London's streets. This is the music that has turned murder into a money-making industry. Understand it and you understand why these children are dying.

A glance at drill videos on YouTube is revealing. Here are no dreams of beautiful women or exotic places. This is a world of shabby London streets, chicken takeaways and dirty stairwells. It centres on London's various gangs. They display weapons, talk about drug dealing, describe recent stabbings and issue threats to rivals. Their concerns are a bizarre combination of the homicidal and domestic: how to clean trainers soaked in blood or a kitchen knife with bleach. 'Blood on my skank, keep it, clean it, use hot water and bleach it,' one rapper instructs would-be assailants. Another video even describes stealing a knife from 'Mummy's kitchen'. It is a reminder that these lethal young men and their fans are teenagers still living at home. This is reinforced by their appearance. Everything in a drill video is designed to make boys look big and fierce, from the bulk of their jackets to the hoods pulled up over baseball caps. The unguarded glance of a 14-year-old gives the game away. Drillers are schoolboys and still in adult care — or they should be.

The first drill rapper, Chief Keef from Chicago's south side, was signed up to a multi-million-dollar deal at the age of 16. Lil Mouse, another drill star, was only 13 when he was discovered. Drill soon moved to London. The music and videos serve to unite a disparate group of boys into a gang, give them a beat they can march to, and provide visual imagery to incite young men to violence.

The lure of drill videos and the gang life they glorify is horribly understandable. Apart from the violence, there is little difference between joining a gang and a sports team. Both offer teenage boys what they crave: a challenging activity, competition with their peers that allows them to make friends, prove themselves and win validation from grown-up men. In the absence of an alternative, these teenage boys have created their own version of *Lord of the Flies*. Our inability to give them what they need to thrive within law-abiding society has consigned a generation to nihilism and bloodshed.

Gang members even keep a scoreboard of their triumphs, all publicised on video. 'If you are in a gang and one boy has stabbed two people and another's stabbed nobody, then there is peer pressure to go out and do it,' says Chris Preddie, a 24-year-old youth worker. Or as one gang member put it to Preddie: 'Man's on the score sheet. Pom, pom pom. Dip, dip, dip.' That boy is top of the table because he has stabbed six people. He does not even know if he has killed them or not. Chris Hobbs, a Met officer who served on the anti-guns Trident team, points out that there are 300-400 non-fatal stabbings a month in London — not all gang-related, but still a staggering score. Young boys are consumed by the closed world of drill videos, with their compelling links between social media and the estates or the streets where they or rival gangs live. They wake in the morning and look for new downloads from their favourite platforms on YouTube, Link Up TV, Press Play and GRM Daily. Then they open Snapchat for the latest on their favourite rappers. Who was caught slipping? Who was cheffed or skanked or rushed the night before? Gossip spreads fast with individuals or gangs gaining or losing credibility.

In the absence of an alternative, these teenage boys have created their own version of Lord of the Flies

The scene thrives on teenage volatility. A video of a rapper and his gang issuing a threat to a rival gang can be recorded on Monday, shot and edited by Wednesday, uploaded on Thursday and get more than 100,000 views by the weekend. It leads to an incident or a stabbing and that in turn gets a new rap.

For the fans and the participants, the music is powered by violence. Beneath one video, a fan comments: 'The beef between 150 (Angel Town gang) and 67 (Brixton Hill gang) is the reason drill music is what it is today.' Fans discuss whether north or south London produces the best rappers. 'South London for the music but beef wise, I think north, hands down.' Rather like sports fans, they demand confrontation and aggression from their idols. One fan looks forward to the summer. Several gang members are due to come out of jail and 'It will be fun to see how this beef continue,' he comments, as if at the prospect of a good cricket match.

Teenage rappers earn money from the amount of 'likes' their videos receive on YouTube. However it is hard for them to turn that into legitimate success and move on with their lives. Rappers only gain those all-important 'likes' as long as they play an active part in 'road' life. 'You can't just eat off this if you are not authentic,' explains one gangster to me. A rapper will attack another to prove his authenticity and up his likes. But duck a challenge and he loses respect, likes and his earnings. One rapper 'valid on the music ting' falls down because 'everyone thinks he's wet on the roads'.

To anyone with experience of teenage boys, this desire to excel is all too familiar. For my son, it was playing rugby. For the boy who showed me around Michaela Community School in Brent, it was learning by heart 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' — all 143 verses. What had prompted this, I asked. He was competing with his friends, he said, and the poem provided the greatest challenge. This 13-year-old is the son of migrants and from one of the poorest boroughs in London. His background and the urge to validate himself is identical to that of the gang members in drill videos. But his school has channelled that instinct to transform his life for the better. He has been saved from dying in a pool of blood by the side of the road. If it can be done with him, then why not others?

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST
Harriet Sergeant and ex-gang member Jermaine Lawlor on drill music.

– 45.6 (6.2), Extra Urban 47.9 (5.9) – 54.3 (5.2), Combined 39.2 (7.2) – 50.4 (5.6). CO_2 emissions 163 – 147g/km.

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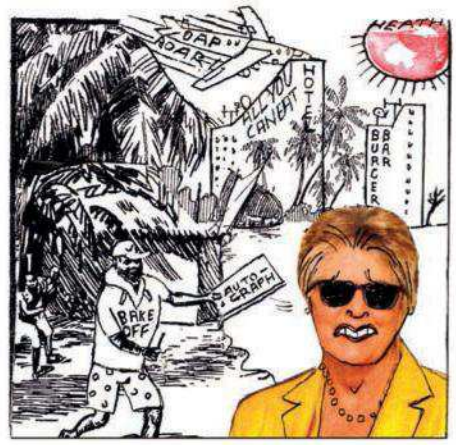
NOTEBOOK

Prue Leith

When Facebook and co stop selling on our details to third parties, will it be the end of spam? For half an hour every evening my otherwise chatty husband is lost to me as he deletes hundreds and hundreds of emails. My PA does the same, and so do I. The waste of time is criminal. But I doubt the spam will stop. If junk through the front-door mail box isn't illegal, I guess junk through a virtual mailbox can't be either. Grrr… Technology was supposed to save us time, remember? What a joke. It just frees you up to deal with more junk.

Desperate for sun and time for me to get the final rewrite of a cookbook and a novel done, we looked for somewhere as near culture-free as possible. If there were any museums, art galleries, ancient buildings or sights to see, hubby John would have been in there like a shot, with me tagging along for fear of missing something. Over the years the most culture-free places we've found are Sharm El Sheikh and Sint Maarten. Sharm was full of the sort of Brits who make you ashamed to belong to the same nation, and Sint Maarten is two flights and a long way away. Gambia looked like ticking all the boxes: perfect climate, white beaches, English the national language, no time change, only a six-hour direct flight, minimal crime and safe, so we booked.

Gambia is all of the above, but it surprised (not to say shocked) this couple of oldies. It's a kind of real-life Tinder dream for geriatrics. The beach was full of elderly white European women happily strolling along hand in hand with beautiful young Gambian men. And triumphant seventysomething white men living the dream, cocktails or beer glass in hand, lounging about with glamorous black girls on the double beach beds. If John or I walked alone on the beach, within seconds a charming if overeager 'beach bumster' of the opposite sex would tag along, offering to be a 'friend'.



There were some geriatrics who, like us, hadn't come in search of sex. Many had been going to the country for years and loved it. But those faithful returners mostly thought they wouldn't be doing so for much longer. Since British Airways stopped flying there, most of the tourists are on all-in holiday packages, and the hotels are going downmarket, attracting customers in search of the all-you-can-eat-three-times-a-day deal. Next door to our hotel was a mini-Magaluf, rammed solid with drunken young. We were in an old colonial sprawl with spacious gardens, big pool and loungers on the beach. In its heyday it had seven restaurants; now it has only one for breakfast, plus a pool café, and it is thinking of trapping its clientele with an all-in deal. Sad.

One of the joys of doing telly is being fussed over by hairdressers, make-up artists, wardrobe mistresses and style gurus. This morning I was asked what skincare products I preferred. Did she mean the E45 (£9.49 for half a litre) I slap all over my face, body, feet and hands? Or the bubbly stuff from Nivea (all-in-one face, hair and shower wash for men) at £1. Ever since, 30-odd years ago, Anita Roddick broke the beauty conspiracy to tell us vegetable fat was as good as a £300 pot of youth elixir, I've happily stayed away from the snake-oil merchants.

I used to be a hot theatre-goer but today I prefer 'live' cinema streaming. At least if the play's a washout it hasn't cost a fortune. Trip to London, taxis, tickets, dinner and a night in a hotel cost more than a mini-break in Istanbul. But we are risking it for *Hamilton*. Not till November, though: you have to book ten months in advance.

This winter has meant an unprecedented amount of mud brought in by the dogs and deposited on carpets and sofas. Our cavalier spaniel is the worst offender, partly because she can't resist a newly dug border or a muddy puddle, but also because she's low on the ground with feathery feet, tail and tum. Trying to catch her for a freezing douche from the outside tap had her sprinting for the drawing room, so we've connected the tap through the wall to the kitchen sink and set the temperature to warm. Now Tattie stands stock still for her shower. If she were a cat, she'd be purring.

MATTHEW PARRIS

I can never resist a trip to the rubbish dump

I was back at the tip on Sunday. I cannot help it. What art galleries or rock concerts or online porn are to some, Derbyshire County Council's dump at Rowsley is to me. I can't keep away. Any excuse will do, and on Sunday it was a bit of cardboard and a broken fan heater. Yes, yes, I know, they could have been saved up until there was enough rubbish to fill the bed of my old pick-up truck, but … well, the stuff was already in the back and I was driving down the A6 anyway and the pull as I came within the magnetic field of this state-of-the-art recycling centre was just too much to resist. An invisible hand nudged mine into an indicate-left tweak on the lever, and we peeled off down the service road, my rubbish and I.

The place was packed with addicts. The boot of the smart BMW in front of me opened to reveal nothing but four old flower pots, and the chap emerging from the driver's seat caught my gaze and looked guiltily away. We tipoholics recognise each other. The staff greet some of us by name.

My brain was buzzing with questions and doubts. Should I cut the plug off from the cable in case it was useful to someone? Ought I really to have removed the 13-amp fuse from the plug, for future use? Should I alert the always helpful staff to the fact that the heater was broken, lest some poor punter take it away to heat his home?

Did it matter that there were some leaflets jammed into the flattened cardboard box and that these technically should have gone into the container marked 'Paper' rather than up the ramp signposted 'Cardboard'? Did it matter (this was more serious) that one brochure was inside a padded envelope with plastic in its lining? I lingered there longer than I should have, turning all these enquiries over in my mind and wondering whether it would look silly to ask; finally I tore myself away and drove off. I'd had my fix for the weekend. I'll be back sooner than I swore to myself, though: such is the fixation.

We're very keen as a nation on 'harnessing energy'. Be it wind or woodchip or combined heat and power; be it the energies of charitable volunteers or the passion for collecting buried artefacts; be it the numbers and varieties of birds at our bird-feeders or butterflies on our flowerbeds … all these energies, human, intellectual or kinetic, are capable of being channelled in ways useful to mankind as well as absorbing to individuals. But there's one big human energy whose potential we're wasting, throwing to the winds. People are fascinated by rubbish.

Look at the recent surge of interest in plastic bags (in fact a relatively minor if unsightly contributor to environmental pollution that only Michael Gove has had the wit to spot and harness). There's a huge potential out there among the public, a curiosity, a nascent environmental consciousness, a willingness to engage and do more: and nobody — not our town halls, not our political class, not our media — seems to have recognised to what good effect we could turn what is probably our rather murky Freudian obsession with waste products.

Nobody seems to have recognised to what good effect we could turn our Freudian obsession with waste

Toss into any friendly human exchange — in pub, dining room or at kitchen table — some of our era's great unanswered questions about rubbish recycling, and watch the conversation light up.

Why in Derbyshire do we separate paper and cardboard from glass and metal and from plastic containers, while in Tower Hamlets in London where I have my flat, *all* recyclables go into the same bag?

What is the status of plastic bags and wrappings? Why doesn't Derbyshire council want me to put them with plastic bottles? Where do we stand on cardboard tubes with tin bottoms? And did you know that some recycling cycles start with a '2D or 3D?' separation — which is foxed by cardboard boxes you've failed to flatten?

Does waxed cardboard count as cardboard? Are glossy magazines pulpable with other paper? May we leave them in their plastic wrappers?

Does it matter that some containers or bottles have residues of food or sauce left within them? Or can these be burned off? Likewise old tins of paint? Should we try to wash them — in which case, how do we introduce into the green equation the energy used on hot water and the detergent sent down the drains?

In fact a whole pamphlet is needed on the subject of waste plastic, and I bet that if your local authority issued such advice it would be eagerly devoured by many householders. Can (a) plastic bottles; (b) cellophane; (c) discarded dolls; (d) Tupperware; (e) plastic tubs from your local Indian takeaway; (f) hard plastic bottle-tops; and (g) discarded items that may be a composite of some or all of these, be lumped together as 'plastic'? I'd honestly stay up late to read about this, and the reasoning behind the advice.

My brother was recently dismayed to watch the early stages of a recycling process and see all the recyclables, which had been carefully separated by householders into glass, metal, plastic, etc, tipped initially into one big container. He says they then use giant magnets, fierce wind machines and other clever detect-and-separate devices (and not, hopefully, Vietnamese children) further to subdivide types of recyclable. Are we then wasting our time trying to distinguish garbage from garbage?

This column has attempted a reasonably light treatment of the subject; but I'm serious. If we had good data on the amount of time the average householder spends per annum pondering these choices, and how much interest they and the logic behind them generate in ordinary conversation, then we'd see that in making rules to influence human behaviour, the state can run with rather than against the grain. Who at Westminster would relish the title Minister for Rubbish? But whoever took the job would fast find themselves mining a great seam of public curiosity and goodwill. Gove is on to something.

So much to do, so much time.

Bring back Girl Power

Why has a generation of women decided they're oppressed?

COSMO LANDESMAN

The recent news of a Spice Girls reunion will, I suspect, be greeted by some former fans with nostalgic longing and others with an embarrassed cringe. But whether you're a fan or foe, I think it's worth remembering that golden decade of Girl Power — the 1990s — when it was bliss to be young and female.

With our present preoccupation with the abuses of male power, we've forgotten about Girl Power. It was a fun-fuelled feminism for the mainstream; a materialistic and hedonistic celebration of female assertiveness, ambition and self-reliance. Girl Power was Thatcherism in sexy underwear.

OK, so maybe Girl Power didn't produce much in the way of great pop music or feminist polemics. But it gave young women the confidence to raise two fingers to female passivity and having to suffer the whims and wrongs of men. Girl Power said, 'Go ahead, demand what you want' ('what you really, really want', as the Spice Girls put it) and don't let any man get in your way.

Just compare the bold assertiveness of the Girl Power generation with the poor-me passivity of a group of contemporary women I call Generation Geisha. They are women who claim that their emotional, social, sexual and professional lives have been devoted to the service of men.

The Germaine Greer of Generation Geisha is the bestselling Italian novelist Elena Ferrante. Writing in the *Guardian*, Ferrante claims that all aspects of a woman's life have been 'codified in terms of male needs… We have to be women according to roles and modalities that make men happy'. Consequently, 'for the sake of peace and quiet, we suffocate ourselves'.

This servitude to men's sensitivity means that geisha women will endure a date with a man who bores them because they don't want to hurt his feelings and they will sleep with a man because he might be sensitive to sexual rejection. For Generation Geisha, a man's feelings always come first because women are made this way by male expectations. So the Generation Geisha women stay silent and keep smiling.

Or they did until very recently. #MeToo and Time's Up have emboldened these silent women to speak up, or so claims Nigella Lawson. She admits to having been groomed by her upbringing for geisha-hood. 'Women of my generation were always encouraged to make men feel good about themselves… we were always told we mustn't make a man feel bad about anything.'

I first heard the voice of Generation Geisha in that now-famous *New Yorker* short story by Kristen Roupenian called 'Cat Person', which went viral in December last year. Its protagonist is Margot, a white, 20-year-old college student who begins dating an older man called Robert. One evening they're on the brink of having sex, but Margot doesn't really want to do it with Robert for all sorts of reasons: he's too fat, he's a bad kisser and he's a bit boring. But she worries that he might think she's 'spoilt' and/or 'capricious' — so Margot goes through with it.

Girl Power was a hedonistic celebration of female assertiveness – Thatcherism in sexy underwear

The reason Roupenian's short story went viral — which was unheard of for a short story in the *New Yorker* — is that so many female readers had experienced that same Margot moment. They, too, had opted not to be mean to their very own version of the older fat guy who was a bad kisser, and regretted it the morning after.

Speaking as an older, former bad-kissing fat guy, I can't but help wonder: where the hell are all these silent, suffocating women who are so sensitive and caring about men's feelings that they'd rather shag than shun them? Over years of dating and dozens of one-night stands, I've never met one of these women; or at least I don't think I have.

Hmmm. Let me see. I don't think it was the woman who right in the middle of sex said to me, 'Please get off me. You're sweating too much and you smell of Gaviscon.' And I'm pretty certain it wasn't the drunk woman who told me, 'Cosmo, you're a really bad kisser', and as she walked away, turned and shouted, 'Oh, and your ex-wife Julie Burchill is a ten times better writer than you are.' (Cheers for that one, Debbie.) I could go on and on.

But I'm not complaining. On the contrary, I prefer the honest, upfront kick in the balls from a Girl Power kind of woman than the passive-aggressiveness of today's Geisha Generation, who just want to suffer in silence and stew in victimhood. A perfect example of this type is a young friend of Ferrante's, who the author says was so worried about upsetting men that she 'trained herself not to be too beautiful, too intelligent, too considerate, too independent, too generous, too aggressive, too nice'.

What decade is this woman from — the 1950s? If Ferrante is right about the servile male-centric lives of contemporary women, then we would have a divorce-free world full of Stepford Wives. Whatever happened to female agency and autonomy? For the past two decades we've heard constantly about female empowerment, so how is it that these women have ended up feeling so powerless?

The claims of Generation Geisha force us to ask the question: has feminism been a total failure? Ferrante says that 'after a century of feminism we can't fully be our selves'. That sounds like an admission of defeat. Maybe we really do need to bring back the Spice Girls after all.

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST
Cosmo Landesman and Ayesha Hazarika on Generation Geisha.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Our future queen

From The Spectator, 15 April 1943: Princess Elizabeth will be 17 next Wednesday, which means she is ceasing to be a child. Her life has so far, most rightly, been spent in her home rather than in the public eye, and her future subjects know little of her, apart from the admirable broadcast talk she gave three years ago, to the children of the Empire, at home and overseas, when she was only 14. Now that the Princess stands on the threshold of public life, they may feel some natural desire to know something of how she is being prepared for the high office that will one day be hers, and the Queen has shown a gracious readiness to make available such information as is relevant for that purpose.

LIONEL SHRIVER

Catastrophising is my idea of a good time

When, on a test of general knowledge, the highly educated score far worse than chimpanzees, university degrees may be overrated (definitely). But something more interesting may also be going on.

According to the newly released *Factfulness* by Hans Rosling, we would-be smart people would improve our results on multiple-choice questions about the current state of the world (16 per cent) if we picked the answers at random (33 per cent). We all seem to think that humanity is in the toilet, and swirling more deeply into the sewer by the day. We're wilfully blind to social progress. The more cheerful a host of indices look, the more belligerently we cling to the conviction that everything is getting worse.

Strictly speaking, I might score more highly than the average chimp on Rosling's 12-question quiz, because I'm technically aware that human history has become steadily less violent, extreme poverty has plummeted during my lifetime, education of girls is on the increase, and immunisation against the likes of polio has been so successful that until very recently the WHO was on the cusp of eliminating the disease from the planet. But temperamentally, I flunk.

I am a self-confessed catastrophiser. As a novelist, I'm a professional catastrophiser. According to the *New York Times Book Review*, Shriver is 'the Cassandra of American letters' — which sounds like quite a claim to fame, except that according to *Factfulness* that makes me an ignoramus.

When global literacy has soared and wars are dramatically on the decrease, it's baffling why people like me continue to lavish a staggering proportion of our mental, conversational, and literary energies on how bloody terrible everything is, and how terribly much terribler it's all bound to get.

Part of the trouble is present-ism. Myopically, we don't see modernity in context. Take two steps back, and barely yesterday we were hunching round a fire roasting voles on sticks.

On the other hand, subjectively, life is getting worse. That is, for individuals, every day that passes makes life remaining 24 hours shorter. The very structure of biological existence is apocalyptic, which may incline us to look for mirrors of our own horrifying mortality in the outside world. For all us pre-dead people, catastrophising is a form of projection. On a subconscious level, too, some of us bitter oldsters may actually fancy the prospect of taking everyone else with us when we go. The notion of all these blithe, carefree younger folks having a wonderful time without us is irritating.

My business is story, and story entails something crap happening. If everything is eternally sweet and good and nice — if life for everyone on earth just keeps getting better and better — I'm out of a job. (Try selling this plot to HarperCollins: 'Mary gets her vaccinations, eats well, graduates from primary school, lives in a democracy, has access to clean water and electricity, and buys a mobile phone.') More, given the persistence of an audience for fiction — and for most non-fiction, which these days is even doomier than the made-up stuff — novelists are clearly not the only ones who crave stories with crap happening. Crap happening is, if you will, a human need.

The thought that the end of the world is nigh is invigorating

The news cycle is equally dependent on crap happening, so that news junkies like me are continually having our bleakness bolstered. Amid the smorgasbord of awfulness to choose from, we focus on stories that arouse the most emotion. I'm not apt to zero in on a more effective treatment for hives, but rather on the 'trash vortex' of plastic in the Pacific that is three times the size of France — an image that sends me into an almost hallucinogenic high of masturbatory self-immiseration.

Most of us, too, have pet catastrophes —to which we grow attached, and which we are always looking to feed, like adopted puppies we hope to nourish into full-grown rottweilers. Some of us suffer from an avocational confirmation bias, and keep a lookout for verification that Syria is insoluble and getting worse as a hobby. Others have a professional investment in the problem with which their own field grapples being far more dreadful than any other field's darling difficulty. Researching my fourth novel *Game Control* during the African Aids crisis, I discovered that epidemiologists were convinced HIV would destroy the population of the continent. By contrast, demographers dismissed Aids mortality as a drop in the kicked bucket, and believed that Africans would overpopulate themselves into oblivion instead. Each group of scientists were in love with their adopted problem.

My pet problem is human population. I think those demographers were right. Because I'm so fiercely attached to my own version of the world — even more so than to the future prosperity of humanity, apparently — you should distrust anything I say about population. In kind, left-wing westerners are mightily attached to a gaping gulf between developed and developing countries that doesn't exactly exist anymore, the better for progressives to feel as guilty as possible, because, gloriously, it's all their fault. Tell them that poverty is on the wane, most of the world lives in a medium-income bracket, and the gap between rich and poor has narrowed, and they will get annoyed. They also won't believe you.

