

THE SPECTATOR

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Quentin Letts

Never tease a Welshman
Rod Liddle

On French intellectuals
Agnès Poirier

The wrong Brexit

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Home truths

Much rot is spoken about how the young have it so bad. In fact, this generation is healthier, richer and better-educated than any before — as well as being better-behaved and more conscientious than their parents were. But the one area where they do struggle is in buying a house. The asset boom of recent years has disfigured the economy, sending property prices soaring and conferring vast wealth on pensioners while giving the young a mountain to climb. Home ownership rates stand at a 30-year low. And the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds in private rented accommodation has almost doubled in the last ten years.

This marks not just a dramatic socio-economic shift in a country that was once strongly associated with owning your own home. (Britain now has the fifth-lowest ownership rate in Europe.) It also represents the rapid growth of a significant new political constituency: people who were brought up in owner-occupied homes but who must now bring up their own children in rented ones.

For the Conservatives, whose success over the past century has owed a lot to their claim to be the party of home-ownership and aspiration, this poses an existential threat. Why would anyone want to support the party of property if they cannot see a way to acquire a property of their own?

Rising house prices were once an electoral asset. They made people feel richer and more likely to reward the government presiding over the market that brought them their capital gain. But now the situation has flipped and high house prices are a huge negative for young voters. If you are stuck in a rented flat, frustrated at your inability to afford your own home, the housing policies advanced by Jeremy Corbyn at last year's general election are far more appealing: a cap on rent rises, three-year minimum ten-

ancies and a licensing scheme that aims to drive rogue landlords out of business.

It is little use the Conservatives protesting that these policies will not work, that rent controls will lessen the availability of rented property and make it even harder to find a home. Those stuck renting are likely to conclude that the current system is at fault and any change which disfavors landlords will be an improvement. Capitalism will never appeal to those without any capital.

Nor is there any point in Conservatives arguing, as they sometimes do, that property ownership doesn't matter very much. It's

We now have 1.8 million families with children living in homes where they can never properly settle

true that some advanced countries manage quite happily with even lower rates of home-ownership than ours. In Germany, only 52.5 per cent live in owner-occupied housing, against 64.4 per cent here. But there, most people renting have the security of long-term tenure. In Britain, most tenancies last from six months to a year.

We now have 1.8 million families with children living in homes where they can never properly settle. They may have to move every few months: cots, baby bouncers and all. If they cannot find another local rental property they may have to take their children out of schools where they are doing well. This marks a huge change since the last time that property ownership rates were this low. Then, renters in both the private and social sectors largely had the right to stay in their homes for as long as they liked.

The solutions to this problem attempted by the current government and the Tory-led coalition which preceded it have been inadequate and counterproductive. George

Osborne's Help to Buy scheme enabled a few people to get on the housing ladder by forcing the taxpayer to underwrite their mortgages, but only at the cost of stimulating more house-price inflation, making things even tougher for the next generation. A policy of subsidising demand without increasing supply is doomed from the outset.

If the Conservatives are to maintain the reputation as the party of home-ownership which has served them so well then they are going to have to consider the kind of radical measures used in other countries where the housing market was targeted by international investors. Switzerland allows only bona fide residents to buy residential property in most cases. Jersey and Guernsey have parallel 'open' and 'local' markets which ensure most housing is bought by the people who live there. It would take only a very small reform to ensure that a proportion of new housing in Britain becomes subject to covenants ensuring it can only ever be bought by owner-occupiers.

As for rented housing, the government could do worse than simply to adopt some (not all) of Labour's policies. It would cost no public money to change the law so that in most cases tenants could look forward to a minimum of three years' security of tenure, with rents controlled for that duration.

There are Conservatives who will scoff at some of these proposals, seeing them as undue interference in the market. But our restrictive planning system ensures that housing in Britain is not a free market anyway. And those who stick to this line may soon wake up to find that the Conservative party has lost the younger generation for good and will never hold power again.

The Tories have two options: fix the housing market or lose the next election. It's time to choose.



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If pine martens were reintroduced to Wales, they'd almost certainly be forced to learn Welsh and charged with a hate crime if they demurred.
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Texas is beautiful and she is barren; corrupt and honourable. Whatever you want to say about her, she will supply abundant evidence
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Why, when we read and listen every day to so many heedless words and senseless tweets, should what Enoch Powell said not be analysed and seen in detail for what it is?
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Michael Moorcock is an English author of science fiction and fantasy who lives in Texas. He finds out what makes a true Texan on p. 32.

James Tooley, a professor of education at Newcastle and an expert on how the world's poorest people are educating themselves, writes about African schools on p. 23.

Agnès Poirier reviews a portrait of the French intellectual and his many failings on p. 34. She is the author of *Touché*, a Frenchwoman's take on the English.

Melanie McDonagh, who explores the animal world's fashion victims on p. 42, is a columnist for the *Tablet* and a leader writer on the *Evening Standard*.

Stuart Kelly reviews John Gray on p. 39. His new book is *The Minister and the Murderer: A Book of Aftermaths*.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK



Home

Amber Rudd, the Home Secretary, apologised in Parliament for the treatment of immigrants from the Commonwealth from before 1971, known as the 'Windrush generation' (after the *Empire Windrush*, the ship that brought West Indian workers to England in 1948). The 1971 Immigration Act allowed Commonwealth citizens then living in the United Kingdom indefinite leave to remain, but the Home Office kept no records of these. Some had lost their jobs, others had been refused National Health Service treatment, and others threatened with deportation. Theresa May, the Prime Minister, apologised to Caribbean heads of government who were in London for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. A teenager was stabbed to death in Forest Gate, bringing to 59 the number of murders in London this year. Gillian Ayres, the abstract painter, died aged 88.

Sir Martin Sorrell left WPP, the advertising company that he ran for three decades. Unemployment fell to 1.42 million, at 4.2 per cent, the lowest level since 1975. The pub chain J.D. Wetherspoon left Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Ant McPartlin, the television presenter, was fined £86,000 after pleading guilty to drink-driving. The England netball team achieved a thrilling victory, 52-51, against Australia in the Commonwealth Games. The Queen's corgi Willow died, aged 14.

Four RAF Tornados, flying from the British base at Akrotiri in Cyprus, launched, from outside Syrian air space,

eight Storm Shadow missiles at a former missile base 15 miles west of Homs in Syria. The air strike was part of a joint attack with the United States and France that launched 105 missiles in response to a chemical weapons air attack on 7 April by the Syrian government on Douma, seven miles north-east of central Damascus. Jet fighters flying from France fired nine missiles and three more were launched from French naval ships. No civilian casualties were reported from the allied attack. 'A perfectly executed strike last night,' tweeted President Donald Trump of the United States. 'Mission Accomplished!' Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, denied chemical weapons had been used in Douma. Russia would not allow the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons access to the site of the chemical attack until 18 April. Syria had taken control of Douma and the surrounding area of Eastern Ghouta after the chemical attack. Tens of thousands of people from the enclave were taken in buses to the rebel-held province of Idlib.