The idea that the end of the world is nigh is invigorating. A dark horizon makes the foreground more vivid, and life seems more precious when it's imperilled. Complacency about how delightfully matters are puttering along feels passive and soporific. For those of us addicted to shooting up gloom and collapsing in an ecstasy of inexorable Armageddon, optimism appears pallid, nay, repulsive — not an opiate, but a disgusting mug of warm milk.

However: catastrophising is an armchair pastime. It's fun. It's surprisingly comfortable; it goes well with wine and cheese. It's an active pleasure — the veritable antithesis of being broadsided by catastrophe itself. Hair-tearing and hanky-twisting about imminent disaster is an entertainment. The only danger of catastrophising, as opposed to catastrophe, is that we lull ourselves into the mistaken impression that we're prepared for the real thing.

Watched pots do boil

Even the Price Suits You!

Every dedicated suit-wearer knows that Hong Kong's master tailors have an enviable reputation for quality, efficiency and price. The only not-inconsiderable snag is that they are ordinarily in Hong Kong whereas most of us ordinarily are not. Seekers after the finest Hong Kong tailoring need not worry any longer. Mr Raja M Daswani, master craftsman and Hong Kong's finest and most respected bespoke tailor, Raja Fashions now travels to the United Kingdom every two months.

On each visit, Team Daswani takes over hotel suites in all of the United Kingdom's major cities, so any of us can make an appointment and get the full Hong Kong Monty practically without jet setting to the far-east. The measurements are done by Mr. Raja and his men here and mailed to Hong Kong along with a series of digital photos of you from every angle. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor, 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can then have it shipped by courier within four weeks if it is urgent-or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It is often said that British clothing chains 'have much to fear from Mr. Daswani.' His dedication to bespoke suiting borders on the fanatical. And both his company's quality and pricing are trulyshocking-in the pleasantest possible way for customers, if not for Mr. Daswani's competition over here.

We are talking £58 for a custom made shirt, £350 for a fully lined, made-to-measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £425 for 100 percent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from hand-made buttonholes to knee lining and double thickness pockets.

Even the most expensive possible Raja Daswani suit made in deluxe cashmere wool for £2,500 comes in at something like a third of the price of the Saville Row equivalent.

In other words, customers can now buy two bespoke, custom cut and hand-stitched suits, made from fine British or Italian cloth and measured by a master tailor for the price of one off-the-peg, chain store suit.

Indeed, making an appointment with Raja Daswani's team is almost the archetypal no-brainer. Why would any British lover of the classic suit NOT?

The Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology may well see the end of the traditional, i.e. cheap-looking off the peg chain store suit. It would be a fitting end to a too often ill-fitting icon.

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2 Bridge Street, B1 2JZ
Apr 20th-21st

BRIGHTON
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Kings Road, East Sussex, BN1 2FU
Apr 23rd-24th

BRISTOL
Bristol Marriott Hotel
2 Lower Castle Street, BS1 3AD
Apr 30th-May 1st

CAMBRIDGE
The Gonville Hotel
Gonville Place, CB1 1LY
Apr 16th-17th

CARDIFF
Hilton Cardiff Hotel
Kingsway Cardiff, CF10 3HH
May 2nd-3rd

CROYDON
Hilton Croydon Hotel
101 Waddon Way, CR9 4HH
Apr 15th-17th

DUBLIN
InterContinental Dublin
Simmonscourt Road, Dublin 4
May 5th-7th

EDINBURGH
The Principal Edinburgh
19-21 George Street, EH2 2PB
Apr 26th-27th

EXETER
Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel
Queen Street, EX4 3SP
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GLASGOW
Hilton Glasgow
1 William Street, G3 8HT
Apr 30th-May 1st

GUILDFORD
The Guildford Harbour Hotel
3 Alexandra Terrace, GU1 3DA
Apr 21st-22nd

HEATHROW
Sheraton Heathrow
Heathrow Airport Colnbrook Bypass
Apr 29th-30th

LEEDS
Hilton Leeds City
Neville Street, Leeds, LS1 4BX
May 2nd-3rd

LONDON
Hilton Paddington Hotel
146 Praed Street, W2 1EE
Apr 18th-22nd

LONDON
Novotel London Tower Bridge
10 Pepys Street, EC3N 2NR
Apr 23rd-25th

LONDON
The Park Tower Knightsbridge
101 Knightsbridge, SW1X 7RN
Apr 26th-29th

LONDON
Canary Riverside Plaza Hotel
46 Westferry Circus, E14 8RS
May 1st-2nd

LONDON
Hilton London Euston
17-18 Upper Woburn Pl, WC1H 0HT
May 3rd-6th

LONDON
Hilton London Tower Bridge
5 More London Place, SE1 2BY
May 7th-9th

LONDON
Hilton London Green Park
Half Moon St, Mayfair, W1J 7BN
May 10th-12th

MANCHESTER
Renaissance Manchester Hotel
Blackfriars Street, M3 2EQ
Apr 22nd-23rd

NEWCASTLE
Hilton Newcastle Gateshead
Bottle Bank, Gateshead, NE8 2AR
Apr 24th-25th

NORTHAMPTON
Northampton Marriott
Eagle Drive, NN4 7HW
Apr 18th-19th

NORWICH
Marriott Sprowston Manor Hotel
Wroxham Road, NR7 8RP
Apr 25th-26th

NOTTINGHAM
Hilton Nottingham Hotel
Milton Street, NG1 3PZ
Apr 27th-28th

OXFORD
Old Bank Hotel
92-94 High Street, OX1 4BA
May 10th-11th

READING
Penta Hotel
Oxford Road, RG1 7RH
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Holy snowflakes

Are young churchgoers smothering the C of E?

THEO HOBSON

As well as writing about religion, I have always been an amateur religious artist. Recently I've been getting a bit more serious about it, and have made a few art works for churches. I recently created one for a City of London church. The vicar, a friend, suggested it might appeal to youngish people somewhat at odds with conventional church (his church hosts such a group). I made a large fabric collage depicting an exorcism: Jesus casting out a demon. I said a few words at its unveiling, which seemed to go well.

But not everyone was happy. A few weeks later the vicar told me that the picture had been taken down, following a complaint. Well, my slapdash neo-primitive style is not for everyone, I conceded, a bit baffled. No, he said, this person felt very uncomfortable due to the anti-LGBT associations of exorcism. She thought that this was a community in which she could feel safe — and she had brought her girlfriend to a service hoping to show her how welcoming it was — and instead this slap in the face: an art work that seemingly celebrates the toxic practice of 'deliverance' used by anti-gay fundamentalists. The experience had so shaken and shocked her that she was losing sleep, she told someone else at the church, who passed on the information to the vicar.

I was expecting a few hurdles in my new side career of religious artist. But this was unexpected: to be accused of persecuting homosexuals, on account of having attempted to depict the theme of exorcism. Isn't exorcism in the Bible, I asked the vicar? Would she like Jesus's exorcisms to be snipped from the gospels? He agreed that her complaint was theologically shaky, but said that we are living in a rising climate of sensitivity, including in the churches.

I shouldn't have been too surprised. I encountered similar sensitivity in a previous attempt at a side career a few years ago: teaching Religious Education at a private school. The textbook contained Michelangelo's famous image of God creating Adam. I made a jokey reference to the childlike littleness of Adam's genitalia, despite his muscle-man physique. Big mistake. One of these 11- or 12-year-olds reported the comment to a parent who reported it to the head who hauled me in for a surreal conversation about the mentionability of Edenic pudenda. I bet science teachers are allowed to mention penises, I protested — why shouldn't humanities teachers, especially if the penis is actually depicted in the approved textbook?

So are holy snowflakes smothering the C of E? I consulted the vicar of a north London church who had worked at a cathedral, where his role included commissioning works of art. 'What I've noticed is that sensitivity has become more secular than religious — it used to be that people were nervous of doing or saying something sacrilegious; now they're more likely to worry about giving secular offence. And often they are not really offended themselves but are imagining other people's reactions; they are upset on others' behalf. So I sometimes have to persuade parishioners that something is not as problematic as they fear.'

A vicar of a central London parish told me that some of her parishioners are excessively worried that traditional Christian themes might seem illiberal. 'We were planning a series of Lent talks last year, and brainstorming for a theme. I thought "sin" would be pretty uncontroversial, but the most vocal members of the group were dead set against it. That's the image of religion we want to get away from, they said; it sounds so judgmental.' But faith is controversial. There's no getting away from it, and that's no bad thing. Anything worthwhile is and should be challenging.

Consider Christian art's most famous images. Adam and Eve is troubling on three grounds: their nakedness, which is simultaneously innocent and (in our fallen eyes) not; their stubborn heterosexuality; and Eve's alleged culpability for the human disaster. Then there's the Passion, with the crucifixion and related events. All that glorying in pain. The same applies to depictions of martyrs. Finally, images of victory: Christ or one of his stand-ins crushes Satan underfoot or lances a dragon or raises a victory banner (which bears an unfortunate resemblance to the England flag). We have already seen the umbrage people take when you persecute demons.

Instead of tiptoeing away from their tradition, Christians should embrace it. Neither faith nor creativity is compatible with running scared. The church should be a refuge but it can't be a safe space.

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Rome and the Jews

Jeremy Corbyn, it is said, does not have a racist bone in his body, and therefore cannot, by definition, be anti-Semitic ('Semitic' here referring to Jews, not Arabs). The Jewish community, however, begs to differ. Perhaps the problem is that Corbyn and Momentum take a Roman attitude towards the Jews.

If racism today relates to defining people as inferior simply because of some unalterable characteristic (e.g. heredity, colour), irrespective of evidence, the Romans, it has been argued, were 'proto-racist'. The reason is that, like the Greeks, they thought that the environment or heredity made a people what they were. One born in the frozen north, therefore, would automatically be stupid but hardy and brave, one born in the warm south, intelligent and cunning but cowardly, and so on.

But Romans did not in fact stereotype Jews in that way. It was the Jews' freely chosen way of life that got up Roman noses. The main charge against them was that they were obdurately antisocial, 'in revolt not only against the Romans but all humanity'. This was mainly down to the fact that while the ancients practised an all-embracing form of syncretism, Jews refused to worship any god but their own. Tacitus put this down to Moses, who introduced 'new religious practices quite opposed to all other religions'. Dietary laws, keeping the Sabbath, circumcision and so on were all part of this unsociable package; proselytes to Judaism became traitors to religion, country and family. So keep them out of Rome was the message. The point here is that while Romans had no time for the Jewish way of life, they did not regard them as irredeemably inferior. Let them give up that life and all would be well.

In modern technical terms, Roman attitudes to Jews were not racist but a form of 'ethnic prejudice'. The big question, then, becomes: do the Corbynistas believe that their attitudes, *mutatis mutandis*, towards the Jews are similar to those of the Romans? And if so, is that why they believe they are being rational, when others take a quite different view?

— *Peter Jones*

For the many not the few

Sir: As is clear from the last paragraph of your leading article (7 April), the ability of Tony Blair to rewrite history (or persuade others to do so) obviously remains undiminished, although it is surprising to find that your own publication succumbs so easily to his 'charms'. How many more times does the canard that he and the Labour party pioneered the use of the phrase 'for the many not the few' have to be refuted? In fact, it was one of your own former editors, the late and very sadly lamented Iain Macleod, who first used that phrase (and, of course, in a different context) at the Tory party conference on 9 October 1969. I have just listened to my recording of that speech again; I was moved and delighted when I first heard it, and it thrills me still. Imitation, of course, is the sincerest form of flattery, and it is understandable that Mr Corbyn and the socialists should seek to expropriate what they cannot ever hope to equal or achieve.
David J. Cox
Hove

May and the Met

Sir: You are right to mention the possible role of Theresa May in the latest rise in crime ('Criminal policies', 7 April). However, you could have gone further. I recall that during the riots of 2011 she refused to let Boris Johnson, the then mayor, use the water cannon he had purchased from Germany, even though water cannon has been used in Belfast (a UK city) in the past.

To add insult to injury she later mocked him about these in a speech. She also stopped him from appointing as Met Commissioner Bill Bratton, who had a very successful record as head of policing in New York — instead favouring Cressida Dick. I recall that Cressida Dick mentioned that 'diversity' was to be one of her priorities in her new role. Most of the public would prefer to see burglary, shoplifting and antisocial behaviour being given a much higher priority.
John R. McErlean
Elstow, Beds

Passionate confusion

Sir: Mary Wakefield's column on the deranged world of Virgin trains rang so many bells with me (7 April). I recently wrestled with a Virgin ticket machine that either could not or would not offer my destination (one single stop: Coventry to Leamington Spa — is that rocket science?). It feels like the world is run by people who want to make it as difficult as possible for the customer to make a simple transaction, while employing an army of marketing types who insist that every aspect of mundane life has to be 'passionate'.

Want to send or receive a parcel? Try using someone like DPD, who are so 'passionate' about 'customer care' and 'excellence' that people are left hanging around all day waiting for a nonexistent delivery. My personal bugbear, being unemployed and eagerly, nay passionately, looking for work, is to find that every job is 'an exciting opportunity'. For crying out loud, it's an accounts assistant position; I'm not trying to find a job with MI6!
Andrew Clayton
Burbage

Puerile Virgin

Sir: Reading Mary Wakefield's experiences on Virgin trains enforces my opinion that the whole rationale of the Branson business empire is based on a concept of commercial puerility. I first experienced this first-hand when sprayed with champagne by the man himself some 35 years ago at a wine bar opening, and then much later on a trans-Atlantic flight to a conference in the USA. Out of a clear blue sky the plane did a sudden dip before righting itself, and the pilot then announced that the stewardess (who earlier had been modelling a swimsuit) had sat on his lap. After that I never flew Virgin again.
Nigel Milliner
Truro, Cornwall

Funeral procession

Sir: Toby Young anticipates in his article this week (7 April) that the presence of a vicar or priest might have resulted in proceedings being suspended upon the death of a mourner at a funeral. My parents have oft-repeated a story which suggests the contrary. At a funeral some years ago in their village church in rural Yorkshire, one elderly mourner failed to arise from the kneeling position following the Lord's Prayer. It quickly became clear that this wasn't out of a greater religious conviction than his peers, but rather the result of a more permanent opportunity to engage with God. Following a brief discussion with the vicar, a couple of other mourners discreetly carried the deceased into the vestry and the service proceeded to its conclusion. The key beneficiary of the saga was the local undertaker, who was able to secure a 'return fare' for his hearse.
Tim Pick
Hertfordshire

'I need more space.'

Unmighty Khan

Sir: Andrew Gilligan is spot on when he decries Sadiq Khan as a lousy Mayor of London ('City slacker', 7 April). But to answer the 'why has no one noticed?' point, *Speccie* readers will remember that the original Blairite waffler Mr Blair himself was oddly popular for many years. Then, post-2005, his name became a by-word for all that is wrong with public life. Khan has been mayor for only 23 months, but already there is a £1 billion black hole in the transport budget, a failure to build homes, and a murder rate higher than New York's. Londoners are starting to notice.
Tony Devenish
London Assembly Member, City Hall, London SE1

Marvellous Budgie

Sir: I yield to no man in my enthusiasm for Rod Liddle's contributions and I cannot remember the last time I disagreed with him. However, in his judgment of the 1970s rockers Budgie ('shit') I feel he has missed the mark (Arts, 31 March). He should reacquaint himself with their oeuvre and particularly the song 'Breadfan', which starts out raucously and then is leavened with an enchanting lyrical quiet passage in the middle highlighting Burke Shelley's unusual vocals. It's marvellous.
Richard Clayton
Edinburgh

Not on Skye

Sir: Lest any tourists to Scotland be disappointed, may I point out that Eilean Donan Castle is not on Skye (Books, 7 April)? It stands beside the road to Skye but is not on the island itself.
Wilson Flood
Dumfries

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

The US shows London how to cold-shoulder Putin's cronies

A decade ago I commissioned an article about Vladimir Putin's business cronies. Among other lines of enquiry, it sought to finger 'a coterie of wealthy and politically influential industrialists, many believed to be former or current secret service officials' who allegedly had shareholdings in Russian companies which, if we or anyone else had been able to prove that they were controlled by the president, might have evidenced a personal Putin fortune of tens of billions. Sensibly, *The Spectator*'s lawyer would not let me publish — but the US Treasury has now done its own version of the job by imposing sanctions on seven oligarchs and 17 senior Russian officials who are believed to form the innermost presidential clique.

The Who's Who of Kremlin favourites has changed many times over the years, but it's gratifying to note that one of those seven oligarchs also featured large in our unpublished exposé: he is Vladimir Bogdanov, a Putin chum since early St Petersburg days and president of Surgutneftegaz, the Siberia-headquartered oil company which keeps huge reserves of cash and whose ownership has long been shrouded in mystery. Then there's Igor Rotenberg, son and heir to Putin's boyhood judo partner Arkady Rotenberg — who I once congratulated here for winning multiple construction contracts, worth more than $7 billion, at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

And of course, most prominently, there's our old sparring partner Oleg Deripaska, the prince of Russian aluminium. When he listed his master company Rusal in Hong Kong in 2010, I observed that it 'set a new benchmark for just how risk-laden a stock can be and still gain access to public markets' and that the only analytical tool with which to address such an impenetrable offering 'must surely be a very long bargepole'. When he listed his new master company EN+ (by now the majority owner of Rusal) on the London Stock Exchange last November, I suggested that 'the City shouldn't be doing business with anyone so close to Putin's Kremlin', particularly when the £1 billion proceeds of the float were flowing back as debt repayments to Russian banks that were already subject to US and EU sanctions following Russian aggression against Ukraine. I gather MI6 made the same point, but to no avail.

Since the new US sanctions were announced, Rusal and EN+ shares have plunged and Deripaska's personal worth is down by a couple of billion — while a legion of bankers and PR men who collected fat fees from him have presumably been shredding their files. What's striking about this story is not that the US authorities are finally closing in on Putin's circle, but that the entire oligarch class, whose concentration of unmerited economic power represents such a stain on capitalism and such a blight on their own homeland, should have been allowed to swagger abroad for so long. London — City and West End, as it were, in all their aspects — has a lot to answer for.

Sorrell vs Branson

If you were asked to list entrepreneur-led British businesses of the current generation that have achieved global impact, you might name Virgin and the advertising giant WPP but I suspect you'd struggle to come up with a third or a fourth. And you'd have to admit that Virgin is actually a brand rather than a business, a nebulous thing that has been attached over the years to everything from aircraft and trains to record shops, cola tins and wedding dresses in a web of ventures whose only commonality is the marketing genius of Sir Richard Branson.

WPP, on the other hand, isn't even an abbreviation — having long since ceased to stand for Wire & Plastic Products, the listed shell company on which it was founded. But it is a vast conglomerate with a market capitalisation of £15 billion and a portfolio of famous agencies, including J. Walter Thompson and Ogilvy & Mather, that make it a world leader of its industry. And it is wholly the creation of 73-year-old Sir Martin Sorrell, the tireless London-born dealmaker who has driven its growth ever since he resigned as finance director of Saatchi & Saatchi to strike out on his own in 1985.

That gives Sorrell a special niche in the pantheon of British corporate chiefs. And any journalist who has had dealings with both him and Branson (as I have) will tell you that whereas Virgin's bearded guru is remote, heavily guarded and strangely difficult to talk to, the WPP tycoon is instantly (indeed almost uniquely) accessible by email and mobile phone. So we have tended, over the years, to give him a positive press, even in relation to an annual pay package that peaked in 2015 at £70 million — and we're watching now with curiosity as he faces allegations of 'personal misconduct', reported to concern supposed improper use of company funds.

WPP's board has instructed lawyers to investigate the allegations, which Sorrell 'unreservedly' denies, and no more can be said on the subject for now. Except perhaps that the relentless money-making instinct of a Sorrell or a Branson is always likely to fuel expectations of a fall. But whereas Branson (after Virgin Music's unhappy but brief encounter with the stock market in the 1980s) has kept his business and his fortune entirely private, Sorrell still operates as the salaried chief executive of a FTSE100 company of which he owns just 2 per cent and whose shares have fallen almost 40 per cent since early 2017. After 32 years in the saddle, and for all his remarkable achievements, that's a very exposed position.

Airport chaos

Spring is here, or it was for a couple of days, and with the daffodil blooms came a clutch of airport stories. Gatwick's runway closed because the sole air traffic controller on duty was entitled to a two-hour break. Stansted arrival and baggage delays afflicted thousands of angry passengers. And at Bristol, a meet-and-greet parking service was caught dumping cars in fields and lay-bys. At last, the holiday season is in sight!

BOOKS

Man of mystery

Leonardo da Vinci has suffered more than most artists from fake history and misinterpretation. But it doesn't make him any less fascinating, says *Martin Gayford*

Living with Leonardo: Fifty Years of Sanity and Insanity in the Art World and Beyond
by Martin Kemp
Thames & Hudson, £19.95, pp. 320

Leonardo: A Restless Genius
by Antonio Forcellino, translated from the Italian by Lucinda Byatt
Polity, £25, pp. 336

'If you look at walls soiled with a variety of stains or at stones with variegated patterns,' Leonardo da Vinci advised fellow painters, 'you will therein be able to see a resemblance to various landscapes graced with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, great valleys and hills in many combinations.' By an irony of history, Leonardo (1452–1519) has come to resemble that stained wall: a Rorschach blot in which viewers discern phantoms of their own imagination.

This is, of course, to some extent the fate of all celebrities, and Leonardo was the first true artist celeb — the forerunner of a long line descending through his younger contemporaries Michelangelo and Raphael down to Picasso, Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst.

The same is true of his works: they too have attained superstar status. Last year, the recently rediscovered and attributed panel of the 'Salvator Mundi' was auctioned at Christie's in New York. The bidding rose from under $100 million to $450 million, making it by a huge margin the most expensive work of art ever sold. And this picture — damaged, heavily restored and unattractively weird to begin with — is not even a very good Leonardo. It has, however, those extra ingredients — enigma, mystery, the sense that there is more to discover — which always boost fame.

Professor Martin Kemp has spent half a century immersed in the mysteries of Leonardo. He has organised exhibitions of his works, written a shelf of books about him, and presided over the construction of a human-powered flying machine and parachute according to the Florentine master's sketches (both successfully tested by brave volunteers).

In *Living with Leonardo*, he has come up with an unusual combination. It is partly a series of essays on Leonardo-esque themes, which sounds conventional enough, but also a memoir of his own adventures with the artist — sometimes exciting, sometimes bruising.

After so much time spent in the 'sanity and insanity' of the Da Vinci business, Kemp has in turn affected how we think about Leonardo — as he did in the case of the 'Madonna of the Yarnwinder'. Received wisdom presumes that there can only be one version of a picture by a master, any others being 'workshop'. But Kemp convincingly argued that there were two equally authentic 'Madonnas'. Parts of each were by Leonardo himself, other sections by his assistants. This conclusion tells us that even when working on a rather bread-and-butter little picture such as this, he was constantly trying out fresh ideas. But in the end someone else had to tidy the thing up and make it saleable. Leonardo was the first to have that characteristically modern worry: how do you finish a painting? For him there was always another way of designing the composition and yet more information to discover about the objects he was depicting.