Abroad

After the allied missile strike, Theresa May, the Prime Minister, said: 'This collective action sends a clear message that the international community will not stand by and tolerate the use of chemical weapons.' She had informed Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the opposition, of the raid the night before. He questioned the legality of the operation and said: 'I believe Britain should now take a diplomatic lead to negotiate a pause in this abhorrent conflict.' In a statement to Parliament, Mrs May said: 'We have not

done this because President Trump asked us to but because it was the right thing to do.' Mr Corbyn said that Parliament should have been recalled and he proposed a War Powers Act to ensure that Parliament voted on any future warlike act. For good measure, Mr Corbyn said he wanted 'incontrovertible evidence' before blaming Russia for the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury on 4 March. The Department for the Environment announced that the poison had been administered to the Skripals in liquid form.

Mike Pompeo, the director of the CIA, who is nominated to be the next American Secretary of State, held a secret meeting with Kim Jong-un, the ruler of North Korea, in prospect of a meeting with President Trump. Barbara Bush, the wife of President George H.W. Bush and mother of President George W. Bush, died, aged 92. The global shipping industry agreed to cut emissions of greenhouse gases to 50 per cent of the 2008 level by 2050; shipping produces as much of these gases as Germany, the sixth-largest emitter. An outbreak of flesh-eating Buruli ulcers hit the state of Victoria in Australia.

President Emmanuel Macron of France said in a speech to the European Parliament: 'There seems to be a certain European civil war. There is a fascination with the illiberal, and that is growing all the time.' Milos Forman, the film director who made *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, died, aged 86. A chick raised by 'two male vultures in a long-term relationship' in Amsterdam Royal Zoo was released in Sardinia.

CSH

DIARY

Quentin Letts



Our ducks are back. Two wild mallard have spent the last five springs on the brook which gurgles past us in Herefordshire. Each year they produce a paddling of chicks; each year most of the ducklings are killed by predators. Our friend Becky thinks she spotted an otter, more likely stoat or mink, in the brook. The fluffy ducklings have little chance of survival. We wish the mother duck would nest somewhere safer but there is no telling her or her green-headed drake.

If I have felt kinship with the ducks lately it was because I was being pursued by sharp-fanged ferrets from the anti-meritocratic, politically unrepresentative, over-indulged arts establishment. In a *Daily Mail* theatre review I questioned diversity targets and colour-blind/gender-blind casting. I criticised the performance of Leo Wringer, a black actor who plays a gallumphing squire in a period-costume Restoration comedy produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Mr Wringer is a distinguished thesp but a duff choice for this role. He is too laid-back, too chic, insufficiently quirky to convey the physical comedy of a huntin', shootin', lurcher-obsessed, barking-mad Squire Haggard. Nowhere did I say no black actor should ever be cast in Restoration comedy. That is not what I believe. But that is what my enemies allege. The part played by Mr Wringer could be done well by Simon Trinder, one of my favourite comedy actors, who happens to be black. But it struck me the RSC specifically sought a black actor for this role in order to match the colour of the guy playing his character's brother. I suspect they were trying to make a political point — to prod their white Warwickshire audience and to satisfy Arts Council diversity box-tickers. I asked if the RSC saw itself primarily as a political organisation or as an arts/entertainment outfit. The Establishment's reaction to my review was blazingly intolerant. The RSC called me an 'ugly' racist. There was an El Alamein barrage from socialist actors such as Sam West and Robert Lindsay. Danny Lee Wynter thought I should be banned from theatres. An anti-Brexit paper said I did 'not belong in theatre' and the *Sunday Times* (once home to that brave critic A.A. Gill) tried

to make trouble for me. Out, out, out! Out of our private arts world! But it is not their private world. The RSC last year received £15.4 million of public money — more than a fifth of its income.

Another -ism. The Russian embassy, displeased with me for taking the rise out of its (v. sketchable) ambassador, accused me of sexism. The only -ism I really like is Anglicanism. Early-morning Prayer Book communion at Hereford cathedral

restores my equilibrium. No one speaks Cranmer better than the Dean of Hereford, and the Collect of the Day uses the fine word 'ensample'.

The *Mail* gave me space in a two-page debate with RSC boss Greg Doran. He listed RSC productions which starred black actors but failed to note that I enthused about several of those shows. Nor did attackers concede that I am a cheerleader for Sir Lenny Henry's Shakespearean career, nor that I defended Emma Rice's pulsatingly multicultural regime at Shakespeare's Globe (arts-crowd cowards remained mute when the Globe ditched Emma). Greg — a charming fellow taken captive by more politically correct colleagues — claimed the RSC was a champion of 'equality, diversity and inclusion' and 'theatre must reflect the society in which we are living'. That sounds to me like an admission that it does have quotas. Then he claimed 'major actors are cast not because of their heritage but because they are supremely talented'. Phew. Under Greg's directorship, 'major' RSC roles have repeatedly gone to his husband, Antony Sher. Among us critics, the RSC is sometimes called 'the Royal Sher-kspeare Company'.

Typical of support from theatre-goers was an email from a *Times*-reading, Remain-supporting doctor, an RSC regular. Although generally pro-diversity (as am I), she said she was often distracted by clumsily quota-driven casting. 'I have found it impossible to discuss this with theatre-going friends,' she said. Such is the McCarthyism created by our arts commissars and the equality industry. Seven fellow critics sent me 'chin up' messages but, in this atmosphere, kept their support private. Given the hate mail I have received, I don't blame them. Some of these threatened my wife and children. One (a *Guardian* reader?) said: 'Your son Claude looks gay to me.' Actually, he is bracingly heterosexual but so what if he weren't? What irks me was that the ignoramus made a spelling mistake. My superb son is called Claud, thank you.

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Quentin Letts's latest book is *Patronising Bastards: How the Elites Betrayed Britain*.

Corbyn shows his true colours

The Tories' great worry after the last election was that they had effectively vaccinated the electorate against Jeremy Corbyn. They feared that the next time they tried to show that he was extreme, weak on national security and too friendly with the West's enemies, voters would yawn and declare that they had heard it all before. They would be immune to any attacks on the Labour leader. Compounding this worry was the fear that Corbyn would present himself, as he had quite successfully during the general election campaign, as a more mainstream figure than he really is.

If Corbyn had followed this 'kindly grandad' approach, the Conservatives would be in deep trouble right now. Labour's moderates would also lack any obvious cause for complaint. Every government mistake, such as the appalling treatment of the Windrush generation immigrants, could be used by Labour to chip away at Theresa May and the Tories' credibility. The old saw about governments losing elections rather than oppositions winning them would apply.

But Corbyn can't give up, or even hide, the anti-western worldview that has motivated his entire political career. Which is why the past few weeks have been so damaging for him. After the Skripals had been poisoned in Salisbury, but before Theresa May had formally pointed the finger of blame at Russia, shadow chancellor John McDonnell suggested that Labour MPs should stop appearing on *Russia Today*. This was a sensible response to the station's desperate attempts to divert blame away from Moscow. It would have put much-needed distance between Labour and a TV channel that Corbyn and his allies had been all too willing to appear on in the past.

Given that it was McDonnell who ran Corbyn's leadership campaign, you'd have thought that the Labour leader would have taken this advice on board. But his office instead felt the need to stress that Labour would *not* boycott the channel. It is hard to see what political purpose this served.

Corbyn's problems deepened once May accused the Russian government of responsibility for the attack. Despite mounting evidence, he refused to accept this analysis and appeared to be looking around for any alternative explanation, suggesting that 'a connection to Russian mafia-like groups that have been allowed to gain a toehold in Britain cannot be excluded'.

Even now, Corbyn can't bring himself to blame Moscow for the attack. He talks of how he still hasn't seen 'incontrovertible evidence'. Again, he won't endorse McDonnell's line that the poisoning of the Skripals was a 'state-sponsored assassination attempt'. Instead, he prefers the line that 'assertions and probabilities are not the same as certainty'.

Corbyn is being wilfully blind to the fact that the Salisbury attack was designed to leave a scintilla of doubt about who was responsible. Vladimir Putin has form on this: the Russian forces that went into Ukraine didn't declare their presence there. Putin also lies as a tactic (as Owen Matthews detailed in these pages last month). In March

He can't give up, or even hide, the anti-western worldview that has motivated his entire political career

2014, he denied that any Russian soldiers were in Crimea. Just a month later, he was lauding them for their role in its annexation. For two years he denied that Russian troops were in Eastern Ukraine, before admitting that they were. Despite this record, Corbyn is still happy to amplify doubts about Moscow's involvement in Salisbury, making it easier for Russia to deny responsibility.

During the general election, the Tories couldn't quite explain why Corbyn was so profoundly wrong on national security. Their arguments often required more knowledge of 1980s politics or the Middle East than most voters possess. But the Labour leader's response to Salisbury has provided a shorthand that spells out the problem. Only 16 per cent of voters believe that he would respond best to a Russian attack on British soil. According to YouGov, his personal ratings have fallen by 33 points since December.



'I'm the war correspondent for Playboy.'

The air strikes on Syria have also exposed more of Corbyn's worldview. The public are weary of foreign entanglements, and of interventions in the Middle East in particular. His stance on Syria is therefore unlikely to be as damaging as Salisbury. But it is still revealing how — and why — he is opposing the strikes.

Personally, I think bombing Assad's chemical weapons facilities is reasonable. The Syrian civil war is awful enough without it persuading every despotic regime that it can use such weapons on its own people and suffer no consequences. But there are, as even senior government figures acknowledge, 'good arguments against the strikes'.

Corbyn, however, wants to indulge in sophistry. He keeps claiming that if Mrs May tried harder, the diplomatic route could work. But this ignores the fact that Russia will veto any UN security council resolution that would harm its client regime in Damascus. He also wants to argue that the only legal basis for military action is either self-defence or a UN security council resolution.

This doctrine would significantly increase Russia's world influence, allowing it to veto any humanitarian intervention anywhere. Every dictator would know that if they allied themselves with Moscow, they could butcher their own people with impunity. (It is, however, worth noting that Corbyn can't even bring himself to blame the Assad regime for the attacks in Douma.)

Many on the Labour side know the implications of what their leader is proposing. It was the last Labour government that used humanitarian intervention as the legal basis for action in Kosovo because it knew that the Russians would veto any security council resolution authorising the use of force.

Watching the Syria debate in the Commons this week, one is again left wondering how Labour MPs who so profoundly disagree with Corbyn on questions of war and peace can campaign to make him prime minister at the next general election.

It would be a brave and foolish man who made predictions about a general election that is still four years away. But what is clear is that Corbyn is not going to take the path of least resistance to Downing Street. Instead, he aims to win with his own anti-western foreign policy views front and centre.

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Hourly updates from Parliament and beyond.

THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

Everyone speaks about the *Windrush*. The boat was actually called the *Empire Windrush*. The full name reveals what the story was about. The boat was one of a series called *Empire X*, X being the name of a British river, as if each were a tributary to a common stream. Mass coloured immigration to Britain was the act of an imperial power — almost, one might say, an imperialist act. In 1948, a Labour government (Attlee's) created a common 'Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies'. Just as we wanted the raw materials of our colonies, so — later in the day — we wanted their labour. This also explains the context of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech 50 years ago this week. Enoch had been a fervent imperialist, but he believed, with the loss of India, that the Empire was no more, so he opposed persisting with imperial pretensions. The entity of 'our great imperial family' to which the present Queen pledged her lifelong service in Cape Town on her 21st birthday in 1947, had ceased to exist, he argued, and therefore its citizenship was a fiction. Thus did the right become the anti-imperialist reformers and the pro-immigration left the imperialist diehards — an irony so great that it has passed almost unnoticed.

The row about the 'Windrush generation' which has embarrassed Mrs May this week is an example of her administration's strange attitude to presentation. Defenders of her method say that she considers substance not spin, but a truer description would be that she does not foresee presentation problems enough. When they come tumbling out before the public gaze, she spins like mad, as she did with her abject *Windrush* apology. The same applies even to her much more successful adventure, the bombing of the Syrian chemical warfare sites. When she at last emerged to speak about this on Saturday, she did very well, but in the days before, her silence created an unnecessary vacuum which allowed Jeremy Corbyn, the Russians and much of the media to spread alarm and despondency. Supporters of the government in Parliament could get no 'line to take', no spokesman to lead. For



all its temptations, spin has the justified purpose of getting your story in first. If it comes in second, it is lame.