The background of the 'Mona Lisa' is seen to contain cryptic hints about extraterrestrial beings

Another of Kemp's ventures into the minefield of attribution had more mixed success. In 2010 he published a book attributing a coloured drawing on vellum, dubbed 'La Bella Principessa', to the great man. This suggestion received a raucous drubbing from a chorus of art world connoisseurs. Evidently Kemp still feels battered by the experience and returns to the question here — stoutly making the case for this portrait.

The episode leads him into reflections on the question of how attributions are made. This is, to be sure, a mysterious matter in which subjective judgment by eye, groupthink and scholarly rivalries play a part, as well as 'scientific' evidence. But this discussion still takes place in the rational world; some readers will find the insanity of the Leonardo business more entertaining.

In a chapter entitled 'Codes and Codswallop', Kemp relates how the master and his works have become a happy hunting ground for eccentrics and conspiracy theorists. In this respect, among the great artists of the past only Van Gogh comes close — and then only when it comes to the question of how and why he might have amputated his ear. With Leonardo, improbable speculations are abundant and never-ending.

In Dan Brown's bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* — and the inevitable film of the book — he is revealed as the 12th Master of the Priory of Zion (others allegedly included Isaac Newton and Claude Debussy). This society apparently preserved the secret that Jesus Christ was married to Mary Magdalene and their descendents became the kings of France. Leonardo, it is claimed, left clues to this in his work. Thus St John the Apostle in 'The Last Supper' — less hirsute and masculine than the other disciples — is the Magdalene hiding in plain sight. (In fact, in Renaissance Italian art St John is often portrayed as youthful and a little girlish.)

These days, fake history has spread far beyond the realms of popular fiction. Others believe Leonardo was 'supercharged' by invaders from outer space and filled the background of the 'Mona Lisa' with cryptic hints regarding these extraterrestrial beings and their influence on the Catholic Church. An alternative theory holds that

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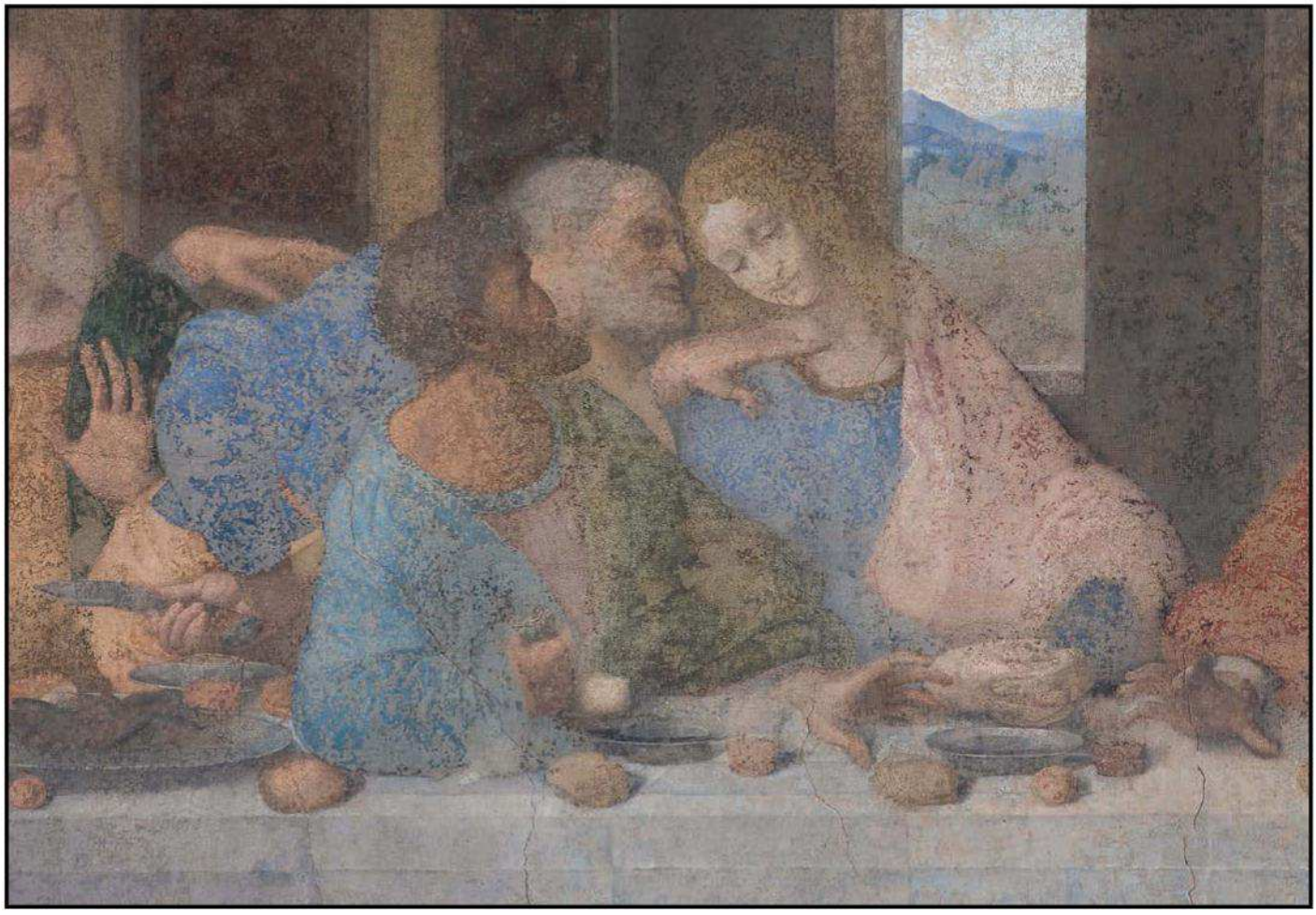

With Leonardo, improbable speculations are never-ending, The Da Vinci Code *enthusiasts see the figure of St John (on the right in this detail of 'The Last Supper') as Mary Magdalene, hiding in plain sight*

the same landscape is filled with 40 separate symbols from the Book of Zechariah prophesying Christ's Second Coming.

Admittedly, the scenery behind the 'Mona Lisa' — at once specific and ethereally vague — seems to invite interpretation. Numerous attempts, none successful, have been made to locate a real terrain Leonardo was depicting. It's the same with the man himself. You get so far in identifying the features of his personality, then certainties dissolve into mist.

A vast quantity of Leonardo's notes and manuscripts survives, filled with his thoughts on such themes as the motion of water and human anatomy. But there are no intimate letters; there is no emotional self-revelation. The question of his parentage is typical. Leonardo was illegitimate. Of his mother, Caterina, almost nothing is known; his father, Piero, was a prominent lawyer who later married several times and had legitimate heirs.

Sigmund Freud once produced a posthumous diagnosis of Leonardo on the basis of a dream. In his notes, the artist describes dreaming while in his cradle: a great bird swooped down and 'struck me many times with its tail within my lips'. Freud argued that this was a fantasy about fellatio and proposed that the species — a vulture — meant that Leonardo's homosexuality was connected with his love for his mother, the vulture being an ancient Egyptian symbol for maternity. Unfortunately, the German text Freud used mistranslated the bird: in fact, Leonardo had dreamt of a kite.

In *Leonardo: A Restless Genius*, Antonio Forcellino seizes on this to suggest that the dream was connected with his father. Leonardo noted that when the kite, 'sees its offspring grow too fat in the nest, it pecks at their sides and keeps them without food'. Of course, it may be, as Forcellino argues, that the artist had a 'very difficult' relationship with his father. But all Leonardo recorded about Piero was a terse note of his death. In contrast, Michelangelo — Leonardo's great rival and temperamental opposite — left a pile of documents recording paternal and filial love, rage, mutual recrimination and, in one instance, a fist fight between himself and his own father, Lodovico.

Forcellino — a well-known restorer as well as the author of lives of Raphael and Michelangelo — is on firmer ground when analysing the techniques Leonardo used on his few surviving paintings. His section on the unfinished 'Adoration of the Magi' (1480–1) is revealing in much the same way as Kemp's is on the 'Madonna of the Yarnwinder'. Forcellino describes the astonishingly laborious process of gestation the painting had undergone before the artist abandoned it. In the time it took Leonardo to get this single picture to a stage of monochrome underpainting, another painter would have completed several such altarpieces.

Much later, when commissioned to paint a picture by Pope Leo X, Leonardo began by distilling varnishes to put on the completed oil. 'Oh dear,' the Pope exclaimed, according to the 16th-century artist and historian Vasari, 'this man will never do anything. Here he is thinking about finishing the work before he even starts it!' But then, it was just this tendency to stray from the immediate task into a labyrinth of endless possibilities that makes Leonardo so fascinating.

The changing face of battle

Daniel Swift

On War and Writing
by Samuel Hynes
University of Chicago Press, £17, pp. 206

On War and Writing by Samuel Hynes is hardly about war at all. There is little about combat here, or the actual business of fighting and killing — what Shakespeare wryly called 'the fire-eyed maid of smoky war/ All hot and bleeding'. Hynes is an august scholar of English literature and particularly the literature of 20th-century warfare. But he also served as a bomber pilot in the Pacific during the second world war, and has written an engaging, plain-spoken memoir of his service called *Flights of Passage*, published in 1988. His two vocations, he explains in the introduction to his new book, are 'professor' and 'pilot', and here the professor not the pilot is at the controls.

This is a collection of essays and reviews, including a short account of his experiences working as an adviser for a TV series about the second world war, and some criticism of the war poetry of Thomas Hardy, W.B. Yeats and others. It is possible to trace a single line of thinking through these varied contents. There are two connected parts to this.

The first is that men dream of fighting the wars before the one they find themselves in. There is a little nostalgia in the hearts of soldiers, and all who look upon them, and this longing for an ideal past most clearly dominates our understanding of the second world war. 'When you think of the scale of our war, and the absolute moral clarity we saw in it,' writes Hynes, 'it was inevitable that the next generation should imagine it as an epic struggle like the Trojan War.' In America they still think of it as 'the good war', while few in Britain are immune to the lure of a Winston Churchill biopic; and Hynes suggests that there is something sentimental in even the preparation for modern war. As he recalls: 'When I was commissioned as a Marine pilot in 1944 and went to draw my flight gear, I was handed a long white silk scarf,' as if he were being dressed for glorious battle.

The second part of this idea is that, as Hynes puts it, 'the more modern the war the more remote it has become'. As a bomber pilot, Hynes may have been wearing a white silk scarf, but he was also participating in a revolution in the technologies and strategy of warfare. Since the second world war, combat has been carried out by Western powers at an increasing distance from what the military historian John Keegan called 'the face of battle'. Modern western warfare depends upon bombs dropped from unmanned planes, or drones, and this remoteness in turn entails an increasing sense that war is abstract, and to be passively endured. We see this in a change in the meaning of heroism. The Medal of Honor is awarded to American servicemen who have distinguished themselves with extreme valour. Hynes compares the citations for the medals awarded during the first world war and the Vietnam war, and argues that soldiers in the latter war displayed what he calls 'victim courage': this is bravery, for sure, but a bravery which assumes that death is inevitable instead of inconceivable.

Hynes is a brilliant critic, both of the literature of war and its myths. In this, the writer he most resembles is Paul Fussell, who fought in the second world war and wrote the best book about the first, *The Great War and Modern Memory,* published in 1975. Like Fussell, Hynes has a soldier's familiarity with war combined with a literary scholar's sensitivity to the patterns of stories. He suggests that poets have always been drawn to war because: 'War enacts the great antagonisms of history, the agonies of nations; but it also offers metaphors for those other antagonisms, the private battles of our private lives.' Beneath Hynes's many local insights there is a constant story, of the peculiar and shifting shape of modern wars, for war has become increasingly metaphorical: we speak of the 'war on terror' and 'culture wars'. So when Hynes is discussing poetry, he's also — and most interestingly — describing the quality of modern war.

Bombs dropped from drones have made modern warfare abstract, something to be passively endured

One resonant example from Hynes's book suggests the similarity between literature and modern war. When Yeats writes in his poetry about war, Hynes notes, these poems are 'not about war in a narrative sense: there are no battles. Nor in an epic or romantic sense, either: there are no heroes, no victories, no brave deaths.'

Hynes may as well be describing last night's news or the front pages of tomorrow's newspapers. We live in an age in which war has loosened its strict shape, has shrugged off its uniform: an age of messy, non-narrative wars, of sieges and drone strikes, of wars fought at a distance and without soldiers. Perhaps all modern warfare is a style of psychological warfare — war conducted in the head, in the stories and the fears of civilians — and this is also, perhaps, precisely why the guides we need are professors as well as pilots, or those who know both war and its many myths.

'Now run along and remember — no inappropriate sniffing.'

Voyeur or visionary?

Dennis Zhou

On Henry Miller: Or, How to Be an Anarchist
by John Burnside
Princeton, £18.95, pp. 208

Few writers seem less deserving of resuscitation than Henry Miller. When the Scottish poet and novelist John Burnside was asked to contribute the latest volume of Princeton's 'Writers on Writers' series, he planned to choose Marianne Moore, a clearer influence on his poetry. Miller was too messy. A non-conformist and autodidact, his most famous novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, opened the door to literary obscenity, and also gave him the reputation of a pornographer. Burnside admits that he wrote the book less from a conscious decision than 'out of need'.

To his credit, he does not skirt Miller's notoriety, nor does he deny that much of his subject's erotic writing is 'embarrassing'. He does, however, announce that he will focus not on the 'sex maverick', but introduce in due course the 'unhappy son', the 'dignified old man', and most importantly, the '*voyant*'. To appreciate Miller is not to read him selectively but to understand why a writer who championed self-liberation could have made the mistake of equating it with the degradation of women.

Grounding Miller's early books in the context of Teddy Roosevelt's cult of masculinity and the soft pornography of writers such as Frank Harris (a frequent patron of Miller's father, 'a feckless tailor with a fondness for alcohol'), Burnside examines the codes of 'manliness' which dominated Miller's Brooklyn childhood. None of this is to excuse Miller, but to shine a light on how his principles of artistic freedom — 'first person, uncensored, formless — fuck everything!' — never liberated him from

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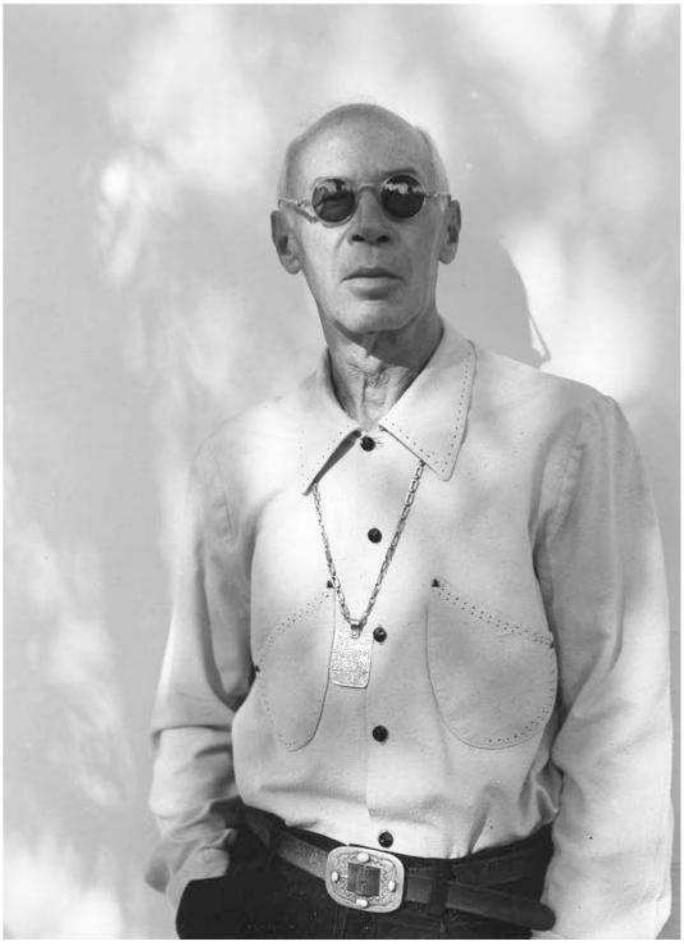


Henry Miller: part of the radical tradition of American seers and prophets

viewing sexuality as inextricably bound to competition and hyperbole.

Burnside is least convincing when he argues that Miller is a 'product of his time', and most when he elucidates the combination of insecurity and overcompensation which permeated his life. Anaïs Nin, Miller's patroness and lover, once told him:

> In *Tropic of Cancer*, you were only a sex and a stomach. In *Black Spring*, you begin to have eyes, a heart, ears, hands. By and by, with each book, you will create a complete man, and then you will be able to write about woman.

It's important to note that when Miller did try writing smut for money, his work was rejected for being insufficiently salacious.

Burnside saves his best readings not for defending Miller from familiar charges, however, but for presenting a new side of the writer through ecocriticism. The important books here are *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* and *The Colossus of Maroussi,* the under-read travel books set in the United States and Greece. Miller 'could be a master nature writer', says Burnside, construing his environmentalism as part of the radical tradition of American 'seers and prophets' like Henry David Thoreau and Rachel Carson.

The sources in this book are wide-ranging and often a delight to encounter. Burnside's mastery of Miller's primary influences — Walt Whitman, Arthur Rimbaud and the *Dao De Jing* — place him squarely as a disciple of Miller's anarchic spiritualism, rather than of his cheap eroticism. Even when Burnside's sources verge

Tropic of Cancer opened the door to literary obscenity and gave Miller the reputation of a pornographer

on the tenuous, for example his extended treatment of the obscure French surgeon Henri Laborit, they are never boring.

At the beginning of his book, Burnside says that he wants to emulate, above all, Miller's 'drunkenness'. His prose resembles more often a pleasantly tipsy dinner partner, but he achieves a good glass-smashing, table-standing tirade in rare moments:

> We want tradition, we get convention; we want sex, we get porn; we want love, we get valentines; we want honour, we get compromise; we want rituals, we get Paroxetine.

Any contemporary appraisal of Miller must answer the question of whether an intelligent, compassionate reader can conceivably take the best of Miller — his anarchist sensibility, his feeling for the natural world, his literary transgression — while leaving the rest behind. By using his own commendable self as an example, Burnside opens up new avenues of appreciation for us all.

Snowy days in Saratoga Springs

Ben Hamilton

Upstate
by James Wood
Cape, £14.99, pp. 232

Alan Querry, the central figure in James Wood's second novel, is someone who, in his own words, doesn't 'think about life too much'. His peculiar surname may recall the brooding, godforsaken Querry of Graham Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case*, but this Querry — who lives in 'the poshest part of Northumberland' — isn't much troubled by God's presence or absence: 'he had a notion that "the question of God" might all have been more or less sorted out in his lifetime, like Cyprus or polio.'

Called upon to visit his daughter Vanessa in upstate New York, Alan stops along the way to meet his younger daughter, Helen, and they make the journey together to snowy Saratoga Springs. Alan sees this as an opportunity for bonding. Since his divorce from their mother and her untimely death, the family has struggled to connect in a meaningful way.

The real motive for the visit, however, is to check up on Vanessa's mental health. According to an email sent to Alan from Vanessa's boyfriend she is 'in danger of doing harm to herself' after tumbling down some stairs and injuring her arm, perhaps intentionally. Vanessa, who teaches philosophy at a liberal arts college, has a history of gloom. In childhood she wrote poems 'full of despair and lament', and as a student at Oxford she went through a phase of giving away her possessions. Helen, by contrast, seems to have a knack for happiness. This is what drives Alan to distraction: 'Why did Helen find happiness easy, when her sister found it hard?'

Readers of Wood's criticism will be aware that he knows his way around an English sentence, but in fiction his prose, while fluent, is not always convincing. The close third-person narration, which stays mostly with Alan, is a jumble of his colloquial language — 'the tall black bloke who looked like a policeman' – and Wood's own *New Yorker*-tinged descriptions — a pickup truck on a winter lawn is 'like one of those brutal modern poems self-consciously surrounded by a lot of white page'. What's more, Wood is sometimes side-tracked by his own editorialising, for example when he has Alan

parroting Wood's own published observations on the differences between American and British manners, or when he has Vanessa's tech journalist boyfriend quoting from William Gass's highly regarded but little read novel, *The Tunnel* (Wood has used the very same Gass quote in his non-fiction).

Wood is still most comfortable writing in or about the academy, where people politely toil among books and ideas. The best and most moving passage in the novel comes late, when Alan surreptitiously attends a lecture given by Vanessa. She spots him before she starts and, to his surprise, smiles 'with transparent happiness and confidence'. She proceeds to give a polished, self-deprecating talk — perfectly pitched by Wood — which Alan takes in with a mixture of delight and boredom: 'Lulled, weary, proud... he got sleepy and had to use his old driving trick — sharply nipping his right earlobe with his nails — to stay alert.'

Trouble in paradise

Julie Myerson

Rosie: Scenes from a Vanished Life
by Rose Tremain
Chatto, £14.99, pp. 210

1991, the Harbourfront Literary Festival in Toronto. The novelist Rose Tremain and the South African writer Carolyn Slaughter are enjoying a lobster thermidor and Chablis lunch. Hearing about Slaughter's abuse at the hands of her father, Tremain finds herself telling her lunch companion about 'something I never normally discussed with anyone: the lack of love I'd had from my mother and father, and my emotional dependency on Nan' (a beloved nanny). Slaughter — who is training to be a psychiatrist — responds that 'any human life, if the childhood is devoid of adult love, will almost certainly be a troubled one', but reassures Tremain that Nan almost certainly saved her from such a fate. 'She was your angel,' Slaughter says. Tremain ends the lunch in tears.

This epiphany offers a rare — and arrestingly intimate — glimpse of the grown-up Tremain in what is essentially a memoir of childhood. Yet the anecdote feels both pungent and necessary here; indeed it might easily have inspired the whole book.

And what a book it is. So much more alert and open and alive than so many slightly disappointing memoirs by otherwise great writers, with their plodding lists of relatives and schools and terraced homes and who had lunch or sex with whom. Much of Tremain's canvas is heartsinkingly familiar — anyone with neglectful or absent parents will identify — but somehow the young Rosie Thomson never quite relinquishes either hope or joy. Perhaps that's the nascent writer in the woman who would eventually become Rose Tremain. Again and again, she finds 'wonder' in the emotional and actual landscape around her, as she waits, sometimes with an almost excruciating trust and patience, to 'find my place in the world'.

Still, Slaughter's diagnosis was largely accurate. With a more or less absent father (Keith Thomson was a playwright who 'as many writers do... used his work as an excuse not to join in many family things'), a coldly, sometimes shockingly competitive mother and chilly grandparents who never recovered from the loss of two favourite sons, Rosie and her equally imaginative sister Jo enjoyed determinedly happy times, in spite rather than because of, the self-absorbed adults around them.

And Tremain describes it all — the euphoric, the bleak and the occasionally horrific — with an infectious relish. The extravagant Christmases and summer holidays at their grandparents' huge Hampshire house, the shooting parties, the rowdy boy cousins who 'brought fun and daring to paradise', even the kindly servant who brought glasses of squash up to the children's treehouse on a silver salver. And of course, there's trouble in paradise, too. Witnessing the death of their grandfather's beloved spaniel 'torn to shreds before our eyes' by the combine harvester, the sisters never ride on it again. Equally unforgettable are the miserable tennis sessions played on a 'wrecked tennis court, its asphalt blackened and torn apart by weeds', almost aggressively left to moulder by the grandparents because their dead sons had once played there.

Meanwhile, the adults around Rosie and Jo are entering a 'period of sexual madness', the first symptom of which is their father running off with his young secretary. His wife's response to being abandoned is typically, brutally solipsistic: she packs both young girls off to boarding school, thus separating them from the only steady presence in their lives, their beloved Nan. It leaves her free, however, to hook up with, and eventually marry, their father's cousin — a development which leaves both girls far more distraught than the loss of their father.

The tennis court is almost aggressively left to rot by the grandparents because their dead sons had once played there

The new stepfather is well-meaning, but as Rosie moves into teenagehood, the knocks and slights from her mother continue, culminating with her dispatch to a Swiss finishing school at the very moment that, encouraged by a perceptive English teacher, she was nurturing hopes of sitting Oxbridge Entrance.

Tremain's attempts to understand this woman, who'd had 'no schooling in love' and who constantly sought to undermine her, are exactly what makes this book so intriguing and moving. Sent away to boarding school herself at six, and 'so often perched on an abyss of anger with her girls', Tremain's mother emerges as a complex, if troubled — and deeply troubling — personality. 'Her greatest human weakness,' Tremain astutely remarks, 'was to care a lot about the way people looked, but to be too emotionally and intellectually lazy to understand what they felt.' The opposite of a novelist, then.

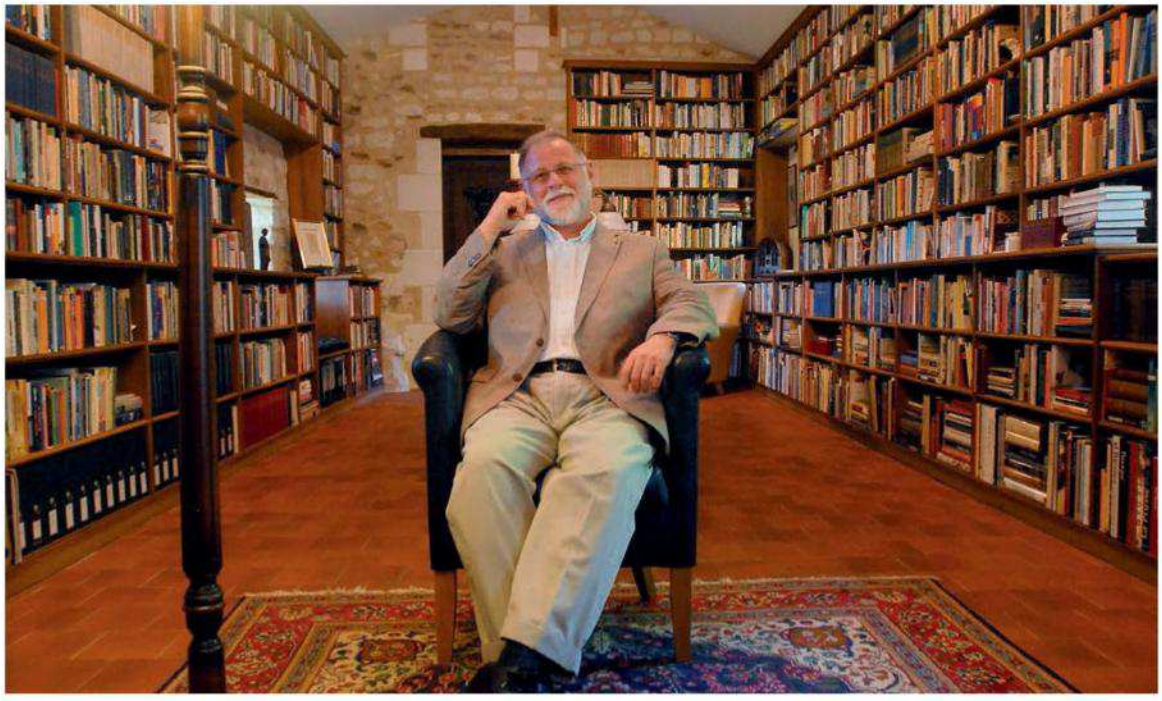
Rosie's final rebellion against her mother comes late and, rather tantalisingly, is only sketchily referred to in the afterword. Is Tremain planning a sequel? If so, I'm ready to pre-order. *Rosie* is a work of self-discovery in the best possible sense of the word — it pulls you in, unsettles, comforts and exhilarates and, finally, makes you see your own life anew. It is also, with all of the risk-taking, fluidity and nuance that such a thing implies, the work of a novelist who is fully alert to her own powers.

Minimalist

The lines are drawn, but there is no battle;
This is our newfound minimalism.
I have presented my love to you
As a glass of water upon a tray,
In an empty room furnished
Only with a table and two chairs.
Will you sit with me and drink,
Either together or apart?
Will you play me a melody
On the rim of your glass?

— Jane Solomon

GETTY IMAGES



Portrait of the reader as devoted book-owner: Alberto Manguel in happier days, at home in his library in France

Goodbye to all that

Daniel Hahn

Packing My Library: An Elegy and Ten Digressions
by Alberto Manguel
Yale, £16.99, pp. 146

Alberto Manguel is a kind of global Reader Laureate: he is reading's champion, its keenest student and most zealous proselytiser, an ideal exemplar of the Reader embodied. And reading is not only his committed, devoted practice, but also the very subject of some of his best writing. His latest book to wander through this familiar domain was prompted by the traumatic experience of packing away his huge personal library, when he and his partner found themselves needing to downsize from a cavernous French barn (containing 35,000 volumes 'in its prime') to a small apartment in New York City.

Packing My Library: *An Elegy and Ten Digressions* is a loosely arranged collection of small essays triggered by this change in his relationship to his books, and — because a library is always a manifestation of autobiography — a necessary reappraisal of where this change will leave him. This is a man whose life experiences have always been given meaning by his reading experiences: when a white owl flies past, it's not just a white owl, but 'like the angel that Dante describes steering the ship of souls to the shores of Purgatory'.

As ever, Manguel ranges widely. The serendipitous pleasures of dictionaries, the mysteries of books' true origins, remembering and forgetting, the popular trope of the writer starving in an unheated garret, how language embodies faith, the Golem, the inevitable failure of any author's attempt to represent reality perfectly (unless that author is God), the inevitability of human aloneness — all these and more have a place in this small, generous book. Opening it at random on page 88, I find Stephen Hawking, Humpty Dumpty and Nebuchadnezzar. As when browsing a library, there's seeming randomness in the order — or is it the other way around? — and it isn't always easy to keep up (clever writing insists upon clever reading, after all); but the erudite mixes nicely with the personal, too. One sentence begins: 'Plato, who would have agreed with my grandmother....'

Manguel's own libraries (plural) began in childhood, with that first shelf of bedtime stories in his toddler years. His relationship to books has always been a physical relationship (he recognises the convenience of modern 'immaterial books', but feels 'you cannot truly possess a ghost'), and one dependent on personal ownership, on having them always immediately to hand, being able to annotate them at will. These physical objects are rich in association — where they were read, from whom they were received, what this particular edition looks like. The physical particularity matters to him. He is a generous giver of books to his friends — just don't ask to borrow one of his.

This self-portrait of the reader as devoted book-owner makes it easy to understand, then, how painful it was to have this part of himself wrenched away. 'I've often felt that my library explained who I was,' he writes, which makes packing it up 'something of a self-obituary.' Will he, like Don Quixote, manage to draw strength from his remembered library even when the real thing has been torn from him?

Just as a private library reveals its owner, so a civic one should be a shared cartography expressing 'a projected communal identity'. Manguel's early emphasis on private ownership rather than communal ownership lays the ground for the book's closing movement, in which he finds himself appointed director of Argentina's National Library, in the distinctly bookish city of Buenos Aires — a city 'founded with a library', he says proudly. Former holders of this post included Jorge Luís Borges, to whom the schoolboy Manguel used to read. Borges — one of no fewer than four blind directors of that library — took the opposing view on book ownership to Manguel's, and had no significant library of his own.

Early in *Packing My Library*, Manguel acknowledges his digressive tendencies, all the better to embrace them; and at the end he accepts that, yes, this curious little book has been somewhat disjointed. But it doesn't much matter. Because while it's reflective, even celebratory, what it isn't doing is making an argument, convincing those who don't already recognise their passions reflected in his.

Instead, as the epigraph from Cicero suggests, it's not about persuading others of 'the beauties of the universe', but about sharing them; if you value these particular pleasures already, you may find yourself the ideal reader for Alberto Manguel.

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Racing on the frozen lake at St Moritz, Switzerland

Courses for horses

Camilla Swift

Remarkable Racecourses
by Tom Peacock
Pavilion Books, £25, pp. 224

The Jumping Game: How National Hunt Trainers Work and What Makes them Tick
by Henrietta Knight
Head of Zeus, £20, pp. 368

With the Cheltenham Festival been and gone, all eyes are on Aintree and the Grand National. These courses feature in Tom Peacock's *Remarkable Racecourses,* as do other familiar names: Ascot, Epsom, Goodwood, Chantilly and so on. But this isn't simply a rundown of the most famous racecourses in the world. It's more a whistle-stop, round-the-world tour of racetracks that are a bit different.

What's striking is just how much a racecourse can tell you about the culture and politics of a place. Politics does occasionally come into racing — after all, the most famous of all the suffragettes' protests happened on a racecourse. We learn that in Beirut, the racecourse was the only place during the Lebanese civil war where residents could 'mix freely', arriving through separate entrances. With gambling illegal in mainland China, Happy Valley racecourse in Hong Kong sees many punters coming for a flutter, and the state monopolised tote can see nearly £100 million staked per meeting. The British colonial influence is seen at dozens of racecourses around the world, from Hong Kong to the likes of Garrison Savannah in Barbados, Ngong in Nairobi and the Royal Turf Club Nuwara Eliya in Sri Lanka.

Other courses teach you about the culture of a place. At Cartmel in the Lake District, a village more famous for its sticky toffee pudding, winning owners and trainers receive a pudding as a prize. At Ashgabat Hippodrome in Turkmenistan, Akhal-Tekes — the Turkmen 'golden' horses, from which the original thoroughbreds are believed to have evolved — race beneath enormous portraits of the country's authoritarian leader, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow. The Soma-Nomaoi Samurai Festival in Japan sees samurai warriors racing in full uniform and bearing katana swords; while in Epsom, the Rubbing House pub claims to be the 'only hostelry in the world on a racecourse'. Perhaps that reflects on the British attitude to a day at the races a little too well.

Gary Moore's horses were ridden daily through the used syringes and burnt-out cars of a Brighton council estate

As the former jockey turned racing correspondent Marcus Armytage points out in the foreword, there are 'no rules governing a racecourse's layout or situation'. So Peacock also takes us to Birdsville in Queensland, Australia, where for two days every September horses race around a claypan in the desert; and to St Moritz, where green turf is replaced by the snowy white of a frozen lake. The Yushu Horse Festival, which takes place on the Himalayan Plateau in Tibet at 12,000 ft above sea level, also features; while at Laytown, County Meath, horses race along the beach — something that was once common in Ireland, but has slowly been dying out.

This book will certainly look beautiful on your coffee table, but the equestrian journey is also an excellent lesson in the history and politics of horse racing from around the world.

Racecourses are all well and good, but somebody also needs to train the horses. You could be excused for thinking that steeplechasers are all trained in the same way. A bit of running around to get them fit, a bit of learning to jump, and Bob's your uncle. But things are never that simple, are they?

In her latest book, *The Jumping Game,* Henrietta Knight, the former trainer of triple Cheltenham Gold Cup winner Best Mate, sets out to discover how different trainers go about training a winning horse. She visits the racing yards of 27 trainers, and not a stone goes unturned. In fact, if you wanted to go into training yourself, this book would be an excellent primer. Knight details the distance

and surface of the gallops the horses train on, the feeds they eat, what their beds are made of, how much jumping work they do — everything, in fact, that goes into the training of a national hunt horse.

But if you're simply a fan of jump racing? Well there's plenty in it for you too. All Knight's previous books have been well received by the racing community, but those were about her own life and horses. In this one, she's telling other peoples' stories. Gary Moore (father of Ryan, the former champion jockey) used to train in council premises in Brighton, where the horses were ridden daily through the 'infamous, crime-ridden Whitehawk estate', with 'used syringes and burnt-out cars all over the place'. Surprisingly, many top trainers aren't from racing stock. Paul Nicholls's father was a policeman; Gordon Elliott's works in a local garage; Nigel Twiston-Davies, Colin Tizzard and Alan King are all sons of farmers; while Lucinda Russell grew up in Edinburgh, the daughter of a whisky distillery owner.

What's interesting is how their attitudes towards training differ. Some 'loose school' their horses (that is, jump them without a rider), a practice which Knight thoroughly approves of. Others make use of swimming pools and spas and salt rooms to help with their horses' breathing — leaving Knight questioning 'whether so many extras are needed for the training of National Hunt horses'. It's not for nothing that she has been a trainer for more than 20 years: she has plenty of experience, and her voice and opinions come over loud and clear.

Qui Patitur Vincit

Death, the elephant in the room, waits unconcerned,
unwatching, his mind elsewhere; has barely shifted
in decades. You've worked long years – bold hopes uplifted
to thwart him; you've paid your dues. Lately you've learned
that irksome days are the mark of failure; slowly
you've wandered down roads not taken; with half-opened eyes
you've toiled your way to conclusions almost wise...
All gods live in details. Our worldliest things are holy.

His time will come. Till then he'll never care
if you act his game out, honour all fears and warnings;
surrender... Or skirmish on through thick and thin,
fearless (he flicks his tail), quietly aware
that elephants also die, that there are brave mornings
when things will come right. That who perseveres may win.

— *Colin Falck*

Prince of punters
Nicholas Lezard

Monsieur X: The Incredible Story of the Most Audacious Gambler in History
by Jamie Reid
Bloomsbury, £18.99, pp. 308

About a third of the way through this book I worked out that I had an unbeatable system for winning at the horses. All I would need was a degree in mathematics, or access to someone who has one, a lot of research on horses, jockeys and racecourses under my belt, including inside knowledge, and a little seed money. Say, £100,000. Two thirds of the way through I realised I would also need some links to organised crime, and if I didn't have any, they would be furnished for me, whether I wanted them or not. By the end of the book I reverted to my original opinion: that it is not for the likes of me.

Monsieur X is the story of Patrice des Moutis, a French aristocrat and gambler who, over the course of the 1960s and '70s, did his best to wring as much money out of the French state betting system, the Pari-Mutuel Urbain, or PMU, as he possibly could. He claimed that he did it perfectly legally, by analysing form in depth, using his formidable knowledge of French horseracing and exploiting loopholes that meant he could use numerous proxies to go around different cafés, all over the country if necessary, betting in various combinations (the big wins go to those who predict the first three horses in any race, in order; lesser prizes await those where the order is unspecified).

Des Moutis won big, repeatedly; and the PMU didn't like it. They smelled a rat, and started withholding his winnings. But Des Moutis did not take this lying down: he may have had the manners of a gentleman — everyone agreed about that — but he was damned if he was going to let any jumped-up functionary deny him what he had won, he insisted, fair and square. He won so big that the PMU kept changing the rules; so Des Moutis changed his tactics. The debate became national, a veritable *cause célèbre*: was Des Moutis a *Robin des Bois,* as numerous commentators attested, or was he robbing the government of tax revenue and, by extension, robbing ordinary (mug) punters?

Things began to look bad, though, when certain races started having unusual results — and Des Moutis still won. Here his story becomes murky, if more colourful: he became mixed up with gangsters from Paris, Marseille and Corsica, and if they did not literally pull the trigger that finally sealed his fate, they may as well have.

The book is surprisingly gripping, my surprise stemming from the fact that my interest in horse racing — both itself and the attendant lifestyle — is tenuous at best. If this book held my attention, then imagine how you'll feel if the following information is your thing:

> Some of the biggest fortunes in Britain, Ireland and the US were represented in the list of *grands propriétaires* too: the Duke of Devonshire; the Texan oilman, Nelson Bunker Hunt; the polo player and former American ambassador to Dublin, Raymond Guest; and the Hong Kong-based shipping magnate Jim Mullion and his wife, Meg.

This and similar rosters may, one feels, be particularly suited to the 'High Life' column of this magazine. Jamie Reid, a very knowledgeable writer on racing, lets the gangsters off only a little less easily, but I suppose we are meant to supply our own outrage about them; and besides, in those days it was considered chic in society to have a few dangerous friends.

Patrice des Moutis's huge winnings became headline news in France, a veritable cause célèbre

The book has the typical, forgivable flaw of the genre — the hyperbolic subtitle. (I bet there were other gamblers more audacious; even my great uncle Lizzie could lose £3,000 in one day, and that was in the 1930s.) And there are sentences such as: 'Across Paris there was the first scent of winter in the air from the bonfires of fallen leaves in the parks and gardens.' Less forgivable is the indifferent proofreading. The publishers are quite casual about the distinction between 'its' and 'it's' and think that Godard made a film called *Au Bout de Souffle*. But don't let that put you off too much.

Great expectations

Zoe Strimpel

Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty
by Jacqueline Rose
Faber, £12.99, pp. 238

BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Sylvia Plath with her two children and her mother Aurelia in Devon c. 1962

In a 1974 interview celebrating the quarter century since the publication of her classic *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir recalled a eureka moment in which she saw that 'to change the value system of society was to destroy the concept of motherhood'. That 'value system of society' rested on what she saw as enforced maternity, whereby women — whether through physical, psychological or social pressure — were pressed into humiliating servitude, a world of narrowed horizons and debasing physical shame. A mother was 'alienated in her body and her social dignity' and, finally, complicit in propping up a violent, corrupt and tenacious system of patriarchy, as well as capitalism itself (though unlike many to follow, De Beauvoir didn't think capitalism was unique in degrading and enslaving women).

Jacqueline Rose has followed De Beauvoir's lead — though unlike the 'mother' of feminists she does not see motherhood as inherently limiting; rather as murderously misunderstood. *Mothers* is an analysis of this misunderstanding, and a kind of *J'accuse* of the world's political, ethical and sexual cruelties, seen at their clearest, maintains Rose, in its symbolic and actual treatment of mothers.

The thing to know before reading anything by Rose, a celebrated essayist, literary critic and feminist, now based at Birkbeck, is that she's an adherent of psychoanalysis. This means that her interpretation of the world is largely refracted through the (unverifiable) power of the unconscious rather than empirical evidence. Not that this has ever hampered her political confidence or ferocity on matters one might think would lie outside the purview of psychoanalysis. Quite the contrary: in *The Question of Zion*, for instance, her masterwork of consuming anti-Zionism, published in 2005, her anti-Israel convictions and psychoanalysis furiously egg each other on, leading her to liken the Israeli treatment of Palestinians to the Holocaust.

Mothers' psychoanalytically infused 'argument' is the idea that 'motherhood is, in Western discourse, the place in our culture where we lodge, or rather bury, the reality of our own conflicts, or what it means to be fully human'. In other words, we both idealise and scapegoat mothers, leading us to heap impossible expectations and cruel habits both of mind and practice on them. As Nancy Chodorow and other feminist psychoanalysts have also noted, mothers strain under the expectation to be perfect, clean and full of love. Glimpses of maternal sexuality, anger, irresponsibility or violence are therefore appalling. But to Rose, it is precisely in acknowledging this 'dark underside' of maternal love that the possibility of a less violent world begins to emerge. The more we deny the messiness and bloody 'humanity' of mothers, the more we rig ourselves up for more violence, destruction and misery.

Are mothers in Brexit Britain being held unjustly responsible for 'the ills of the world'?

These themes are aired here across four sections — none of which does much to clarify what it actually means. The first, 'Social Punishment', begins with what Rose sees as the racist, sexist and anti-maternal British tabloid coverage of Bimbo Ayelabola, who in 2016 had a (free) £145,000 caesarean section at Homerton Hospital, London, to deliver her quintuplets while on a visit from Lagos. Unsupportive headlines prove that, in Rose's reading, mothers in Brexit Britain are being held unjustly responsible for 'the ills of the world'.

Rose then switches to ancient Greece, with the violent griefs of Clytemnestra and Medea 'shattering a myth of collective innocence'. In the next section, 'Loving', the impossible and often paradoxical expectations of motherhood are tackled with reference to Roald Dahl, Virginia Woolf, Hannah Arendt, Toni Morrison and Rachel Cusk, whose 1997 account of the annihilating experience of becoming a mother Rose finds particularly suggestive.

The third section, 'Psychic Blindness', covers maternal hatred, which is given psychoanalytic grounding in D.W. Winnicott's *Hate in the Countertransference* (1949), which lists 18 reasons a mother must hate her baby. From here onwards, the book is really about mothers and daughters, since, presumably, daughters muddy the boundary between the maternal 'me' and 'you' more than sons. But the ensuing discussion of Sylvia Plath and her strained relationship with her mother Aurelia hardly clarifies anything. Instead, the discussion of the Plath tragedy and its 'implications' generates an opaque rhetorical question: 'What on earth do we expect, as long as society continues to believe it has the right to trample over the mental lives of mothers?'

Answers to similarly unwieldy, abstract

questions are demanded of the novels of Elena Ferrante, author of the bestselling Neapolitan quartet. Her visceral, bloody and powerful depiction of maternity garners her a whole chapter in the book's final section, 'The Agony and the Ecstasy'. For Rose, Ferrante's mothers in all their wild, shape-shifting power point towards nothing less than a 'foundation for a different ethics, and, perhaps, a different world'.

As the Ferrante chapter makes clear, one of main problems with this book is that, in skidding across a vast literature on motherhood, from theory, criticism, news stories, plays and novels, Rose reveals a strange disregard for the differences between types of evidence. Surely the plot of a novel does not offer the same kind of data as a Freudian dictum, a poem, a news clipping, or a social survey.

Psychoanalytical or not, some respect for empiricism would have vastly improved the arguments of this unfocused, rhetorically loaded and curiously lazy-feeling book.