There has been a good deal of speculation about how Mr Putin will hit back after the West's attack. I notice that talk of it all being like 1914 has fallen away, as has the Russians' claim that they would shoot down American planes. Attention is rightly paid to threats of cyber-warfare. A subset of this worth watching is Russia-as-defender-of-the-environment. Because Russia's international earnings are so heavily dependent on its fossil fuels, it very much wants all countries — except, of course, itself — to be as green as possible. Then they will have to buy Russian gas, oil and coal to keep the lights on when the wind-farms fail. The Russians are desperate about this, because shale, especially in the United States, is destroying their dominance of fossil fuels. Last year, the US became a net energy exporter. In March, the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology found that Russian agents had used social media outlets to oppose American energy production. It tracked accounts linked to a Russian 'troll farm', the Internet Research Agency, which from 2015-2017 had published 9,097 social media posts attacking US energy policies and projects. I hope all the relevant agencies here in Britain are keeping an eye on the funding of anti-fracking groups. It would be just the sort of cynicism which Mr Putin enjoys if his Big Oil and Big Gas were to stand behind western Greens.

In David Goodhart's justly famous distinction between Anywheres and Somewheres, I consider myself a Somewhere. We Somewheres, however, should be grateful for the fact that

Anywhere is at least available. It would be much less fun if we all had to be Somewhere and Nowhere Else, which even today is the fate of most of humanity. This is one of the reasons I like going to London, though I never saw it as home even when I lived there. One day this week, I travelled up, had my hair cut by a Moroccan, and then got stuck trying to cross the Mall, because the way to St James's was blocked by the presence of what we mustn't any longer call our great imperial family gathering for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference (CHOGM). Late, I reached my club for lunch, which was full of mostly British, mostly white men. Twenty minutes afterwards, I was in a ward of Guy's Hospital visiting a friend with cancer. The nurses, physios and orderlies I talked to were Irish, New Zealand, central European and African. During my visit, I heard only one person speak English with an English accent. Such experiences are, of course, entirely usual in big modern cities, but when you come there from Somewhere, you notice them. Such juxtapositions, such cheek-by-jowl lives, create problems, of course, but they are nevertheless wonders of the world.

On Tuesday, Parliament debated anti-Semitism. It is hard to get over the oddness of the situation. It is 150 years ago since the Conservatives produced their first Jewish leader: Benjamin Disraeli became Prime Minister on 27 February 1868. If the Tory party in the 21st century had a leader who was seen as tolerant of anti-Semitism, and was backed by its most anti-Semitic factions, the scandal would bring him and/or it crashing to the ground. Yet with Labour, this is not so. Mr Corbyn is a bit uneasy with his predicament, but not fearing for his political life. How have we got here?

Barbara Bush, who has just died, was a gallant feminist. One day, when she arrived at 10 Downing Street, Denis Thatcher kissed her hand — which was his (surprisingly Continental) habit with women. When she departed, and was saying goodbye outside the famous front door, she grabbed his, and kissed it back.

Brexit blunders

The Windrush debacle is a symptom of deep confusion among Conservatives

FRASER NELSON

A few months ago, Britain's most senior ambassadors gathered in the Foreign Office to compare notes on Brexit. There was one problem in particular that they did not know how to confront. As one ambassador put it, the English-language publications in their cities (it would be rude to name them) had become rabidly anti-Brexit: keen to portray a country having a nervous and economic breakdown. Their boss, the Foreign Secretary, later summed it up: many believe that Brexit was the whole country flicking a V-sign from the white cliffs of Dover. The job of his ambassadors is to correct this awful image. But how?

Their plight has not been made much easier by the Prime Minister. Last year she gave two good speeches, in Florence and at Lancaster House, about how Britain is ready to make new allies and go global. Fine words, but they come all too rarely and, anyway, a government is judged on what it does rather than what it says. To those in the Windrush generation fearing a knock on the door from immigration police or to Czech nurses still waiting to be told if they can stay after Brexit, it will seem that a theme is emerging. That the Prime Minister's real agenda is not to go global, but to raise the drawbridge as her country turns in on itself.

This week ought to have provided the perfect chance to cast off this image. The Commonwealth summit has been a celebration of how empire gave way to a fraternity of 53 nations, 16 of which still choose to have the Queen as head of state. The streets of Westminster have filled with delegates, many in national dress. A wonderful sight. But the newspapers they carried had news of how citizens from the Commonwealth, invited to Britain decades ago, are now being investigated and deported. They have been asked to provide residence records, some of which the Home Office has itself destroyed. Behind each statistic lies an awful story.

Like, for example, that of Paulette Wilson, who used to work as a cook in the House of Commons. Aged 61, she was sent to a detention centre prior to deportation to

Jamaica — a country she had not laid eyes on since childhood. She was asked for residence records, and had not been saving them because she never imagined she'd need them.

Or Michael Braithwaite, who lost his job as a special needs teaching assistant when the Home Office deemed him to be an illegal immigrant. He had lived in Britain for half a century. And these are just some of the cases we know about — brought to light only due to outstanding reporting by the *Guardian*.

The government says it cannot say how many have been deported, as it would cost too

in deportees being advised to adopt Jamaican accents to fit in with where they were headed.

Placing EU nationals in immigration purgatory was Mrs May's personal idea. Every Brexit campaigner and all of her rival candidates in the Tory leadership race wanted to grant immediate and unconditional guarantees that they would not be affected. But Mrs May has always prided herself on her firmness as her selling point. Even now, she privately complains that her whole cabinet is wet on immigration apart from Gavin Williamson, the defence secretary, and Karen Bradley, the Northern Ireland Secretary (and her protégée).



much to count them all. This is what it looks like when bureaucracy trumps humanity.

Mrs May's apology (which came after her initial refusal to meet Commonwealth leaders) was embarrassing. But at a time when the world is still trying to work out what direction Britain is taking, it is also damaging. And it fits a trend. The 3.7 million EU nationals in Britain have found themselves victims of the same Home Office intransigence — a mindset that is an indictment of the culture Mrs May once presided over. Even now, their status (whether they can stay, retire, be treated on the NHS and receive a state pension) has not been assured because the Prime Minister seeks to use them as bargaining chips, waiting for reciprocal assurance from the EU about British nationals.

There is a clear logic to her strategy, but it's also the kind of cold logic that ended up

You can argue that Britain is one of the most welcoming countries on earth, that we have taken in 17 EU nationals for every ten who have left since the Brexit vote. But this is of little comfort to those who feel that Britain is now a less welcoming place. Last week, I met Swedish business leaders who say their colleagues in Britain are hearing anti-immigrant comments for the first time. This can't be dismissed as oversensitivity: what matters is that enough people believe it to be true. When the Home Secretary floats bizarre ideas such as employers keeping registers of foreign workers, no wonder they worry.

The Home Secretary in question is Amber Rudd, a leading light in the Remain campaign (and, by the end, its de facto leader). It's impossible to accuse her of being anti-immigrant. So why would she even consider asking employers to make an immigrant register? When Tory MPs were discussing the Windrush debacle in their WhatsApp group, it tended to be the Remain-voting MPs defending the government and the Brexiters who were most aghast.