Amused and confused

Viv Groskop

How to Rule the World
by Tibor Fischer
Corsair, £16.99, pp. 246

Tibor Fischer has a track record with humour. His first novel, the Booker shortlisted *Under the Frog*, takes its title from a Hungarian saying that the worst possible place to be is 'under a frog's arse down a coal mine'. And he also has form with being a bit meta: his third novel, *The Collector Collector*, was narrated by an earthenware pot. Here he throws his weight behind a character who feels like he's walked off the set of *Brass Eye* or Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror.* It's not entirely clear whether we are supposed to loathe him or sympathise with him. Baxter Stone is a filmmaker whose best days are behind him and who is struggling to stay relevant in an industry that is itself dying.

Baxter is in debt and is plagued by many real and imaginary enemies. His only hope of salvation is a job that will turn into the last hurrah in the form of a commission from his idiotic editor, Johxn (the x is silent). Johxn is so inept that he turns down an interview with Osama bin Laden a month before 9/11. The whole novel is, in a way, a hymn to Baxter's self-loathing around his dependence on Johxn: he wants the job, the money and the relevance, but he hates himself for wanting it all.

Baxter is redeemed in the reader's eyes — and in his own — by his genuine love for his friend Herbie, the journalist who got him his first job. He has counted the months since Herbie's death five years earlier and harbours a secret wish to recover Herbie's safe which was stolen just after he died. Baxter fantasises that the safe will contain some information or a video that will destroy Johxn. And it's this hope — as much as the desire to get back on his feet — that sustains him.

If you are sick to death of media, reality TV, London's losers and capitalism in general, this may well be the book for you. Although I had fun reading it, I wasn't entirely convinced I had understood it. *How to Rule the World* has a meandering, self-conscious narrative, and it isn't always easy to figure out what is really going on and what is happening in Baxter's mind. You can't help but wonder if the whole thing is some kind of meta comment on the illusion of fiction. Or something like that. I was conscious throughout of Fischer's short story collection *Don't Read This Book If You're Stupid*.

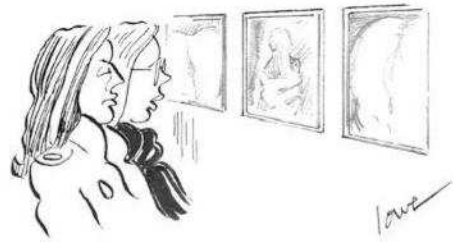
There are some wry observations on London life (Baxter hasn't moved his car in four months because he has the best parking space in Soho). And Baxter's propensity for telling it like it is feels cheering. (He wonders why anyone would bother becoming a serial killer when they could just join the army and do it all legally.) But overall, what this novel does best is lampoon the desire for recognition. As Herbie puts it: 'Success? At best, it's idiots liking your work. Otherwise it's idiots pretending to like your work.' This idiot was left amused but also very confused.

A play on the Scottish play

Andrew Taylor

Macbeth
by Jo Nesbo, translated from the Norwegian by Don Bartlett
Hogarth, £20, pp. 503

It must have seemed a good idea to someone: commissioning a range of well-known novelists to 'reimagine Shakespeare's plays for a 21st-century audience'. The first six novels have come from irreproachably literary authors of the calibre of Jeanette Winterson (*The Winter's Tale*) and Margaret Atwood (*The Tempest*).



'Sadly, I was shocked out of my smug bourgeois complacency long ago.'

Now, however, we have something a little different: Jo Nesbo, the Norwegian crime writer, has recast *Macbeth* as a thriller, allegedly set in 1970, though this timeframe should not be taken too literally. The plot is very loosely connected with Shakespeare's.

The location is a crumbling city in a dystopian country where many of the names have a Scottish ring. Prostitution, gambling and above all the drug trade are now the only industries that flourish in this decaying town. Its rulers are corrupt local politicians and the chief commissioner of police. The latter, Duncan, is an upright officer, a new broom sent by the government in faraway Capitol to sweep the city clean. His job is Nesbo's equivalent of the crown of Scotland.

In this version, Macbeth is a former drug addict who is now Duncan's protégé. He has risen to become the hardbitten but honourable head of the police SWAT team. 'Duff', Malcolm and Banquo are among the other Shakespearian characters who re-emerge as police officers. Sometimes the transformations are surprising. Caithness, for example, is now a woman police inspector who is having an affair with Duff and at one point floats about in a negligée.

Macbeth is passionately in love with an older woman — the red-headed Lady, who runs the Inverness, the city's classiest casino, with steely efficiency. Hecate is the city's leading drug manufacturer, whose ruthless commercial efficiency has turned thousands into addicts. The chief of the three witches is a striking transsexual.

Nesbo is best known for his ferociously successful 'Harry Hole' series. His version of *Macbeth* has many of the same qualities — strong, unsubtle characters, a driving narrative packed with set-piece action sequences and a surreal, cartoonish quality that often has more to do with Gotham City than Glasgow.

Whatever the novel may lack in psychological subtlety, it more than makes up in shoot-outs. The climax is a particularly splendid affair involving Gatling guns, a decommissioned locomotive named Bertha Birnam and a lethal chandelier.

When the bodies have been carted away and the blood mopped up, what's left? Nesbo has produced a sprawling, often confusing thriller which may not have a great deal to do with Shakespeare's play but at least bursts with a rude imaginative vigour of its own.

A for effort, then, and indeed for prolixity. Nesbo's *Macbeth* takes 503 pages to do what Shakespeare does, in my edition of the play, in 86. It's a cruelly unfair comparison but I know which I prefer.

ARTS

The nonconformist

Viv Albertine, formerly of the Slits, is publishing her second book – and it's full of the honesty and anger that have marked her life. *Michael Hann* takes the brunt

Viv Albertine, by her own admission, hurls stuff at misbehaving audiences. Specifically, when the rage descends, any nearby full cup or glass is likely to be decanted over the object of her ire. She's remembering an incident a few years back, at a gig she played in York, when she felt compelled to introduce some persistent talkers to the contents of their pint glasses. 'There's such a fine balance there, because you don't want to sound like a schoolmarm. Johnny Rotten used to walk offstage if there was spitting. The Slits [the groundbreaking punk band for whom Albertine was the guitarist] couldn't do that because we would have looked like Violet Elizabeth Bott: "We're not going to play until you thtop thpitting".' She laughs, something she does a fair bit, and it's important to note, because her words alone make her appear fairly terrifying, to men at least.

But back to York, and the talking men. 'So I was toying with the idea that if I said something to these cunts, am I just gonna look like a schoolmarm? But in the end, I had to shut them up, and I tried to do that in a way that wasn't schoolmarmish, that shocked them.'

In her new book *To Throw Away Unopened*, Albertine recalls that incident, and the silence of the audience as a middle-aged woman confronted boozy men who were ruining a show. I'm surprised they didn't back her up with cheers, because God knows how much we all hate people who talk through performances. 'Yes,' she says, surprised the thought had never occurred to her. 'Why the fuck didn't they cheer?' And then she thinks of a reason. 'Maybe they believed me when I said, "I'll take it outside with this fucking bottle, mate."'

Albertine's first book — *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes. Music, Music, Music. Boys, Boys, Boys* — dealt with the externalities of her life: the London punk scene, her time in the Slits between 1977 and 1982, her career and relationships after that. The new one is concerned much more with her family — her mother and father, who split when she was a child, her sister and her daughter. Of the principals, Albertine included, only her daughter escapes without a certain amount of savaging. The readers' sympathies ebb and flow, as did Albertine's during the course of writing it, as she discovered more about how her mother and father perceived their marriage very differently.

'One of the questions in the book was: how the hell did I turn out to be this person who is so full of anger?' she says. 'To me, part of the detective story in the book is realising it was my mother who really schooled me like a little warrior: indoctrinated me, chanted and nagged me in quite a different way to most mothers.'

One would walk past Albertine in the street without thinking for a moment she was either one of the original punks, or filled with rage: she doesn't get a second glance in the Jewish arts centre café in which we meet. Unlike say, John Lydon, she doesn't look and speak like a caricature of her young self. She speaks precisely, and — this is probably the wrong thing to say — looks frankly brilliant for 63, despite having come through cancer and other vicissitudes. And, as the two books detail, there have been enough vicissitudes to go round, often because of her belief in living as honest a life as possible.

The Slits were abused and attacked, even threatened with rape, for daring to be so different

I say that honesty seems an awful lot more important to her than happiness. 'I didn't pursue happiness at all,' she all but snorts. 'I've never pursued it. I wasn't brought up to pursue it. You're quite a bit younger than me [I'm 48, not 23] and there was a bit more of that ethos around as you grew up. But when I grew up there was no pursuing happiness; it wasn't talked about. Both my parents lived through a world war. My grandparents lived through two world wars. And they didn't go around saying, "Look for happiness".'

Gosh. We do have very different views of the world.

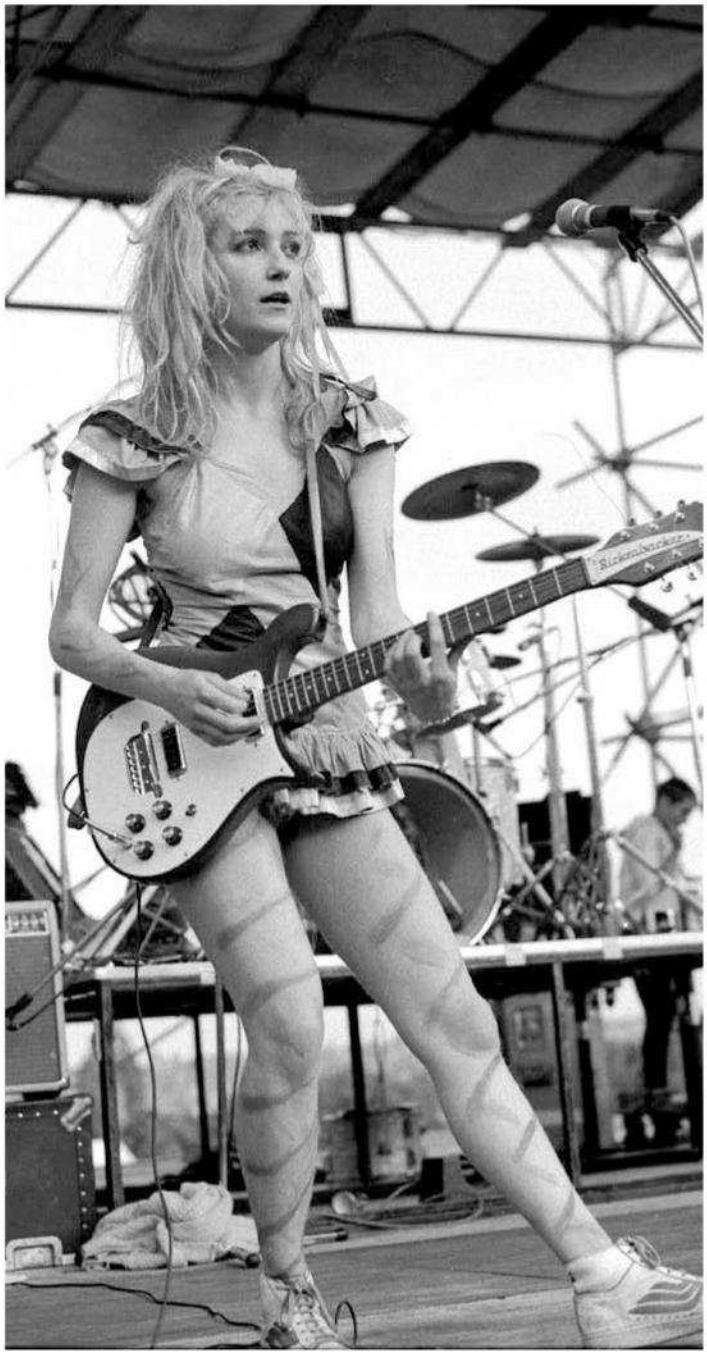
'I wonder why, middle-class white man? If you go against everything that is prescribed for you in life, it's nothing but struggle and not fitting in. And it's never ending.'

Both books, at times, read like rebukes to those who are happy to conform; to people like me, who are naturally inclined to say yes. 'Well, our experiences have been so different. I can understand you thinking: "I'm lucky. Society is built around people like me." So that makes it that much easier to have the space to have a bit of happiness. But I don't think you should see it as a rebuke.'

Nevertheless, popular culture — especially pop music — is built around the dichotomy between the creative spirit and the nine-to-fiver, and it's built into the language of pop: the divide between the hip and the square. I explain how certain songs by Ray Davies, Paul Weller and Damon Albarn have always driven me mad — the ones in which our narrator pours scorn on the dead-eyed commuter: hang on, that's my dad you're having a pop at! 'That's kind of irresponsible,' Albertine admits. 'I don't think I said it in the book, but if my daughter did ask me whether she should love an artistic life or a conventional life, I wouldn't say, "You go out there and live an artistic life!" because there are huge consequences. It's all very well for the Kinks and Damon Albarn to sing those songs and sneer at Mr Nine to Five, but again they're white men, so they didn't have it very hard.'

I imagine, by now, readers might be rolling their eyes: Oh, there goes the arsey feminist. Well, Albertine is an arsey feminist. And it's no wonder given her experiences. When she was in the Slits, the group were frequently attacked for daring to be so different to what society expected. And 'attacked' isn't metaphorical: their teenaged singer Ari Up was stabbed twice. 'They' —

DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS



CARDINA AMBIDA

Viv Albertine, left, at Alexandra Palace, 1980; and right, today

that's men — 'would spit at us in the street, and hit us, and threaten us with rape. We literally got threatened with rape in the streets.' She pauses. 'Now we get threatened with rape online.'

Still, punk left her with both a legacy and proof that all you need to do to achieve something is to get up and do it, something she thinks young women should bear in mind. A few years ago, we were both judges at a Battle of the Bands contest at the comprehensive school both our daughters attended. Three of us judges offered non-committal praise, regardless of quality. Albertine, to every group of teenagers, said: 'You! Have! To! Write! Your! Own! Songs!'

'I couldn't be as hard on them as I would have liked,' she says. 'I would have liked to have been even harder. You've got one life: find your voice within it. If I was a young girl coming across someone giving me a poke up the bum like that, I'd have been pleased. Any kind of role model. Any kind of encouragement. Any kind of belief.'

So, Viv Albertine, what makes you angry these days? I think I can guess the answer, and it duly arrives. 'A pompous man who is talking down to me. I want to kill him. It triggers all the years of it. All that has built up and is coming out in me.' I look at the table between us. Our glasses are both empty. I'm safe.

To Throw Away Unopened *is published by Faber.* Here To Be Heard: The Story of the Slits *is at selected cinemas across the UK.*

Television

It's a cult thing

James Delingpole

I have decided to set up a cult, which you are all welcome to join, especially those of you who are young and very attractive or stupendously rich. The former will get exclusive membership of my JiggyJiggy Fun Club™, while the latter will be essential in financing all the cool shit I need on my 500-square-mile estate, viz: hunt stables and kennels, helipad, private games room with huge comfy chair, water slides, grouse moor, airstrip, barracks for my cuirassiers, volcano with battery of rockets inside, and so on.

What gave me the idea was this new Netflix documentary series everyone is talking about called *Wild Wild Country*. It tells the story of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the bearded guru who in the early 1980s decamped from India with his thousands of followers to set up a utopian colony on a remote and beautiful ranch in the wilds of Oregon.

If you didn't know it was all going to go horribly wrong, you might find the early episodes ever so slightly dull. 'Yeah, yeah. Beard. Twinkly eyes. Namaste. Hideous orange clothes. Rolls-Royce. Free love. Money-making machine. We got it,' I muttered after the first part, which lasted an hour but felt like two. For example, the bearded guy (not that that narrows it down much) who used to be a hotshot LA lawyer but then became the cult's attorney: did we really need to have quite so much of him expatiating ad nauseam in his neat clothes and stripped-wood loft space on how delightful and misunderstood the cult was, how charismatic its leader, how foxily cunning and dedicated its modus operandi?

This is the series' blessing and curse. Directors Mclain and Chapman Way have secured in-depth interviews with all the story's surviving participants. Very in-depth. Yes, indeed, it is a coup to have got Ma Anand Sheela, the remarkably determined, supremely unapologetic woman who ran the operation — and later got a 20-year jail sentence — to open up. At the same time, though, as is the modern style, the directors prefer merely to point the camera and let the viewers make up their minds what to think. Which leaves you feeling a bit rudderless as you watch, not least because Sheela and co remain utterly convinced that Rajneesh and his cult were worthy and good. You end up almost being programmed to their way of thinking.

How weird, dangerous and corrupt was the cult? Dangerous enough, we later learn, deliberately to have infected with salmonella 751 people in order to incapacitate voters so as to win a local election. Weird enough for you to be appalled if one of your kids joined because they'd end up with that far-off look in their eyes and you'd barely see them again. Even so — hence my intro — there's a part of me that thinks: well if that's what these people are into why shouldn't they be able to set up their private fantasy worlds in the middle of nowhere? Especially when, as in my cult, the uniforms are going to be so much better. I've not yet decided what the girls wear, but we boys all get to dress like Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Indian Summer School (C4) is the latest variant on one of my favourite reality TV genres: unteachables go to brat camp. In this case, the tough reformatory for five naughty English kids is the Doon School — 'India's Eton' — a magnificent boarding school set in 70 acres of grounds abundant with trees and flowers in the foothills of the Himalayas north of Delhi. So — not much real hardship: just homesickness and exposure to the kind of old-school rigour, discipline and traditionalism which, in India at least, have yet to be killed by trendy headmasters who think it's a good idea to give boys the option of wearing skirts or to invite Laura Bates from the Everyday Sexism Project to come and lecture them on how they're all potential rapists.

The most delinquent kid, Jake, has already been sent home, thank heaven. It was too excruciating to watch this charmingly quaint establishment, with its well-behaved, hard-working boys, and its kindly, firm but fair staff, being exposed to a horror who smuggles in booze, shaves off his classmate's eyebrows for a joke, and sunbathes on the roof rather than attends lessons.

That will leave space for the series to focus on more positive participants in the experiment: Ethan, the Welsh would-be transsexual learning maybe to be a bit less of a needy, pouty snowflake; Harry, coping with his rages; and (my favourite) dear, sweet, gangly, ginger Jack, who has spent his schooling in rough comps being bullied and who is now discovering how different learning is when no one is mucking about in class and the teachers really care.

Dance

A Manon to remember

Louise Levene

Sutra
Sadler's Wells

Manon
Royal Opera House, in rep until 16 May

The Shaolin monks are no strangers to the stage. Their home in Dengfeng is a major stop on the Chinese tourist trail and their lives of quiet contemplation (and shouty martial arts practice) are regularly punctuated by spells on the international circuit with Kung Fu extravaganzas like *Wheel of Life* and *Shaolin Warriors*. Quite how they square this six-shows-a-week-plus-matinees life with the whole monk ethic is a question for their Abbot or, just possibly, their agent (Shaolin Intangible Assets Management Co. Ltd. Yes, really).

But they put on a very good show, the best of which is *Sutra*, devised by Belgo-Moroccan dancemaker Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and performed in an installation by Turner-winning sculptor Antony Gormley.

The 60-minute piece premiered at Sadler's Wells in 2008 and has been regularly revived ever since in theatres from Macao to Montreal. It has worn extremely well, largely thanks to the acrobatic ebullience of the 19 monks (one thinks of Peter Cook and the leaping nuns of St Beryl) and the brilliance of Gormley's simple-seeming design.

The silver-grey box set is furnished with 21 coffin-sized crates which are manhandled into ever-changing configurations by the holy hard men of Henan. Meanwhile, dancer Ali Thabat, the sole layman in the set-up, lurks downstage right like a puppet master manipulating a scale model of the set aided by a junior monk who tries (but fails) to mimic the gymnastic stunts of the main ensemble.

The finale lets the monks show off their

HUGO GLENDINNING

How do these Shaolin monks square six shows a week with monking?

martial arts skills with much tumbling and stave-twirling, but even their best tricks would become monotonous after 60 minutes without Gormley's inspired carpentry which evokes a dazzling succession of beguiling (or troubling) thoughts every time a box is moved. The simple shapes conjure a prison, a hive, a capsule hotel, a giant henge or a shrinking iceberg. Controlled collapses create dominoes and ziggurats or cause the long shapes to open out in a Busby Berkeley blossom of stripped pine that cries out for a crane shot.

Cherkaoui is an extremely busy man, directing plays and operas and working with any number of ballet companies (Paris, Flanders, Dutch National and others). A Covent Garden commission was only a matter of time and a new one-act work will prèmiere at the Royal Opera House next May.

Meanwhile the Royal Ballet has embarked on a run of Kenneth MacMillan's 1974 *Manon*, set to a cut-and-paste of Massenet melodies and adapted from Abbé Prévost's 1731 novel about a young theology student whose passion for a lovely but light-minded girl leads them down the primrose path to prostitution, transportation and death. The latest revival hit the ground running: cast to the hilt and strongly danced and played at every level.

It's usual at this point to say something piously hashtaggy about MacMillan ballets abusing women

Federico Bonelli, now in his late thirties, still has the boyish looks and silky finesse needed for the slightly wimpish hero. His Act I solo, a choreographic love poem packed with obsessive-compulsive footwork and sumptuous arabesque fondues, reads like a pastiche of textbook technique (the role was written for arch-classicist Anthony Dowell).

Manon is undoubtedly a star vehicle but there are plum roles at all levels. Alexander Campbell was clubbable if slightly ingratiating as Manon's pimping brother Lescaut. One misses the ruthless streak that dastardly dance actors like Stephen Wicks and Irek Mukhamedov displayed in David Wall's old role but Campbell's toe-twiddling opening solo was as crisp as his cuffs and he had fun with his drunken duet in Act II. Claire Calvert with her brazen jump and teasing pointe work was on superb form as his long-suffering mistress. James Hay will debut as Lescaut at the end of this month but made the most of the beggar chief's firecracker solos.

Even the humblest figurant has a back story, turning the stage into a Hogarthian melée seething with drama and interest. The brothel scene is so crowded with incident that MacMillan is obliged to impose a freeze-frame, allowing us to focus on the main event: Manon herself, Francesca Hayward.

In only her third attempt at the role Hayward wafted into the grimy Paris inn yard like a fragrant breeze: pretty, innocent (for now) and quick to realise that her youth and loveliness are a highly desirable commodity. By the time we see her in Act II she has learned to calibrate her charms in the cynically judged private dance for her new sugar daddy, a sensuous wriggle running through her torso as a promise of future delights. Moments later, she is luxuriating in the admiration of every man in the room, passing from hand to wandering hand like Zizi Jeanmaire working a stag line.

It's usual at this point to say something piously hashtaggy about MacMillan ballets abusing women but Manon is emphatically the author of her own destiny. The hapless tarts in the tumbrels are victims but Manon has options and it is her bad decisions that spin the plot: she's the one who steals the old gentleman's wallet; she's the one who wants the diamonds and furs.

You can't have melodrama without suffering and MacMillan's male characters — Romeo, Rudolf in *Mayerling*, the Foreman in *The Judas Tree* — don't exactly get off lightly. Poisoned, shot, hanged or just left alone with a corpse in the fever swamps of Louisiana: the ballet stage is no place for sissies.

Louise Levene's fourth novel, Happy Little Bluebirds*, is published by Bloomsbury on 17 May.*

Radio

Good morning, Martha

Kate Chisholm

Like a breath of fresh air Martha Kearney has arrived on Radio 4's *Today* programme, taking over from Sarah Montague (who will now host the lunchtime news programme formerly presided over by Kearney). Her presenting style is just so different, less confrontational, more investigative, perhaps developed by her because at lunchtime the mood is different, less rushed, more ambulant. The tone on the *World At One* was always much more reflective than reactive, Kearney pondering events rather than racing through to the next interview, butting in, hustling, flustering her guests.

On Monday morning's *Today*, she interviewed the author of a book on 'elastic thinking'. Leonard Mlodinow, a theoretical physicist who has also written scripts for *Star Trek*, argues that we need to think more flexibly if we want to cope with the avalanche of information that now threatens to engulf us. 'Elastic thinking,' he said, 'is Mary Shelley, Stephen Hawking…'

'Explain that?' Kearney interrupted, with a rising tone to the question, the eagerness of someone really wanting to know. 'Explain about *Frankenstein*.'

Mlodinow told us the story of the Villa Diodati, the holiday by the lake, the rain-filled days, the night-time bet, and Mary Shelley's quest for a ghost story that would outdo Byron and her husband Shelley. She went to bed and tried to think of nothing, allowing her mind to make connections about which she herself might not have been consciously aware. Into that space, said Mlodinow, arrived Frankenstein and his monster. Not a bad thought to start the day, and only heard by us because Kearney had that instinct, that innate sense of what might be of interest, to ask him to explain.

Meanwhile, Petroc Trelawny who hosts Radio 3's *Breakfast* programme, was invited on to *Feedback* last week to tell us why he's drawing listeners away from *Today*, and especially, and perhaps surprisingly, younger listeners. We only have them for about 20 minutes, says Trelawny, while rushing through their smoothies and teeth-cleaning rituals. It's no good putting on a whole symphony. No one would ever hear the whole of it. Instead, 'We're trying to give them great works from the repertoire in fantastic recordings… with brief but very well-written news bulletins' (they are much better written than usual). The Mozart sonatas and Haydn, Grieg, Mendelssohn, Stravinsky, Delibes on his playlist could all be shared by Aled Jones, who hosted Classic FM's breakfast show this week with his characteristic enthusiasm and well-balanced choice of music. But then, says Trelawny, we like to surprise our listeners, giving us Holst (Imogen, not Gustav), a song by Rabindranath Tagore and a snatch of Shostakovich, Compay Segundo and Iturralde. '*Breakfast* is a clear entry point into Radio 3,' says Trelawny, 'a window into our world.'

I tuned in to *Feedback* because we were promised an interview with Bob Shennan, the BBC's director of radio and music. He was meant to be responding to the recent Annual Plan, delivered by the BBC's board, which talked a lot about the new world of 'personalisation' (creating your own radio station through voice-recognition technologies), 'fake news' and globalisation, but said very little about how the stations would respond to these innovations. Sadly, Shennan was detained by 'unavoidable operational issues' and did not appear. The fate of radio as we know it, in a future ruled by Alexa (your virtual assistant, who can summon up programmes at your bidding, thereby dispensing with schedules) and flooded with podcasts, is as yet unknown.

Back in 1996 the writer A.L. Kennedy, always a class act on radio, set out to climb Mount Sinai. She was hoping for an epiphany. It's 'a spiritually charged place' filled with pilgrims, camels and nuns. It was just like the pictures in her child's illustrated bible. Surely it was not unreasonable to expect that something might happen, something that would change her?

On top of Sinai, everyone is happy, uplifted by the pure air, the rising of the sun. Kennedy feels nothing

In *Epiphanies* on Radio 4 (produced by David Barnes) Kennedy tried to define what we mean by 'an epiphany', asking the question of a neuroscientist, a psychologist, a rabbi, Muslim, Anglican canon, as well as taking us with her on her pilgrimage to Sinai, puffing and panting up the mountain. An epiphany could be as simple an experience as discovering the supreme beauty of rain while fumbling for your door key, or something more akin to 'an ambush', that light-bulb moment experienced by Shelley and many other writers. Canon Oakley told us of a chance conversation with a taxi-driver in Dresden. His grandfather was in the RAF during the second world war, flying bomber planes over Dresden. The taxi-driver's mother, it turned out, had died on the night of 14 February 1945. 'And now,' said the taxi-driver, refusing to accept a fare, 'you and I shake hands.'

Back at the top of Mount Sinai, Kennedy still feels nothing. Everyone around her is happy, uplifted by the experience, the pure air, the rising of the sun. She, though, is irritated. She buys a hot chocolate from the tumbledown kiosk and abandons her search for whatever breakthrough she expected. 'And then for one big moment it was all beautiful. And I stopped being an idiot and paid attention. I was where I was and that was perfectly all right.' It was an epiphany, of sorts.

Exhibitions

The evanescence of everything

Martin Gayford

Monet & Architecture
National Gallery, until 29 July

Think of the work of Claude Monet and water lilies come to mind, so do reflections in rippling rivers, and sparkling seas — but not buildings. He was scarcely a topographical artist — an impressionist Canaletto, even if Venice was among his themes. Nonetheless, *Monet & Architecture* at the National Gallery is an intriguing experience.

Before I saw it, the suspicion crossed my mind that this was the solution to a conundrum that must puzzle many galleries. Namely, how to put together another Monet exhibition without it being the same as all the others? An institution such as the National Gallery could not just borrow a lorry-load of Monets and shove them up on the walls — although quite a lot of visitors might be happy enough with that.

Exhibitions are supposed to have a serious point, to explore novel territory. A little unexpectedly, *Monet & Architecture* succeeds in doing just that. Not only does it contain an array of masterpieces but it also makes you think harder about just what the subject of these pictures really is. Paradoxically, the answer turns out to be that it isn't architecture.

Although the exhibition is vaguely chronological, this is not a retrospective. Large sections of the painter's oeuvre are omitted because they depict no man-made edifices. Thus the pictures he did at Étretat in the early 1880s are left out, but there are several of the quite similar ones Monet painted not far along the Norman coast at Varengeville. The reason is that the latter often feature the medieval church and a humble shelter for the local customs officer.

Mind you, those structures were not exactly the subjects of these pictures. A reviewer at the time got it right when he wrote that Monet had put the *douanier*'s little cottage with its red roof in the corner of one picture 'to put the rest in tune' ('*pour donner le la*'). That is often the role of architecture in Monet's pictures. It adds a contrast or backdrop.

In a wonderful painting, *The Church at Varengeville, Morning Effect* (1882), the geometric clarity of the steeple and Gothic walls and windows contrasts with the rugged chaos of the rock face below. The painter

The Church at Vétheuil, 1878

noted his true interest in his title: the slanting sunlight of early morning which catches outcrops of stone, while leaving other parts of the cliff in misty violet shadow.

The moisture in the air of northern Europe and its mutable maritime climate were essential to Monet's art. Almost all his finest pictures were produced in his native Normandy, most of them at points along the railway line from Gare Saint-Lazare along the valley of the Seine to the sea. His pictures of Mediterranean scenes — at Antibes and Bordighera in Liguria look brash by comparison.

Monet was clear about his intentions, though his recorded remarks were often terse. He explained his urge to paint the national celebrations of 30 June 1878 in the rue Montorgueil, by saying: 'I love flags a lot.' Of course he would. Flags are mobile notes of colour in the air. Again his preoccupation is not the street. It's the euphoric, fluttering movement of people and coloured cloth framed by the grey Parisian house fronts.

In the excellent accompanying book the curator Richard Thompson quotes Monet as complaining that 'everything changes, even stone'. Thompson considers this a 'cryptic remark' — but you could also read it as a four-word manifesto. The constant flux of the '*enveloppe*' of light and moist air surrounding Rouen Cathedral no doubt made his work torturously difficult. But it was also his deepest theme.

With the series of the Rouen façade, Monet selected what was virtually a postcard view. But the famous arches and niches of the west front weren't really his quarry. If you peer closely at the surface it looks like a 1950s abstraction. In another gnomic aside, Monet confessed he wanted 'to do architecture without doing its features, without the lines'.

This sounds like painting the grin without

the cat, but actually it's just what he accomplished. A sequence of five Rouen Cathedral canvases is the climax of the National Gallery show. Standing in front of them is like looking at a movie of fluctuating light and atmosphere from dawn to dusk — but enormously more subtle than any photographic image could ever be. What he was actually painting was evanescence, passing time.

In a way, admittedly, concentrating on Monet and architecture is arbitrary. Haystacks or poplars were just as satisfactory material for him as a medieval cathedral. It was what went on around these solid objects — shimmering sunlight, fog, patches of shade — that really counted. But this itself is a revealing conclusion. The other point the show makes is that — despite his popularity — Monet was a truly great painter. The public are quite right to love him: this exhibition is crammed with marvellous, exhilarating pictures.

Theatre

Politics at play

Lloyd Evans

Pressure
Park Theatre, until 28 April

Devil with the Blue Dress
Bunker Theatre, until 28 April

David Haig's play *Pressure* looks at the Scottish meteorologist, James Stagg, who advised Eisenhower about the weather in the week before D-Day. The play works by detaching us from our foreknowledge of events. We're aware that the landings went off smoothly on 6 June in fine conditions. However, D-Day was originally scheduled for 5 June, and for the preceding month southern England had basked in a prolonged sunny spell. According to Eisenhower's American meteorologist, this was set to continue. But Stagg believed a storm was about to engulf the channel. Eisenhower trusted Stagg and postponed D-Day. The storm arrived, albeit tardily, which vindicated Stagg who then foresaw a brief period of clear skies and low winds for the following day. Eisenhower trusted him again.

This Michael Fish-y narrative is grippingly told against the background of two harrowing personal stories. Stagg's heavily pregnant wife has been hospitalised with high blood pressure (continuing the play's titular theme), and he has to reconcile his concerns for her safety with his enormous professional responsibilities. Meanwhile, Eisenhower is conducting a clandestine affair with his beautiful British driver, Kay Summersby, whose passion for him is hurtling towards a crisis. In war, their affair is safe. Peace will tear them apart. Should Kay believe the ambitious American's assurances that he plans to make her his new bride? This is a wonderfully entertaining play and the script will prove irresistible to low-budget film producers. Imagine it. You can make a second world war movie in a single location, a map-room. Pure gold.

Devil with the Blue Dress coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Lewinsky affair. I was half-expecting a ribald political satire, but Kevin Armento's play treats the characters and their predicament with sympathy and intelligence. Monica arrives at the White House as a young intern and eloquently describes the glamour of Washington and the erotic power of the tall, genial, ever-smiling commander-in-chief. Their affair began accidentally, after a series of chance meetings, and it continued for many months. Both were hooked on their mutual physical attraction and on the sheer naughtiness of their misconduct. They seem as sweet and naive as a pair of schoolyard snoggers behind the bike shed.

The play explores the emotional ramifications for Hillary and the family, and it reveals fascinating details about the Clintons' weird personal lives. Bill and Hill taught Chelsea the ruthlessness of the political process by playing 'murder-board' at home. Chelsea was required to deliver a political argument which her parents would ruthlessly dissect and attack while she mounted the best defence she could muster. The experience often reduced her to tears. It also toughened her up. Chelsea was mortified by Bill's infamous denial, 'I did not have sexual relations with that woman,' because the words sounded so guarded, pinched and loveless. And they were. Bill, who hedged from the start against the possibility of exposure, refused Lewinsky's request for penetrative sex so that this technical get-out clause would remain available to him. But he still comes across as a figure of sympathy. It's almost tragic to witness the world's most powerful man sneaking around the White House snatching three-minute quickies with a bewitched groupie. Sexually the affair was utterly unsatisfactory. They were never, for example, fully naked together. Bill comes across as a struggling addict, a tortured penitent, who vowed to give up adultery when he reached the White House but couldn't resist his baser nature. He's like a paedophile who joins the priesthood hoping that the church will purge and discipline him.

The play's central figure is Hillary, wounded, traduced and incensed by the man she wrongly believed had curbed his adulterous urges. She takes us on a brief tour of their relationship. From the start, he needed her more than she needed him. She twice rejected his proposals of marriage in the early 1970s. While he retreated to Little Rock to start his political career, she went to Washington to take the bar exams. She failed. He invited her to Arkansas where she sat for the bar and passed. So began a wonky political marriage.

Historically this play is fascinating. Psychologically it's full of astute and stimulating details. There are two fine performances here. Daniella Isaacs is convincing as the attractive, bubbly and faintly earnest Monica. Flora Montgomery gives us a strong sense of Hillary's anguish while also conveying her faults as a politician: she has the haughty rectitude of Mother Teresa and the public persona of an Abrams tank.

As a piece of theatre the rough-and-ready staging looks a little disorderly. And the action is marred by a saxophone player whose bursts of noise drown out the dialogue with the regularity of a broken car-alarm. This is a fine start for a production that can look forward to a long and fruitful life in America.

Music

Mozart's diminuendo?

Damian Thompson

Glenn Gould used to say that Mozart died too late rather than too early. The remark was intended to get up the nose of Mozart-lovers and it succeeded. What a nerve, coming from a pianist whose own reputation peaked in his early 20s, with his first Goldbergs, and was especially tarnished by his Mozart piano sonatas, which he butchered in order to demonstrate their supposed faults.

But still... Gould wasn't the first person to wonder if there was a slight diminuendo in Mozart's creativity in the couple of years before he died in 1791 at the age of 35.

The wild-eyed Greco-Russian Currentzis is the world's greatest conductor of Mozart

The last concerto, for clarinet, has a wistful, naive perfection that doesn't fire up the neural pathways to the same extent as say, the C minor Piano Concerto of 1786. The *Prussian* string quartets aren't as inventive as the earlier set dedicated to Haydn. *The Magic Flute* is glorious, but you don't find yourself thinking 'I can't believe he just did that', as you do at the end of Act Two of *Figaro* when Mozart keeps tossing characters into the ensemble in a head-spinning contrapuntal miracle.

The last piano concerto, No. 27 in B flat, really makes me worry that old Glenn had a point. The gentle finale is the work of a genius — but an annoying genius affecting child-like gemütlich simplicity. That's admittedly not a description that fits his last opera, *La clemenza de Tito*, but what a shame that its stretches of top-notch Mozart weren't saved

for a less arthritic vehicle.

And the very last composition, the Requiem? That's a tricky one, because it's not all by Mozart. Famously, the composer finished only the first movement and detailed sketches; these were orchestrated and missing movements composed by his pupil, Franz Süssmayr.

This leaves us with a cloudy cocktail of pure Mozart, Mozart-cum-Süssmayr and pure Süssmayr. We know where the manuscript breaks off — but not where Mozart ends, because the composer left verbal instructions (though the deathbed dictation in *Amadeus* is fiction). We can hear that some passages are clunky — once they've been pointed out by scholars. The trouble is that we detect the dreaded Süssmayr in different places, depending on which experts we've listened to.

To complicate matters, some editions of the Requiem prune Süssmayr to make him translucently Mozartian, while others try to delete him and fill the gaps with pastiche. Also, in 1962 the beginning of an 'Amen' fugue destined for the Requiem turned up. It lasts 20 seconds.

I've never enjoyed 'completions': it's impossible to forget that the authorship of the notes keeps changing and that often you're listening to two composers at once. Give me the plain sketch instead. When it comes to Mozart's Requiem, I've only been able to relax during the finished Introitus, whose melting discords are authentically spooky because we know who wrote them — 'a man staring into his own grave', to quote Jan Swafford.

But then, a couple of weeks ago, I heard a recording of the Mozart Requiem so radically different from any other that all the textual distractions seem irrelevant. It's from Siberia, of all places, recorded in Novosibirsk by the New Siberian Singers and the Russian period band MusicAeterna eight years ago and now re-issued by Alpha Classics.

These musicians have been drilled to within an inch of their lives by their wild-eyed Greek-Russian conductor, Teodor Currentzis, who sends them hurtling into the fugal passages expecting — and receiving — pinpoint accuracy. And 'pinpoint' really is the word: individual notes stab, twinkle and snap, creating a pointillist effect that reminds me of Webern, and especially Webern's arrangement of Bach's six-part *Ricercar*.

Critics are divided on the subject of Currentzis. That's their problem. He's the world's greatest conductor of Mozart. You may disapprove of tricks with close miking, but here the sound of strings snapping back onto the fingerboard adds a new terror to death. As Patrick Barbier notes in his accompanying essay, the Requiem's D minor is also the key in which fate catches up with Don Giovanni. No other recording makes that connection to such devastating effect, in the process demolishing the theory that Mozart had passed his peak before the end.

And Süssmayr? Currentzis not only leaves him in but plays his contributions with ferocious conviction. In this reading, the true mystery of Mozart's Requiem is how the pupil came to be so utterly possessed by the spirit of his master, and that's one I'm happy to live with.

Only once does the performance bow to the musicologists. Currentzis gives us Mozart's 25-bar 'Amen' fragment, uncompleted. But there's no sudden silence. Instead there's a noise that sounds like the soft rattle of a thurible or the bells of a funeral carriage. Perhaps it's a sleigh-bell stick. I don't care. It's a desperately sad moment: a gap in the music that leaves us staring into Mozart's lost grave. And he stares back.

Cinema

Home is where the heartbreak is

Deborah Ross

Custody
15, Key cities

Custody is both social realism and a thriller and it's terrific. It is smart, beautifully acted, never crass about the subject in hand (domestic abuse), and is one of those films that will have you totally gripped while you'll also be longing for it to end, as it's so unbearably tense. I swear my heart as good as stopped several times. It's written and directed by Xavier Legrand, who handles both genres with supreme elegance. Or, to put it another way, it's like a Ken Loach film that's been hijacked by Stephen King, but seamlessly. ('Mind if I have a go, Ken?', 'Be my guest, Steve'.)

This is Legrand's second film after *Just Before Losing Everything* (2013), which was only 30 minutes long, but earned him an Oscar nomination. It followed Miriam (Léa Drucker), a wife fleeing from her violent and controlling husband, Antoine (Denis Ménochet). Domestic terrorism is reprised here, as are the characters, and the cast is the same, but it isn't necessary to have seen the first film. You'd just know who to believe, unless Antoine has truly changed? Could he have? Violent men are always great manipulators and, here, Legrand uses the same mechanism to manipulate us too. Smart, like I said.

Custody, which won the Silver Lion at Venice, opens in the social realist register with Miriam and Antoine sitting across from the family law judge who will now decide on custody of Julien (Thomas Gioria), their 12-year-old son. (They also have an older daughter, but as she's about to turn 18, she's of legal age, so spared this ordeal.) Miriam says Antoine is a monster, in effect, but she's timid and not that forceful. Julien has written a letter saying he wants nothing to do with his father, which the judge reads aloud. But Antoine acts nice as pie, lays on the charm. He is a loving father, he insists. Hasn't he left his job and moved so as to be near his son? Because Miriam has never pressed charges, so cannot 'prove' her claims against Antoine, and because the judge has not seen *Just Before Losing Everything*, she awards Antoine weekend visitation rights. Oh boy. But maybe — maybe — it will be OK this time? There. There, it's happening again.

This is a film that exploits domestic violence as a premise but it isn't exploitative. No physical violence is shown, so it's not as if you are forced to sit through Miriam getting punched in the face or anything. This isn't *Nil by Mouth* or *What's Love Got to Do With It* or any of those. It's all about the fear; the fear women and children have to live with in these circumstances. Nothing is spelled out, but we understand. We understand much about Antoine simply by the way his parents behave around him, for example. And

Custody is like a Ken Loach film hijacked by Stephen King – and it's terrific

we understand the importance of Miriam's address being kept secret… but will Julien be able to prevent his father wheedling it out of him? The scenes between Julien and Antoine are as unbearably painful as they are unbearably tense.

The suspense builds, but apart from the final moments perhaps, which are pure Stephen King, it is never melodramatic. There isn't even any soundtrack music to get in the way. Instead, it's accentuated everyday noises (car indicators; the intercom; a lift) as Legrand keeps it tethered to what feels like the real world and a woman desperately trying to think what to do for the best — how do you do that? How do you protect your family from such a man? — while he veers from rage to self-pity and back again. Both lead performances are outstanding. Drucker brings vulnerability to Miriam, but also strength, while Ménochet is menacing, but naturalistically so, rather than cartoonishly, and you do get where his character is coming from. He doesn't have a problem. It's just that everyone else is plotting against him.

The film isn't flawless. For instance, you will wonder why Miriam hasn't ever pressed charges. And when Antoine arrives to stay with his parents, and happens to unpack a hunting rifle from his boot, you know this has to be Chekhov's gun. But the tension is superb. My knuckles went pure white and have yet to return to full colour, I swear.

NOTES ON…

Long-distance walking

By *Mark Mason*

Long-distance walking is all the rage these days. There are all-nighters staged by charities, for instance the annual MoonWalk in London, which raises funds to fight breast cancer: participants of both sexes walk marathon and half-marathon routes wearing bras. The outfits might have changed, but when it comes to foot-slogging, long-distance has a long history.

Charles Dickens liked a nocturnal ramble. He did it to combat sleeplessness, and on one particular night in October 1857 walked the 30 miles from his house in Tavistock Square to his country home in Kent. In the essay Night Walks he describes passing Bethlehem Hospital (the psychiatric institution from which we get the word 'bedlam'), and wondering how different its inhabitants were from the rest of us: 'Are not the sane and the insane equal at night as the sane lie a dreaming?' At dawn Dickens would head for a railway station to watch the mail come in. Only when daylight appeared would he feel tired enough to go home and sleep.

Many writers use walking for inspiration. Thoreau said that 'the moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow'. It isn't just writers, either — Erik Satie composed his music while walking, often at night, and when Paris's streetlamps were blacked out during the first world war he found it difficult to work.

GETTY IMAGES

Pace and quiet: walking can be therapeutic

Another motivation is money. During the 18th and 19th centuries Britain enjoyed a boom in 'pedestrianism', the undertaking of long-distance walks for wagers. Originally aristocrats pitted their footmen against each other (please don't let Jacob Rees-Mogg read this — he might get ideas).

But then along came people who were prepared to do the legwork themselves. In 1788, Foster Powell walked 100 miles in 21 hours, 35 minutes. One of the most celebrated pedestrians was Captain Barclay, who in 1809 walked 1,000 miles in 1,000 hours for 1,000 guineas. That was one mile (the same one, laid out on Newmarket Heath), once every hour from 1 June to 12 July. A crowd of 10,000 turned up to watch. In 1864 Emma Sharp of Bradford copied the feat. People threw red hot coals in her path and tried to trip her up, and for the last two days she carried a pistol for protection. When she finished her supporters roasted a celebratory ox.