There are theories about this inside Westminster: that those wanting Britain to leave the European Union were painfully aware that they'd be accused of xenophobia, so would go to great lengths and make great gestures to answer these claims. (Boris Johnson's plan for a bridge to France is one such example.) But many Remainers genuinely believed they were engaged in a battle of

'open' vs 'closed' — and that 'closed' won. So as democrats, they ought to obey what they believe to be the demand of Brexit voters: clamping down on migration, sounding more tough and less liberal.

This is a tragic misreading not only of the referendum result, but of public opinion today. Seeking to control immigration is not the same thing as being anti-immigrant: now that control is assured, support for immigration has risen sharply. A poll last year showed that 71 per cent of Leave voters would back a system that controls low-skilled migration from the EU with no limit on high-skilled newcomers. This rises to 75 per cent among Conservatives. Just 14 per cent of the public disagree with this idea. It is the obvious next step.

Such a policy should replace the current crude immigration target, which has not been met since it was created. Mrs May once referred to the target as a 'comment' during last year's campaign, which was truer than she would admit. The policy was created on a television studio sofa by Damian Green, Mrs May's erstwhile deputy, who said during a TV interview that the Tories would cut net migration to the 'tens of thousands'. This was not an agreed policy. Rather than admit that the (then) immigration spokesman had

The party hierarchy still fails to understand the true motives of Brexit supporters

misspoken, the Tories turned his slip of the tongue into policy. So the 'tens of thousands' pledge remains to this day, supported by almost no one in cabinet.

Chasing this target has led to the Windrush debacle and more madness. Migration from the EU cannot be restricted until we leave, so all of the pain is focused on those from outside. If the Home Office cannot deport professional beggars from Romania, it goes after law-abiding Brits who have been living here for decades but are unable to provide proof of their status. We also insist that if a UK national marries someone from outside Europe, they cannot live with them unless they earn £18,600 a year. This heartless stricture resulted in Irene Clennell — a wife, mother and grandmother — being deported to Singapore after living in the UK for 30 years. Why? Because her British husband was unable to work after suffering a hernia.

A more effective Labour party leader would have had plenty to say about how the Windrush scandal exposes the dark heart of Conservatism and a party that sees numbers, not people. The truth is that this exposes a dysfunctional form of Toryism and a party hierarchy that still fails to understand the true motives of Brexit supporters and the opportunities it will present.

After Brexit, the government will be able to control all immigration, so it can start talking now about a better and more liberal system. The object should be to win

The Trolley Man

When someone asks, Could I have
a sandwich with some cheese in it?
I will say, No sandwiches today!

And if anyone should ask for coffee
I will say, Hot water not working,
It's shocking, isn't it?

I will wheel my trolley from one end
of the train to the other, smiling
magnificently at everyone.

And when a lady asks,
I don't suppose you've got
a piece of shortbread
some lovely, lovely shortbread?

I will say, No my dear
all the lovely shortbread has gone.

— Julian Stannard

the global war for talent. Limits should be placed on unskilled labour, as is common in most countries, but skilled workers should be welcomed with open arms. There should be no more treating Australians or Indians as second-class immigrants, and no more violinists deported to Massachusetts because they don't earn enough. Plans can be made to abolish the worst defects of the current system.

Our world-class universities (we have six in the global top 30 while no other EU country has any) should be allowed to recruit as many overseas students as they can manage. Those who graduate with a proper degree should be welcome to stay for a further five years. And, if they settle down, invited to apply for full citizenship. There ought to be hundreds of state-funded scholarships, offered globally, to underline Britain's intent about strengthening its wider networks. There need be no delay in removing students from the immigration quotas.

And if Britain has a skills shortage, more can be done to meet it by training the low-skilled. We need a new breed of schools specialising in STEM skills and putting as much effort into steering pupils towards an engineering apprenticeship at Rolls-Royce as today's top schools expend on getting them a

PPE place at Balliol. It will cost, but there are plenty of savings to be made from the failed apprenticeship levy system. Savings from the EU membership bill are also on their way: the Office for Budget Responsibility estimates the cost (currently £8.6 billion a year) will be below £1 billion within seven years.

These are not unachievable ideas, and nor are they without Tory champions. They would sit well with the free-trade agenda which will be the bedrock of post-Brexit ambitions. Almost every member of the cabinet would abolish the immigration target in a heartbeat. Jo Johnson was so passionate an advocate for higher education reform that he was sacked as universities minister to give No. 10 a quieter life. The Conservative party has no shortage of people with ideas about a liberal Brexit or how to achieve it. But until now, they have kept quiet so as not to destabilise their leader at a difficult time in negotiations.

They are not doing her any favours. Mrs May is no xenophobe but she is using Iron Lady tactics at a time when warmth, accommodation and communication are needed. When she first entered No. 10, she was teased for saying that 'Brexit means Brexit'. Almost two years on, she is still struggling to improve on this definition. In the absence of any government ideas, Brexit will be defined by its enemies — and her blunders.

As Prime Minister, Mrs May has two big battles on her hands: to negotiate a deal with Brussels then win the battle for Britain's global reputation. It's about time that she started to fight.



SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

Fraser Nelson and Chris Wilkins on
Brexit battles.

A bipartisan bungler

The sacked FBI boss James Comey is trying to take down Trump. He'll fail

DOMINIC GREEN

Americans forget their corruption in order to savour their innocence. When Republicans and Democrats are struggling to find ways forward and the presidency is all over the road, the combat of ex-FBI director James Comey and reality television star Donald Trump is almost heartening. For, despite partisan division and the rise of China, the drama of the American psyche survives. The puritan grips the pornographer, and the spirit of the civil servant contends with the flesh of the president.

The excitement over last Sunday's ABC News interview with Comey was almost as much as that around Michael Woolf's *Fire and Fury*. So much has happened since that worthy mishmash of secondhand gossip hit the remainder bins in January. At the time, Woolf claimed that his revelations would bring down the Trump presidency. Yet Trump is, in the words of another eccentrically coiffed entertainer, Elton John, still standing, and better than he ever did.

Comey also has a book to promote. It is called *A Higher Loyalty*, to remind us which character he plays in the Manichaeic combat. Jacob against the Angel, Bunyan's Christian against Apollyon the Fiend, and now Comey the attention-grubber against Trump the pussy-grabber. True to casting, Comey called Trump 'morally unfit' to be the President. 'A person who sees moral equivalence in Charlottesville, who talks about and treats women like they're pieces of meat, who lies constantly about matters big and small and insists the American people believe it — that person's not fit to be President of the United States, on moral grounds. And that's not a policy statement.'

Comey has a point. But *A Higher Loyalty* is not a book of revelations about Trump. Americans already know that he is unworthy of the office dignified by Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton. This time around they knew about the President's failings before he moved into the White House. They voted for him anyway.

Hours before Comey's interview aired, a *Washington Post*/ABC News poll reported that 32 per cent of Americans have 'a favourable view' of Trump 'as a person', but 46 per cent 'approve of his handling of the economy'. That is a policy statement, and a

moral statement too. When policy has failed the ordinary American, morals are as much of a luxury as health insurance.

A Higher Loyalty is, however, a book of revelations about Comey. The Democrats blamed him for weakening Hillary Clinton's presidential run in 2016. His investigation of her private email server was a gift to Trump. So was closing the investigation with a press conference at which he accused Clinton of 'extreme carelessness' and then reopening the investigation a week before the election. Comey says 'any book written about one's life experience can be an exercise in vanity, which is why I long resisted the idea of writing a book of my own'. He was fired 11 months ago.

One reason for Trump's popularity among white males is that his idea of fun is theirs

Speaking to his confessor, ABC's George Stephanopoulos, Comey regretted using words like 'extreme carelessness' in relation to Hillary Clinton and her emails. But he didn't suggest an alternative and he stood by his judgment of Clinton: 'This wasn't your ordinary bureaucrat who mishandles some document.'

The revelation here is that Comey wasn't an alt-right enabler. He was a bipartisan bungler. Like the rest of Washington, he just thought Clinton would win. 'I was operating

in a world where Hillary Clinton was going to beat Donald Trump,' he told Stephanopoulos. Although Comey wasn't 'consciously' aware of it in 2016, he reckons he must have been thinking: 'She's going to be elected President, and if I hide this from the American people, she'll be illegitimate the moment she's elected, the moment this comes out.'

With similar integrity, Comey did not hide his thoughts on the second-most important issue in American politics. Do the Russians, Stephanopoulos asked, 'have something' on Donald Trump? Comey replied that it was 'unlikely' but 'possible'. But anything is 'possible' with Trump, so the defender of the Republic thought it best to discuss the most important issue of all on prime time: a purported videotape in which women pee on Trump at the Ritz-Carlton in Moscow.

'I'm a germophobe,' Trump told Comey. 'There's no way I'd let people pee on each other around me.' Eminently reasonable, and an example of the keen intelligence necessary for high office. But imagine for a moment that the President's idea of water sports is broader than waterskiing off the beach at Mar-a-Lago, and that the story of Muscovite micturation is true. Would it make any difference?

The public know that Trump is a scoundrel. One of the reasons for his popularity among white males is that his idea of fun is theirs, and that he has only done what they would do. The press holds those voters in such contempt that it feels it must prove that Trump is a scoundrel. But the greater the predictions of a legal takedown, the less plausible they seem.

The media are crying Wolff. Trump is already a moral disgrace, but his policies are quite popular, and becoming more so. Unemployment is low, the Dow is high and wages are starting to rise. The Democrats are signalling virtue and drifting left. There is no reason why Trump should not win again in 2020, if he can be bothered. Trump is not Nero, but if American politics continues to roll in the gutter, then sooner or later, we will all be piddling while Rome burns.



'Sorry if it shatters the illusion but today is our collection day.'

Dominic Green is a writer for the Weekly Standard.

OUR PERSONAL FINANCIAL
ADVICE BEGINS WITH ONE QUESTION:

WHAT MATTERS TO YOU?

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A 292 lightbulb moment

The new Audi A7 Sportback

Official fuel consumption figures for the new Audi A7 Sportback range in mpg (l/100km) from: Urban 30.4 (9.3) Standard EU Test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect 'real driving' results. Car shown features optional equipment. Images shown for illustrative purposes only. Fuel consumption until further notice). These figures facilitate direct comparison between different models from different manufacturers, but may not represent the actual fuel consumption achieved in 'real



– 45.6 (6.2), Extra Urban 47.9 (5.9) – 54.3 (5.2), Combined 39.2 (7.2) – 50.4 (5.6). CO₂ emissions 163 – 147g/km. and CO₂ emissions figures are obtained under standardised EU test conditions (or, in cases of vehicles with WLTP type approval, are the NEDC figures provided pursuant to Government guidance world' driving conditions. Choice of wheels and other options may affect fuel consumption and emissions data.



So much to do, so much time.



CUNARD

QUEEN MARY 2

Joking about vowels is a hate crime now



It took four days to actually see the pine marten in the flesh. We caught it on a trail cam on night two of our holiday as it scampered in an agreeably gamine manner for the food we'd left out. It ate better than us that week. By night three it had a choice of eggs (its favourite), peanut butter sandwiches and chopped-up frankfurters. All it needed was a nicely chilled Chablis. We sat in the dark for hours, waiting, until my wife said: 'Fuck the malodorous little bastard, let's watch TV.' She is not much of one for wildlife really. And then it appeared, up on its hind legs crunching its way through the shell of an egg, tipping the yolk down its throat. Pale golden chest, long bushy tail, perky, impish face — we'd got our man.

The creatures have long since been exterminated from England by the idiot gamekeepers, but still hold out in the north and west of Scotland, where we were staying. There are plans to reintroduce them south of the border, perhaps in Northumberland or the North York moors, if the grouse lobby can be quietened. There is also a programme of reintroduction in Wales, but if I were a pine marten, I'd tell them to stuff it. They'd almost certainly be forced to learn Welsh and charged with a hate crime if they demurred; harassed and vilified by the various dimbo, chippy and gossamer-skinned mayors and mayoresses of Toytown who somehow have been allowed to run the place. People with 'Ap' in their names who you pay for through your taxes. Stay east of Offa's Dyke, if you know what's good for you, pine martens. Leave Wales to your less photogenic, foul-smelling cousins, the polecats.

I had a taste of what the pine martens might expect a week or so back. I made a joke about the Welsh language, lightly suggesting that it was largely devoid of vowels — neither an original nor terribly wounding observation, I would have thought. Oh, and I also mentioned that the Severn Bridge connected their rain-sodden valleys with the first world.

It was a joke. But ooh, the Welsh went bananas. Except that it wasn't the Welsh, of course, but the tuppenny panjandrum, largely from within Plaid Cymru, who preside over them. Screaming 'Hate crime! Hate crime!'

It started with a dunderhead called Arfon Jones, who is the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner. First he tried to get me prosecuted (and failed), then petitioned the Independent Press Standards Office, which cheerfully refused to entertain his complaint. 'Morally repugnant' was Arfon's verdict on me. In what possible sense, you halfwit? Then the rest of them piled in, with demands for the matter to be debated in Parliament or the National Assembly of Wales, with one bloke wondering what 'legal redress' Wales might have. None, you imbecile. It was a joke.