Several years ago, hearing of someone who'd taken seven hours to run the London marathon, I thought: 'I could walk it in that.' So one autumn day I tried. You always hear about average walking pace being four miles an hour — it's nonsense. You really have to motor to achieve that, and I only just completed the course in the seven hours. Later, for a book, I walked the whole London Underground system overground. Up to 20 miles, I found, gives you a real buzz. Between 20 and 30 you start to come back down, and much beyond 30 is a real struggle. My longest day's trek was 39.5 miles. It would have been over 40 if you could walk to Heathrow Terminals 2 & 3: it's the only Tube station to which you can't.

Perhaps the most bizarre long-distance walk was accomplished by Albert Speer, who during his time in Spandau prison did more than 2,000 laps of the garden to simulate a walk from Berlin to Heidelberg. Fellow prisoner Rudolf Hess suggested he follow it up with a walk 'to' Asia. Speer refused — it would have meant passing through several Communist countries.

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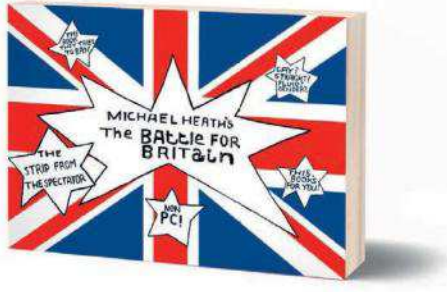

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Unfortunately, technology is a bit like Hitler: it doesn't know when to stop
— Rory Sutherland, p61

LIFE

High life
Taki

When poor old battered Odysseus landed on Circe's island having lost all his ships (except his flagship) when he tangled with the Laestrygonians (their king liked to eat Greek flesh and swallowed up most of his crews, yummy) Circe — witch, sorceress and goddess in her own right — turned the few survivors into swine, except for Odysseus, whom she wanted for some old-fashioned hanky-panky. If she were around today she would most probably be the first American female president.

Odysseus serviced her rather well and stayed in her palace for a year. He also used the 'moly', the antidote Hermes had given him in the form of a magic herb that turned pigs back into men. When Circe realised that Odysseus was not just a dumb shipwrecked schmuck, she played nice, although kindness was not an every day occurrence in her island of Aeaea. But unlike some hardcore feminists of today, Circe developed a soft spot for Odysseus and told him how to get to the underworld and then on to Ithaca and his family. If the kindness towards Odysseus got out, however, I don't think she'd crack the glass ceiling and make it to the White House. Hate right now is much more important than love.

Circe came to mind after reading that an American woman novelist has recast the goddess as a very nice girl, a hero in her own right, the type you'd like to bring home to your mother. American women do not particularly like to be considered second best, yet Circe was just a pit stop of one year in the hero's ten-year peregrinations. No longer. Madeline Miller's novel (one I do not plan to read incidentally) places Circe as a sort of avenging angel. In an interview Ms Miller said the following: 'Circe as a character is the embodiment of male anxiety about female power.' Now she tells us. Why that arch phony Homer, how dare he lead us astray all these 3,000 years. It was all about female power all along and how we men are scared shitless of them.

La Miller has perfect timing. She reads the mood of the culture and writes accordingly. About seven years ago, when being gay became de rigueur among the bien pensants, she wrote her first anti-classic about the romance between Achilles and Patroclus. Dress designers, hairdressers, Hollywood types, closeted sailors, TV writers, book reviewers, Condé Nast journalists and others of that ilk all went bananas. Why make war when you can stay in your tent and bugger each other? Back home where it all began, we have never accepted the Achilles-Patroclus friendship as anything but that. But the drop the soap in the shower crowd says it ain't necessarily so. Too much time in the tent and under the sheets makes Achilles and Patroclus naughty boys. La Miller knew how to catch the attention of the tres bien pensants. I wonder what she will write next? We now need transgender types, and Troy besieged by Greeks can provide opportunities galore.

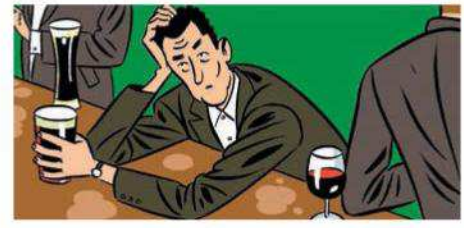
What got to Ms Miller was that Homer, well known as a male chauvinist pig among us Greek chauvinist pigs, had Circe kneeling and cowering before Odysseus and then gave him some nooky as a conciliatory gesture. I agree. Only a backward Greek could think like that. Ms Miller went to Brown, so if you're planning to send your brat to an American university, don't forget Brown. The brat might write another classic, how Jesus Christ was a woman, after all. It's bound to be a bestseller in the Islamic world.

It simply doesn't pay to be male anymore. I wish I'd been born a girl

There are ill-informed people who insist one should not paraphrase the classics. Balderdash! Get to it, girls. Men are bad, bad, bad, women are good, good, good, and there's money to be made. Extortion, too, can be profitable. I don't know about London, but here in New York men are running scared. Lawyers and private eyes are employed against an upswing of false accusations and blackmail. Rich men in particular are the targets. The latter are being advised not to apologise because an apology now is an admission of guilt. The #MeToo movement has given baseless claims more teeth, according to a gumshoe by the name of Herman Weisberg. 'If you're accused by somebody by email, do not apologise,' advises Sam Spade. 'It's an admission of guilt.'

My, my. What's a poor little Greek boy to do? Actually I know exactly what to do. I'm going to have a sex change. Safety first, as they say in school. It simply doesn't pay to be a male any longer. At least over in these parts. Take for example my sexual harassment suit against the ladies of *The Spectator*. My lawyers, Epstein, Epstein and Goldfarb had assured me it was a slam dunk. A judge thought otherwise and threw it out. Now my lawyers are suing me for nonpayment although they had taken my case on a contingency basis. I wish I had been born a girl.

Low life
Jeremy Clarke



A pair of anti-terrorism officers watched us check through into the boarding lounge. They stood behind the easyJet woman and took us in as we came through. One was about 30, the other about 40; both hard as nails. The younger did the Speedy Boarders; the other the common herd. What was remarkable about them, apart from their being there at all, was their Zen-like stillness and the slow economy of their eye movements. The check-in desk was a maelstrom of anxiety and pocket fumbling and the easyJet woman was working both queues like an acrobat. And there, just beyond, were these two very still individuals who appeared to be more in tune with the spirit world rather than with the information being relayed from their own eyes and ears. As I passed by them, my person, I felt, was being scrutinised chiefly on an extra-sensory level. There was nothing airy-fairy about these gentlemen's faces, however, which stated clearly that their mediumistic gifts could be backed up at short notice by a supplementary propensity for state-sanctioned violence.

Almost as remarkable to my mind was the cut and quality of their plain clothes, footwear and hair. These were no low-paid state functionaries. Seen from behind, the width of their upper backs, outlined by the superfine cashmere wool, told of a professional level of fit-

ness, athleticism and strength. These days, the various kinds of security officers one notices everywhere seem to be either fat or elderly. Capably fit, well-paid, highly intelligent, highly motivated-looking anti-terrorism officers like these were a bit of a shock, though a reassuring one. 'What is strength,' asked Milton, 'without a double share of wisdom?'

But was I perhaps getting carried away by this intuitive face reading? Was it in fact a prelude to insanity? I had to ask the question because the man in the aisle seat one row in front, other side, about 60 years of age, brutal haircut, bullet head, white laughter lines in a tanned face, was to my mind without doubt an old-school London gangster. I knew it simply by looking at the face and instantly recognising that humorous, gentlemanly, renegade air. But in this case the association wasn't intuitive, it was genetic. I've known them. I've worked with them. I've lived with them. I've loved them. And I know their style. And if this wasn't one, I'd have been very surprised.

The French air traffic controllers were on strike again, but only some of them, and only for a few hours.

So although we were boarded and the aeroplane doors were closed, we wouldn't be taking off for at least an hour and a half. We heard this from the captain's mouth. Speaking into a hand-held microphone, he stood before us (next to the toilet) so that we could see for ourselves how transparent he was, and how nakedly sincere was his apology, and when he'd finished apologising we showed our appreciation for his levelling with us in person with a smatter of applause. Meanwhile, he said, his cockpit door would remain open and if anybody wanted to venture forward for a chat or a glance over the controls they would be made most welcome.

The gangster had the row of three seats all to himself — the only person on the plane to have that luxury — and he was therefore able to open his *Daily Telegraph* to it's full extent. He read it in about 15 minutes. Then he stood up and went forward to the cockpit, where he had a long chat with the captain, perhaps as one type of aristocrat of labour to another. Later, when we were in the air and the drinks trolley came round, he ordered a half bottle of champagne and drank it modestly, as though it were a staple.

At Nice airport, the passport control officer had an anti-terrorism officer watching closely over his shoulder. This one was impressive also. He was a tall, gangling, 40-year-old skinhead with pale grey irises on bulging eyeballs. They bulged so far out of their sockets you could see almost all of them. Perhaps it was a medical condition. He was too tall to stand upright in the passport booth and there was no seat so he clung on to the ceiling with one hand and sort of hung there like a furious lemur. Twice I tried to look him in the eye and twice I recoiled immediately.

Then I was out through the sliding doors like a game-show contestant: one of the first to emerge among the meeters and greeters. A black-suited chauffeur stepped forward to intercept me. Monumental shoulders, a four-inch scar from the corner of his mouth to his ear. 'Excuse me, but are you off the Bristol flight?' he said in a hoarse cockney voice. 'He's right behind me,' I said.

Real life

Melissa Kite

'How could you forget to get on the train?' asked the keeper. 'I can understand how you forgot to get off the train, but how were you standing on the platform waiting for another train to go back the other way, and the train came but you forgot to get on it?'

I had been on my way from Victoria to Clapham Junction. The keeper had rung to say he was popping in to let the dogs out and did I want them fed?

I was telling him no thanks, as I would be on the train to Guildford in a few minutes. But as I was sitting in my seat saying this, the train was pulling into Clapham Junction, the doors were opening to let passengers off, and then the train was moving away again.

So many things aren't right that I wouldn't know where to begin or end

In other words, in the time it took me to say, 'Don't worry, I've got everything under control', I was trapped on a non-stop train to East Croydon with nothing to do but listen to the worst ever train announcement: 'If you see something that isn't right, text British Transport Police and we'll sort it. See it, say it, sort it!'

This esoteric message always makes me want to self-harm because I can see so many things that aren't right I wouldn't know where to begin such a text, much less end it.

Can you even send a text that long? How much would it cost? But of course, I spent the pointless journey from Clapham to East Croydon composing the text I wanted to send.

Broadly, I wanted to bring to the attention of the authorities pretty much everything I'd seen from the moment I got up that morning, from the unfixed potholes in the flooded roads, to the rude, horrible people everywhere, including those huge, loud, self-obsessed women pushing prams into train gaps while on the phone, not caring if their baby dies a horrific death on the track so long as they can tell their friend about the top they've just bought from TK Maxx.

None of that is right. And that's before we get to the issue of the story in the news being about a man of 78 driven from his home for fighting off two intruders who were burgling his house. That's not right. And nor are the poo bags dropped on the ground or hung from trees. I wish the primitive lifeforms who do such things nothing but ill. I hope there is such a thing as karma and they come back as fish choking to death in a stretch of the ocean full of poo bags.

But most of all, these smarmy security announcements on trains aren't right. 'If you see something that isn't right…' It's a cheek, isn't it?

The idea that the authorities are going to sort something that isn't right because we are telling them about it, I would say, is a huge kick in the teeth, considering what really happens when you try to report something that isn't right — either they point the finger at the person who is complaining, or they open a file then close it a day later due to lack of evidence.

If they are seriously suggesting they want us to report activity or individuals that might be terror-related, I say they need to get a grip and go out and find an ethnically balanced cross-section of terror suspects themselves. Don't be asking us to do it.

Obviously, however, while composing such a text, I almost forgot to get off at East Croydon. I remembered at the last moment and then stood waiting on the opposite platform for the train to go back the other way. I called the keeper for a chat to pass the time, and while I was on the phone, somehow failed to get on it.

The train came, stopped short of where I was standing then moved off again. 'Short train,' said the guard when I asked. 'Yes, that one's always a short one,' he mused, philosophically.

I waited again and a longer train came which I managed to get on. No sooner was I in my seat than the smarmy voice started again: 'If you see something that isn't right…'

The rain, I thought. The dismal buildings, the pointless rules, the monotony, the idea that we are all just going to put up with this

Little Bo-Peeps

until… For goodness sake, I told myself, stop it or you will never get off at Clapham Junction. So I stood by the door waiting.

I managed to get on to the train for Guildford. 'If you see something that isn't right…' came the announcement.

I looked out the window, but a train had pulled up next to us and all I could see was the reflection staring back.

The turf
Robin Oakley

William Haggas's Addeybb heralded the opening of the Flat season by winning the Lincoln Handicap on 24 March but I find it hard to engage with racing that isn't over obstacles until the excitement of this weekend's Grand National is over. That said, recent devastation of the jumping programme by Britain's monsoon season and the improved quality of all-weather racing, particularly Lingfield's Good Friday championships, has lately given me a new interest in the contests taking place on fibresand, Tapeta and Polytrack surfaces at Lingfield, Newcastle, Chelmsford, Wolverhampton, Southwell and Kempton Park.

Kempton's card on Saturday provided frantic finishes aplenty and you couldn't help but feel that sap-stirring sense of renewal as ten wide-eyed two-year-olds, only four of whom had seen a racecourse before, tiptoed and skittered their way inquiringly around the parade ring before the EBF Novice Stakes. One handler whistled softly to his charge to calm him on this first day of school and jockeys vaulting into the saddle were mostly quick to give the youngsters a reassuring pat or two.

It began well for me too: prior experience is often the key to these contests and nobody produces sharper, fitter two-year-olds than David Evans, the Sid James lookalike who trains in glorious countryside beneath the Black Mountains near Abergavenny. Noting that his Lihou had finished fourth first time out in the Brocklesby on the first day of the Flat I looked no further and was nicely rewarded at 5-1 when Lihou, under Fran Berry, surged past Mick Channon's Kinks in the final furlong to win by a comfortable head. 'He's a nice sort of horse,' said the winning trainer, who has another 30 two-year-olds readying at Ty-Derlwyn Farm. His operation doesn't have massive spending money and he declared, 'It's nice to get an early two-year-old. I have to get in before the big battalions come out, though mind you it takes some of them six months to do so.' Warming to his theme as he took a swig from a bottle of non-alcoholic Cobra in an inside pocket, Dave Evans added, 'We should have two-year-old races in February. There are just not enough of them. People criticise the likes of Mick Channon for running horses too often but you have to run two or three sometimes just to give them the experience.' In that context Evans's other two-year-old in that novice race, Disruptor, finished an eye- catching fifth under his old ally John Egan after being slowly away. Don't miss him next time out.

Lingfield's all-weather championships were dominated this year by French raiders, three of whom carted first prize money back across La Manche. Hunaina, the sole French entry at Kempton, was therefore not surprisingly backed down to 7-2 co-favourite in the Snowdrop Stakes. Trained by Henri-François Devin and ridden by Alexis Badel, Hunaina could be called the winner two furlongs out and stayed on strongly to win comfortably. When I asked Alexis if this was his first ride in Britain he revealed that he had enjoyed four or five, including a previous victory at Haydock for Mick Channon. They are courteous these French jockeys: 'Would you be good enough to excuse me,' he declared before breaking away from our conversation to accept his prize.

This stage of the Flat season is all about expectation and so I looked back over the records of the six two-year-olds who had contested the Kempton novice event the previous April. The 6-4 winner then, Paul Cole's Plunger, has had just two runs since, coming second and third. The runner-up Dragon's Teeth, then trained by Jo Hughes, has endured no fewer than 17 appearances, most of them for subsequent French trainer Romain le Gal at places like Saint Malo and Deauville and including victories at Compiegne Saint-Cloud and Chantilly. The third, Quick Skips Lad, then trained in Lambourn by Stan Moore, also headed later for France and won once at Le Croise Laroche for David Windif, with his old rival Dragon's Teeth second.

The fourth last year was Kodiac Express, trained by Mike Murphy. He won a race at Nottingham at 3-1 and in 12 more runs has six times been second. The fifth Afterthisone, who debuted at 50-1 a year ago for Robin Dickin, has mostly started since at 66-1 or 100-1, never finishing higher than ninth. One time he even refused to race — perhaps demoralised by his daunting odds.

Heavenly Pulse, sixth and last on his Kempton debut for Ann Duffield, was unruly at the start and badly outpaced round the turn. His trainer was told he couldn't race again until passing a stalls test and retribution swiftly followed: he was gelded four days later although fifth of eight is the best he has managed since. That's 53 runs between them for just five victories. At this time of year owners and trainers see only potential swans. Some alas achieve only a row of duck eggs.

Bridge
Janet de Botton

I'm not saying that I want 'She played bridge for England' on my tombstone — but then again…

Last weekend, due to the freakish weather at the beginning of March, my team was selected to play the second weekend of the Camrose Trophy in Dublin, as the Allfrey team, who won the place to represent England against the other home countries, couldn't make the rearranged date. The Hinden team, who played first, had left us in the lead and as my first teacher, David Parry, said in his meltingly sweet email to me, 'Don't screw up. Nobody remembers who came second.' We all played our hearts out under the wonderful captaincy of Alan Mould, and won the Trophy back for England! More exciting than that I haven't experienced.

Glyn Liggins, an old hand at International bridge level, earned us a big swing with his play of this hand against Wales:

Dealer South **All Vul**

North: ♠ A 5 ♥ 10 4 ♦ K 9 6 4 ♣ A 9 7 3 2

West: ♠ K Q J 10 8 7 6 3 ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ VOID ♣ 6

East: ♠ 4 ♥ J 8 6 5 3 ♦ A Q J 7 5 2 ♣ Q

South: ♠ 9 2 ♥ A K ♦ 10 8 3 ♣ K J 10 8 5 4

West	North	East	South
			1♣
4♠	dble	pass	5♣
All pass			

West led ♠K which Glyn took with dummy's Ace. He drew trump (1-1) and cashed the Ace and King of hearts, eliminating that suit. Feeling rather pleased with the way things were going he confidently advanced the ♦8 (check out the pips) and… ouch! But as every boy scout knows giving up is not an option. East took his Jack — but was caught in the famous double endplay: he exited a heart (best) but declarer ruffed in dummy and discarded ♦3 in hand. Now the stage was set — he advanced the ♦10 which East won with his Queen (see the importance of discarding the ♦3 now??) but was endplayed again. He had the uncomfortable choice of giving another ruff and discard or establishing dummy's ♦King. Contract made. Well done everyone.

Chess

Class club

Raymond Keene

The annual Hamilton-Russell competition for London Clubs has been won by the Royal Automobile Club, with the Marylebone Cricket Club in close contention. On Tuesday 17 April, the awards ceremony will take place in the Mountbatten Room of the Royal Automobile Club, Pall Mall, combined with the annual dinner for notables of the contesting teams. It is the premier annual social event of the London chess scene.

This week, a game won by Dominic Lawson from this year's closely run event.

Lawson-Shankland: Hamilton-Russell Cup 2018; Scotch Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 c3 dxc3 5 Bc4 cxb2 This is certainly playable but capturing so many pawns is dangerous. 5 ... d6 and 5 ... Nf6 are safer lines. **6 Bxb2 Bb4+ 7 Nc3 Nf6 8 e5** Acting immediately in the centre. After 8 0-0 0-0 it is hard for White to generate much play for the pawn as 9 Nd5 is comfortably met by 9 ... Be7. (see diagram 1) **8 ... Ng4** This allows White to generate a useful initiative. Better is the natural central counter 8 ... d5, which is based on the tactical point 9 exf6 Qxf6! when although Black is a piece down, he will regain it due to the double threats against the Bc4 and Nc3. The game Stein-Spassky, Tallinn 1959 continued 10 0-0 Bxc3 11 Bxc3 Qxc3 12 Qe2+ Be6 13 Bxd5 0-0 and was soon drawn. **9 0-0 0-0** Unsurprisingly, 9 ... Ngxe5 is too greedy. After 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Nd5! Nxc4 12 Bxg7! White wins. **10 Nd5 d6 11 Nxb4 Nxb4 12 exd6 Qxd6** 12 ... cxd6 is safer. **13 Qb3 13 ... Be6** Black is anxious to complete development, but this is a losing blunder. 13 ... c5 14 Rad1 Qb6 is playable for Black although after 15 Rfe1 White is very active. **14 Rad1 Bxc4** After 14 ... Qb6 White can pick off one of the vulnerable knights with 15 Bxe6 fxe6 16 Rd4, creating a fork along the fourth rank. **15 Qxc4 Qh6 16 Qxg4** With a clear extra piece, White is winning easily. **16 ... Nc6 17 Rd5 f5 18 Rxf5 Rxf5 19 Qxf5 Rf8 20 Qd5+ Kh8 21 Ng5 Nd8 22 Re1 c6**

Diagram 1

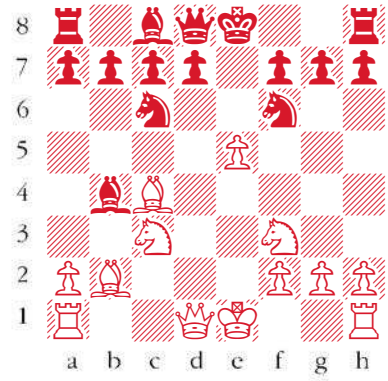
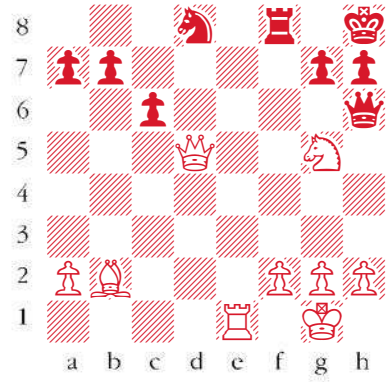


Diagram 2



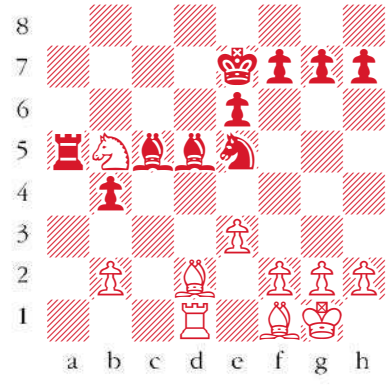
White now finishes in style (see diagram 2). **23 Nf7+! Nxf7 24 Qxf7 Rd8** 24 ... Rxf7 25 Re8+ mates, as does 24 ... Rg8 25 Re8. **25 Qe8+ Rxe8 26 Rxe8 checkmate**

Overall results from the Hamilton-Russell Cup 2017/18 were as follows:

1. Royal Automobile Club 14
2. Marylebone Cricket Club 13
3. Oxford & Cambridge Club 11
4. Oriental and East India Clubs 8
5. Athenaeum Club 7
6. Chelsea Arts Club 6
7. Reform Club 5
8. Hurlingham Club 4
9. National Liberal Club 4

PUZZLE NO. 501

White to play. This is from Bluebaum-Anand, Grenke 2018. Anand has been having a rough time in the elite Grenke tournament. What was the subtle move that allowed his opponent to create intolerable pressure in this endgame? Answers via email to victoria@spectator.co.uk by Tuesday 17 April. 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 Nxa7
Last week's winner Martin Axworthy, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Competition

Poison pen

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3043 you were invited to provide a short story inspired by the Salisbury poisonings.