Another Plaid member with 'Ap' in his name, who couldn't cut it as a national journalist, deplored the declining standards

*It wasn't the Welsh going bananas
but the tuppenny panjandrum
who preside over them*

of the *Sunday Times*, where my piece had appeared. The best stuff, though, came from the guardians of the Welsh language, such as Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (which means 'the little saucepan is bubbling on the stove, look you', I think). Robin Farrar, the group's general secretary, said: 'Discrimination against the Welsh language is completely unacceptable. Attacks like this are symptomatic of a colonial attitude that should belong in the far distant past.'

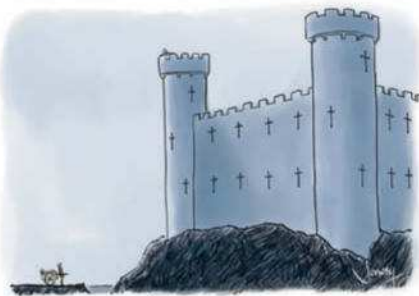
Robin's contribution made me shake with mirth, but he was outdone by the Welsh Language Commissioner, Meri Huws. I shall reproduce her wonderful piece of double-think and hysteria in full: 'While it is important that we respect freedom of expression

on different topics, the increase in the offensive comments about Wales, the Welsh language and its speakers is a cause for concern. Over recent months we have seen a number of situations where people have been insulted — and this is totally unacceptable. A few months ago, I joined with others to declare that action is needed to stop these comments, and stated that legislation is needed to protect rights and to prevent language hate. I will now call a meeting with interested individuals and groups to discuss the matter further and think of ways to move the agenda forward.'

So in other words, it isn't remotely important that we should respect freedom of expression — it is, instead, vital that we stop it. I do hope Meri invites me to her fatuous meeting with those 'interested people'. Language hate, indeed. Making a joke about vowels? Are you sure you're all right in the head, love?

But the point is an important one. If you have doubted that restrictions upon freedom of speech are tightening by the day, just examine this little furor. Grown men and women demanding that the police and the government must take action because someone made a short joke about vowels and the usual hundred or so on Twitter are baying for blood: people determined to be victims, revelling in the warm outrage that victimhood brings them, devoid of a sense of proportion and antagonistic to the very idea of freedom of speech, themselves filled with an implacable hatred of anyone who might dare to give them offence or disagree with their point of view. That's where the real hatred is. There was none at all in my little squib — hell, I quite like Wales and the Welsh and certainly prefer the place to most southern English counties. And yet as a result of this little spat I will now feel it incumbent to make a joke about Wales in every column I write, which might get boring for the readers.

But still, if making a joke about vowels can be considered a hate crime, or hate speech, or hate language, then I would suggest that pretty much anything can. Be careful what you say out there.



'Do you think His Majesty might be interested in some erotic wall tapestries?'

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/RODLIDDLE
The argument continues online.

The future of war

Is human conflict exhausting its evolutionary possibilities?

CHRISTOPHER COKER

Imagine Peace. These were the words that appeared on an otherwise blank page in the *New York Times* on New Year's Day 2013. They were paid for by Yoko Ono and they are of course an echo of John Lennon's most famous song. A few days later, the *Guardian* conducted an opinion poll in which it asked its readers whether they thought the advert would produce world peace. Surprisingly, a third of the respondents thought that it would, though there was little evidence around the world to confirm them in that hope. By then, the civil war in Syria had already claimed the lives of nearly 200,000 people. It's now about 400,000.

Wouldn't it be marvellous if war were just an idea, a very bad one, and that universal peace could be achieved by just imagining it? Jeremy Corbyn is certainly in the Yoko Ono camp. He doesn't believe that it is worth fighting a war for anything. It is not quite clear where Diane Abbott stands, though she insisted last week that the only war that could be justified would be one like the second world war — the good war, as Americans like to call it. But that is precisely the war we are not going to get. The next world war will not involve great ideological principles any more than it will see mass attacks on multiple fronts and heroic set-piece battles like Stalingrad. But that won't stop it from breaking out. War is evolving all the time, thanks in part to technology. A crude Darwinian principle appears to be at work which suggests that it will end only when it finally exhausts its evolutionary possibilities.

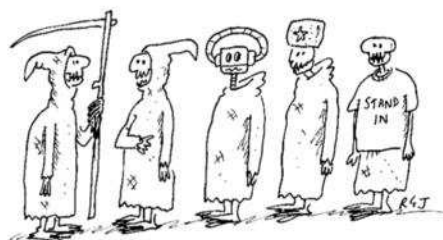
It is those possibilities that the Great Powers insist on both exploring and exploiting. We can see this in Syria now with Russia and America using proxy forces to confront each other. But we now have theatres of war that were not available during the Cold War. War is being rebooted for a new century and cyber warriors are at the forefront of the endeavour. One writer, Lucas Kello, tells us that the old divisions of peace and war have been consigned to the dustbin of history and we are now living in an era of 'unpeace' which could last some time. Two other experts, Google's Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, tell us that we are already fighting a Code War, a non-kinetic struggle in which computers are hacked into, economies sabotaged and secrets stolen on an industrial scale. Or if you want a good

idea of what an actual shooting war between the US and China might look like, read Peter Singer and August Cole's novel *Ghost Fleet*, in which young cyber-hackers from Silicon Valley answer the call and hack into Chinese computers, and the US discovers on the first day that enemy viruses have gone undetected for years and overnight their planes' missile-avoidance systems have become missile-attraction ones.

Surely, you may ask, the nuclear taboo will always deter the great powers from engaging in a direct confrontation? It would be reassuring to think so, but nuclear weapons are being upgraded and modernised. We are entering what some in the military call the second nuclear age. What the West finds particularly disturbing is that the Russian military has changed its doctrine to include nuclear weapons in conventional operations. The nuclear taboo may be weakening. In the Crimea crisis, some Russian generals suggested launching an intercontinental missile into Ukraine but replacing its nuclear warhead with a conventional one — just to send a message. Were the US to go to war against North Korea, Pyongyang could send a message, too, by exploding a small nuclear device over the skies of a Japanese city.

We are encouraged these days by materialists to think of our minds as computers that absorb and process information and then get our bodies to perform the output. But the mind also creates and imagines, and we imagine unreal fears and insults that are a threat to our reputations. We behave unpredictably as a result. War continues to feed off the same factors and raw emotions that it always has.

If we want to be a little more scientific in our approach, we might ask, as the Nobel prize-winning ethologist Nikolaas Tinbergen did: what are the origins of war? There is a lot



'I'm War, and this is Cyber War, Cold War and Proxy War.'

of evidence to suggest that other hominid species were fighting each other long before we came on the scene. They probably did so for the same reasons that we do now: to defend territory. At some point we decided fighting back was cheaper than running away. We still find ourselves contesting territory, whether in Ukraine or the South China Sea. These days, we don't have to send in mass armies: we can use paramilitaries, mercenaries and mafia mobsters and call it hybrid warfare.