Ian McEwan, a writer who is fascinated by spying, was asked recently on the *Today* programme how he would begin a novel inspired by the current confrontation with Russia. The image that comes to mind, he said, was of a lion hunting a pack of deer-like creatures in a herd. 'There's one that's trailing behind — too old, too young, perhaps, or has just left the EU…' We find ourselves, McEwan said, back in that strange Cold War world of brazen lies. Many of you clearly agreed with him, judging by the regular appearances of George Smiley in the entry.

John O'Byrne, Terence Horrocks, Roger Phillips, Bill Greenwell and Joe Houlihan all put in strong performances. But they were pipped by the prizewinners, printed below, who are rewarded with £25 each. The bonus five pounds goes to Alan Millard.

Sid Swain awoke in his squalid bedsit and, without washing, threw on his dirty rags and fried an egg in the greasy pan. He gagged on the first mouthful but still ate it. His immune system had learned to cope with rotten food. Having previously replenished his mobile snack bar with produce salvaged from supermarket waste bins, he made for his usual lay-by on the city outskirts to await his customers.

Later, on seeing the newspaper photographs of the poisoned pair, he remembered them stopping at the lay-by. He had piled tomato ketchup on their hot dogs to disguise the taste. Knowing the police were eager to learn of their whereabouts during a missing 40 minutes he was tempted to phone them but, as the investigations were well under way, he decided against it. Everyone believed the Russians were to blame. It was best to let sleeping dogs lie.
Alan Millard

Smiley sighed and slowly cleaned his glasses. He contemplated another breach of security in the Circus. An ex-Russian agent had been attacked in this country and he was sure that it was not the Russians. The episode jarred; it felt wrong. He knew it was an insider but who?

No one in the Circus shopped at Sainsbury's or went anywhere near popular pizza restaurants. It was unthinkable. After all, they might have seen a child or been exposed to a Margherita. He put his head in his hands. Who did he know who would take a risk like that?

Then he remembered. Good God, hadn't Hugh Chetwynd once had a life? Buried in his file Smiley found a footnote stating he had once got some beers in and watched a DVD. Grim-faced, Smiley reached for the phone. This man was dangerous. He had to be stopped.
Paul Carpenter

Over tea and biscuits he told me the story. In the beginning it had been easy. The memes on social

media; the crestfallen dog beside the empty biscuit tin, the comely kitten peeping from the devastated Christmas tree, seemingly endless variations and each with the same caption: 'The Russians did it.' Slowly, slowly he watched it build until it became a catchphrase, a beloved cliché, gradually replacing 'oops' as the response to any embarrassing accident.

When the Kalashnikovs were poisoned in the sushi bar and the pictures began to circulate, the Russians got the blame by tabloid default and now here we were on the brink of war. He sat back in his chair, rubbing his hands together gleefully.

'But who, then?' I asked. He just grinned.

'You?' His grin grew. 'But — why?'

He shrugged. 'The Devil made me do it. Now drink your tea.'

Ann Drysdale

All genuine news events resemble one another, but each fake news event is fake in its own way. Into which category Dimitri Nikolaevich Anakaramaskolnikov's brutal murder of Alyona and Lizaveta Ivanovna and Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov belonged was a matter that Porfiry Sherlovich Columbov was determined to resolve. His patience was growing thin. His train had been three days late due to an (alleged) suicide on the track. Desperate for a beetroot and cabbage borscht with potato dumplings, he was not in the best of moods.

'Dimitri Nikolaevich Anakaramaskolnikov, it is highly likely, highly probable, that you are responsible for the murders of Alyona and Lizaveta Ivano…'

'Highly likely, or highly probable, Porfiry Sherlovich? Which is it?' interrupted Dimitri Nikolaevich Anakaramaskolnikov. 'Are you sure the deaths weren't accidents? Couldn't they have simply bludgeoned themselves? How do you know it was me?'

Porfiry, sighing, replied simply: 'DNA on the axe handle.'

David Silverman

'*Fancy that film Liz mentioned?*' She shook her head. '*Russian; no way*.' A pity; he'd developed a taste for Zvyagintsev's work but he knew that look. No meant no, the same way she'd backed out of that new café when she'd seen a samovar behind the counter. '*It's only decoration*,' he'd pleaded; you'd think he'd suggested poison the way she'd glared. '*Shostakovich won't hurt you*,' he'd said when Radio 3 trailed a concert with a few bars of the *Leningrad*, and she'd leapt to unplug the set. '*You can't be too careful*,' she'd muttered, washing her hands in running water. An unopened bottle of vodka went down the sink — '*Just in case*.' He still writhed with embarrassment after she'd refused a seat on the Tube, all because the neighbouring commuter was reading Chekhov. '*Might as well suggest swimming with sharks*,' he growled. She nodded: '*Much safer. Tomorrow, then?*'

D.A. Prince

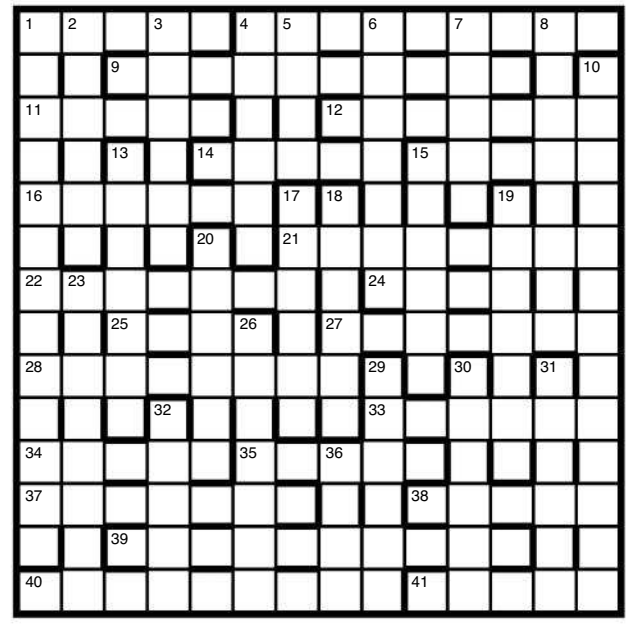
NO. 3046: FIRST AND LAST

You are invited to supply a poem beginning with the last line of any well-known poem and ending with its first line, the new poem being on a different subject altogether. Please email entries of up to 16 lines to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 25 April.

Crossword 2354: Pioneering

by Columba

Two unclued lights form a three-word phrase. Clues in italics are cryptic indications of partial answers; in each case, the indicated part must do as instructed by the thematic phrase to create the full answer to be entered in the grid. Resulting entries (two of which consist of two words each) are defined by unclued lights.



Across

9 Unravelling clue, I found measure of capacity (10, two words)
11 Old smuggler in hat offloading barrels (5)
12 Left capital protected by great force, going west in boat (7)
14 Singular brilliant spire (5)
16 Florid colour reflected in precious metal (6)
21 Calm in the morning aboard shallow vessel (8)
22 Item for fishing in Scotland, favourite around remote north (7, two words)
24 Knight errant one found in element (4)
25 Island united for demigod (4)
28 Troy? Ruined realm in end (8)
34 Bundle in past split by stick? Not good (5)
35 Earl delayed cheer (5)
37 Clothes to wash? Note several, first off (7)
38 Slow movements from primordial entity (5)
39 *Hard time, right away*
40 *Echo following mantra*
41 Insects around pole (5)

Down

1 One old treaty, omitting chapter in book, not rejected by body (13)
3 Sour liquid raised storm indeed (6)
4 Carter's assistant and agent pitch up (6)
5 Bitterness in club without women (4)
6 *Exhibition's opening*
7 Windows in small chambers lacking length (5)
8 Pearly king entering on cue as arranged (8)
10 Fabric seen at night is different (13, two words)
13 *Centre of trade*
15 Bring forward stage in festival (6)
17 Real gold around court above middle of wall (6)
18 Improvise with strip of pasta (6)
19 Comprehensive point at heart of sport brought up (7)
23 Love poet nearly smothered (8)
26 *Dislike doffing hat*
29 System joined with trough (6)
30 Arrival, see, in port on time (6)
31 Learn about decay in tropical plant (6)
32 General course for singer (5)
36 Long almanac helpful to some extent (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 30 April. 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 2354, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name .....

Address .....

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Email .....

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SOLUTION TO 2351: TRIPLETS

Unclued lights associated with IRIS are: flowers (2, 11, 40), Greek goddesses (10, 16, 30), and parts of the eye (6, 12, 34).

First prize P. Taylor-Mansfield, Worcester
Runners-up Aidan Dunn, Newton Abbot, Devon; Derek Willan, Gosport, Hampshire

No Sacred Cows

I used to think I was smarter than my wife. Not anymore

Toby Young

According to new research published in *Advances in Physiology Education*, men tend to significantly overestimate their own intelligence whereas women only marginally overestimate theirs. The architect of this study, Katelyn Cooper, a doctoral student at Arizona State University, believes this helps explain why fewer women embark on PhDs in the life sciences and why there are fewer tenured female professors in STEM fields. She also thinks it partly explains why women are less likely to rise to the top of their chosen professions.

I'm not so sure about that, but first a *mea culpa*. I used to think I was smarter than my wife. However, after being married to Caroline for more than 16 years I'm finding it harder and harder to cling on to this illusion. For instance, she's much better than me at Scrabble. I initially told myself she was just lucking out, drawing better tiles than me, but that excuse had a limited shelf-life. I then thought it was because she'd had more practice than me. She had played it with her parents growing up, after all, and knew lots of fiendish little words like Qi. But over time, as I got more practice, that excuse began to fade too. I now refuse to play with her, saying I find Scrabble 'boring'. That also applies to Boggle and Bananagram and — surprise, surprise — any games that are a test of raw intelligence.

When we're watching anything on TV with a complicated plot I have to ask her to explain it

Another example: when we're watching anything on TV with a remotely complicated plot, such as *Broadchurch*, I constantly have to pause it and ask her to explain what's going on. It's now reached the point where she'll pretend she's lost interest in a series and leave me to watch it by myself, claiming she's 'tired' and 'going to bed'. But as often as not, when I go upstairs I'll discover her watching the same series on her laptop, away from her annoying husband. She's also a much faster reader than me. A few years ago, we tried to read the same books at the same time so we could talk about them together — proper, grown-up novels like *War and Peace*. It would be our own little book club. But we had to abandon that project when she kept finishing the books before I'd got to the end of the first chapter.

Predictably, it isn't just when it comes to IQ that I've had to revise my opinion about our respective abilities. When we first got married I was convinced I was a better driver than Caroline and worried about her taking the car out in case she had difficulty parking or misjudged the width of the vehicle and clipped the wing mirror. Sixteen years later, she's been involved in precisely one accident, whereas I ding the car roughly once a month. The last time was a couple of weeks ago when I was reversing out of a driveway in Reading — the repair bill was £450. It's reached the point where the kids refuse to get in the car if I'm driving.

Caroline gave up a career in the law to become a full-time mum when we had our first child and hasn't returned to work since. In light of the above, perhaps we'd be better off if it had been me who gave up journalism to look after the kids 15 years ago and Caroline had stayed in work. She'd probably be a senior partner at a City law firm by now. And I daresay some people reading this will think that, by assuming I was cleverer than Caroline, I damaged her self-esteem. That is, if it wasn't for her arrogant, sexist pig of a husband, Caroline might have had a meteoric career.

But here's the thing: Caroline says giving up work to care for the children was a *choice* she made, one she's never regretted, and I believe her. The problem with the sort of theories Katelyn Cooper has come up with to explain why women aren't better represented in STEM fields and at the top of the professions is that it assumes they're irreparably damaged by men's attitudes, that they lack the necessary agency to make rational decisions based on their own interests.

In fact, those choices should be respected and not belittled on the grounds that women are only electing to stay at home, or to become flight attendants rather than pilots, because of gender stereotypes, implicit bias and so on. International surveys of women's career choices have found that the more gender equality there is in a country, the *less* likely women are to go into STEM fields. That suggests the under-representation of women in those areas is a result of freely taken decisions, not prejudice. Maybe Caroline hasn't been 'damaged' by misogynistic, overbearing men. Perhaps she's just doing what she wants.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH

The Wiki Man

We're still waiting for the internet revolution

Rory Sutherland

At the risk of sounding like Jean Baudrillard, I would like to suggest that the internet revolution has not yet taken place.

So far, lots of very clever people have performed amazing feats of technical ingenuity. But for the most part our collective behaviour has so far failed to change enough to truly benefit us. Rather than making us freer, more relaxed and more efficient, in general everyone seems busier, more distracted and more tense.

Unfortunately, technology is a bit like Hitler: it doesn't know when to stop. No sooner has it annexed the Sudetenland than it starts invading Czechoslovakia. The world might be happier if Silicon Valley were put on a two-day week, to give us — and our social norms — time to catch up. Unless behaviour soon changes more significantly, we will have squandered digital technology's real potential to solve second-order problems: the housing shortage, say, or transport congestion, or the spiralling cost of education.

A lag between technological progress and behaviour change is only to be expected. Technological progress is at times very rapid and exponential, whereas changes in human behaviour follow a sigmoid curve: slow at first, then rapid, then hitting a plateau. I noticed this first-hand when the high-speed rail service opened in Kent ten years ago. Conventional wisdom would predict people would instantly switch to the new, faster line. It didn't work like that. For the first few years, alighting at Ebbsfleet station felt like *Bad Day at Black Rock*. Then suddenly it tipped. In the past five years usage has grown by 200,000 passengers a year, and the trains are packed. In time, growth will level off. (Virtually nothing in the human realm is linear, which is why extrapolating trends is so dangerous.)

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Most behaviours — and attitudes, too — follow this sigmoid path. The fall in drink-driving or smoking; the rise in divorce; attitudes to homosexuality; car use; mobile phone adoption; the craze for gin, the fashion for beards. I am certain vegetarianism will surge in popularity over the next 30 years: what is harder to predict is when the surge will happen and where it will peak. Humans are largely a social, mimetic species, and adopt behaviours more by diffusion than by individual calculation. Consider 'gluten intolerance' for proof of this.

But some step change is overdue in the patterns of working behaviour. In 1988 I had to go into the office to do almost anything. Now, other than talking to people face to face, there is nothing work-related which I cannot do at home. Yet people drudgingly travel into offices at the same time each day to do things that they could do anywhere — such as replying to emails or making phone calls.

In education, there is an interesting development called 'flipping the classroom'. Traditionally teachers talked at pupils during the day, setting them exercises as homework. The new approach aims to reverse this. You watch YouTube lectures for your homework, and do exercises in class (where the teacher is on hand to help). Mostly it seems to work well, since it frees time up for people to interact when they are together.

I recently tried an experiment which I recommend highly: 'flipping the office.' Other than for half an hour in the middle of the day, I refuse to use any technology in the office at all. Sometimes this means I go home at 4 p.m. and do emails on the train. If I have no one to meet, I travel in late. Or I work from home for one day a week and pack all phone calls and emails into that day. Granted, not everyone can do this. But if only 10 per cent of people started the trend, peak-time overcrowding could largely go away.

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DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED

Q. We were about to send off to the printers the invitation for our son's wedding (we agreed to do this bit) but now the prospective in-laws are asking for the use of the word 'with', as in 'You are invited to the marriage of Lady X with Mr Y'. We have noticed that 'with' is used in the marriage invitation of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle and understand that it conveys the implication that one party (the first named) is socially superior to the other. What should we think?
— Name and address withheld

A. My most highly placed observer declares that 'This is a highly royal usage which it would be common for a commoner to imitate.' If you are being rushed to printing, you could make the tactful request that you retain the more conventional 'to' by claiming that a much-loved ancestor of yours, a stickler for traditional form, always insisted on 'to' rather than 'with'. Would they mind if you honoured the wishes of this eccentric old boy as you can inexplicably sense his disapproval from beyond the grave?

Q. A godson has passed his training to be a doctor. However he's decided not to take the qualification further and has instead moved to Berlin 'to write', although a contemporary tells me that 'he isn't doing much except wearing polo necks and smoking'. Needless to say, his parents' opinions hold no sway, but for various reasons the boy has always been something of a fan of mine and, since I am personally acquainted with how rewarding a career in medicine can be (even in 2 018, when a third of doctors' priceless time must be spent on filling out pre-emptive paperwork), I feel strongly that I would like to intervene. What would be the most diplomatic path to take?
— Name and address withheld

A. You must make a subtle approach because today's young, being much more informed about technology, tragically assume they know better than their elders in general, even those they are fans of, about everything else too. He would be unlikely to take the advice even of Anthony Trollope, who recommended that if you want to write or paint, you should carry on with a day job and write or paint in your spare time. However, in The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham, *the biography by Selina Hastings, we learn how when Maugham himself qualified as a physician in 1905, he too decided to go and live in Europe and write instead. Only too late did it dawn on him that he could have 'written in the evenings'. Despite his success, he regretted giving up medicine for the rest of his life. He never forgot the fascination and fulfilment he had enjoyed during his training, which taught him such a great deal about human nature and inspired his first novel,* Liza of Lambeth. *Since Maugham was the same age as your godson when he made this wrong decision, send him this book. It is a page turner.*

Drink

Too much too young

Bruce Anderson

This April is the cruellest month, but not in the sense that Eliot intended. Memory and desire are mixed: memory for previous verdant seasons; aching desire for a new one. Instead, we appear to have permanent midwinter spring, with the emphasis on midwinter.

So this might seem to be absolutely the wrong time to drink rosé. Readers may be aware of my considered prejudice, that rosé works well south of Lyon as a wine to drink mid-morning with the last crumbs of croissant. But there is the Domaines Ott, whose pretensions and prices soar well above the ground level of normal Provençal plonk. I had some the other day, in the most depressing environment possible. 'The doors clap to: the pane is blind with showers.' It was as if the elements were sneering: 'You dare to drink rosé, in early April, in England? We'll learn you.'

The lesson failed. Clos Mireille, from Ott, was a prejudice diffuser. By any standards, this is a serious wine. It has plenty of fruit, but also structure and length. I drank a 2016. Though we were stopping short of infanticide, the wine was barely ready. I would like to taste it in future years, for the evolution will be interesting. As a food companion, it will stand up to something a lot more serious than croissant shards.

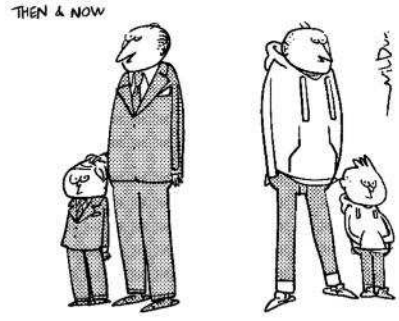
Youth and evolution: I have been hearing a lot lately about the 2005 clarets. There seems to be a consensus that anything much above Cru Bourgeois is too young to drink, and that to be ready for dinner, even the minor wines need decanting at breakfast. That said, there is no anxiety among the experts. A lot of the 1975s went from extreme youth to extreme old age without an intervening phase. No one thinks that the 2005s will suffer a similar fate. They are merely sleeping peacefully and will awaken joyfully. But they are not yet ready for a fairy prince with a corkscrew.

The 2005s are sleeping peacefully but are not ready for a fairy prince with a corkscrew

This was especially true of the Bahans Haut-Brion, as the second wine of Haut-Brion used to be named, until it was re-christened Le Clarence de Haut-Brion, after the great Clarence Dillon. I remember tasting the '05 in 2010, and deciding it was full of promise but needed another five years. It was already depressingly expensive. Last week, the promise was even more apparent, as was the need for time, as was the expense. The Bahans had been opened for two hours: not nearly long enough. It still needs another five years. And as for price: approaching £1,000 a case if you can find it.

Prices of that magnitude raise a philosophical question, hitherto avoided in this column. At what point does it become absurd to spend a lot of money on a case of wine? Suppose the alternative were a weekend in Venice, or a painting? Surely either would be preferable? I am told that because of the idleness of the modern housewife, addicted to her dishwasher, a late 18th-century Coalport dinner service is now as cheap as chips. How much wine would one of those be worth? There are two answers to that question. The first is tough-minded and sounds philistine: it depends on how rich you are. The second opens the casement to romanticism. We should not underestimate the cultural potency of a great wine. I have just helped to drink a 1995 Léoville Barton. A bottle like that trails clouds of glory. It acts as a communion wine, consecrating a mystical union between the drinkers and old high European civilisation.

There is one way of avoiding the relative value question: find good wines from a lesser year. I have been lucky enough to drink a number of 2004s recently. None disappointed. The Léoville Barton, the Pontet-Canet and the Batailley were excellent. Lesser names, jolly good — and they were all ready. To conclude: Domaines Ott in anticipation of summer — proper claret as a consolation for the season's delay.



When children dressed like their fathers. *When fathers dress like their children.*

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Around

Crooning is I think the word to describe what my husband was doing to the lyrics of a Beach Boys number. 'Round, round, get around, I get around,' he crooned ludicrously, for no one less like a Beach Boy than he, with his frayed tweed jacket cuffs, could be imagined. He was, however, right if he was implying that the boys from Hawthorne, California, were having their cake and eating it. Generally, where a choice is possible, Americans prefer *around* and the British prefer *round*. I can't get used to references to *All-Around Gymnastics*. What next, cricketing *all-arounders*?

Anyway, British English is suffering from prepositionitis, unable to come out with the correct preposition when it's needed. I have been complaining about *across* since I wrote about it here in 2011, and on Saturday I heard two absurd examples: an announcer on Radio 4 plugging coverage of the Commonwealth Games 'across the BBC' and the agreeable Bridget Kendall speaking of cotton in use 'across the globe'. If anything's *round*, one would have thought it was the globe. Yet I find that the Oxford English Dictionary has 12 quotations illustrating other words (since it has no separate entry for *across the globe*) which happen to include this phrase.

As for *around*, it thrives in some jargon-infested semantic wastelands in constructions that you and I never use: *issues around anger-management*, for example. It is more insidious when we hear it, not from emissaries of Human Resources, but from the lips of quite ordinary citizens. I should like to defend *about* from the encroachments of the invasive species *around*, specifically in a phrase like *about 300*. In *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, Jeremy Butterfield, the current curator, notes: 'British English tends to prefer *about* as a preposition meaning "approximately".' *Around* seems less bad with times: *around three o'clock*, perhaps because points on a clock face have areas *around* them. But repeated use in British newspapers of *around 40 per cent* or *around 20,000 Palestinians* has the cumulative effect of suggesting one is reading something American. It is hardly a nationalist point to expect British words for British readers.

— *Dot Wordsworth*