In fact the enemies we have been fighting since 9/11 take a variety of forms and are constantly shape-shifting. Governments have responded by playing their ace card: technology. How do we organise manhunts, asked Donald Rumsfeld at the beginning of the War on Terror. As it happens, drones are the ideal weapon for manhunting, an operation that now has its own technocratic jargon derived in part from social network analysis and what war nerds call 'nexus topography', a science of sorts which enables us to map the social environment that binds individuals together and thus to identify and take out the critical nodes, such as terrorist cells.

In the US, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) plans to improve the performance of its pilots by investing in machine-learning and artificial intelligence. Soldiers and pilots will partner autonomous or semi-autonomous machines that will one day be able to take their own decisions as to whom to target. Drone pilots already have their brainwaves and heart rhythms constantly monitored to check that they are paying attention and not getting too stressed out. We are becoming increasingly machine-readable in all walks of life.

Tinbergen also encouraged us to ask another question: what are the mechanisms that allow a particular human practice to flourish? One of the most important is literature, which has furnished us over the centuries with inspiring role models which encourage young men to join up. In 2009 passages from the *Iliad* were read out to West Point cadets who were about to go off to Afghanistan. Stories help us bond with others: at Princeton, experiments have found that through neural coupling the same parts of the brain are energised in both the narrator and his audience.

These days most young men spend their time playing computer games but the digital is merely the next stage in our evolutionary road map. Some of the results in game playing are particularly telling. In 2005, the game *World of Warcraft* got a new character: a winged serpent whose bite infected players with the plague. Some deliberately got themselves bitten so they could travel back to the enemy state and spark off an epidemic. In no time at all, members of the Department of Homeland Security turned up to discover what motivated young patriotic Americans to become suicide warriors. So it was not that surprising that a few years later Isis began

encouraging nine-year-olds to play at terrorism through a game modelled on *Grand Theft Auto V*. The first British jihadist to blow himself up in Iraq left a message saying that he had gone off to play *Call of Duty* for real.

Computer gaming has in fact become a vital mechanism in keeping war alive in the imagination. The US Defense Department now reproduces some of the technology seen in computer games and Hollywood blockbusters for lethal use. The Talos suit from the *Iron Man* franchise is nearing development.

In the past 20 years, war has evolved faster than perhaps ever before. It has opened up two new dimensions in which it can be conducted: space and cyberspace. Terrorists make common cause with each other through the internet. The Chinese opened space up to war in 2007 when they shot down one of their own satellites. Given that we are so dependent on space for everything from inventory accounting to cellphone use, the prospect of a space war is truly alarming. One way the Russians might retaliate after another western mission in Syria is to take out a western satellite by jamming or spoofing. Not that we want to give them any more ideas.

War has increased its cast list, too. Take the empowerment of women. It is no coincidence that many of the most popular warriors on screen are not men. Think of Katniss from the *Hunger Games*. Indeed, as war continues

to evolve, women may be found to be better than men at dealing with its mental challenges. A recent study found they outperform men in inductive reasoning and are better at keeping track of a fast-moving situation.

The real game-changer is going to be AI. Last year, the Pentagon launched Project Maven, which uses data, lots of it, to analyse insurgent attacks. From the time a bomb goes off in a street market, you can rewind histo-

The US Defense Department now reproduces some of the technology in computer games for lethal use

ry to find its point of origin. At the Santa Fe Institute they have algorithms that can work out how a city works by collecting data on tax returns, gas station revenues and crime statistics. But if this tells you how a city works, it could also help you to shut it down.

Then there are robots. More than 5,000 saw service in Iraq at the height of the military operation. At the moment, they are slow and pretty dumb but fast evolving. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots fears the day when they will be able to decide who, when and where to target without human instruction. Others believe robots will offer us what Google's Ray Kurzweil calls a moral upgrade. For some years the US has tried to

programme a conscience into the next generation of robots so they won't suffer from racial or political prejudices. Nor will they know fear or be enraged by the death of friends. It would be safe to surrender to them. A group of Iraqi soldiers actually did surrender to an unarmed robot vehicle in the closing hours of the first Gulf war; the event was captured on CNN.

But programming a robot with a conscience will depend on who is doing the programming: you or the Russians. And that brings us to the main challenge of AI. Machine intelligence doesn't have to be superior to our own to be dangerous. In the absence of embodied intelligence it may be quite dumb. The real danger may lie in outsourcing more and more key decisions to machines not nearly as intelligent as ourselves.

Even if we do manage to avoid a third world war, we are likely to still find ourselves engaged in a cognitive arms race with actors both familiar and unfamiliar. Imagining peace is not going to save us. War is not an idea: it is part of the human story and we do it very well.

Christopher Coker is Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and author of Barbarous Philosophers: Reflections on the Nature of War from Heraclitus to Heisenberg.

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Let kids learn

British charities are putting ideology before education

AIDAN HARTLEY

Why would anyone who claims to care about the world's poorest children try to shut down their schools? It's strange and sad, but several British charities, in cahoots with some British unions, are making a concerted effort to close down hundreds of schools in Africa. They are doing this because they dislike private education, seeming not to care that this will destroy the life chances of thousands of desperate children, forcing them, at best, into state schools where the teachers are often absent, drunk or incapable.

The campaign involves not only an alphabet soup of left-leaning charities from Action Aid to Amnesty International but also Unison and the National Union of Teachers (NUT). Their attacks are directed at Bridge International Academies, a private company backed by, among others, Bill Gates and the British government.

If Bridge set up bad schools that failed African pupils, the campaign would make sense. But it doesn't: But it doesn't. Bridge schools are good and improving education.

Founded by an American husband and wife about a decade ago, Bridge started with a single pilot project in a Nairobi slum and has grown to 600 schools across Kenya, three other African countries and India. Simply built and painted green, the schools are now a familiar sight in the poorest areas. Bridge makes no secret of its aim to one day make a profit by charging fees, albeit very low, but it will reach that stage only when it has grown its student population from the current 100,000 to half a million. The Bridge dream is to one day educate 10 million children.

I visited a Bridge school in the slums of Gilgil in Kenya's Rift Valley. Gilgil is a mess of rusty tin shacks, open sewers and stinking rubbish. The parents I met were all desperately poor, but equally desperate that their children should be better off. I spoke to a man called Charles Maina, whose daughter had graduated from the school. He just about survives by selling potatoes in the local markets, yet despite their circumstances, he and his wife had spurned the local government primary school because it did not offer a good enough education for their daughter, Anne. Instead, they often went hungry to send her to the Bridge school

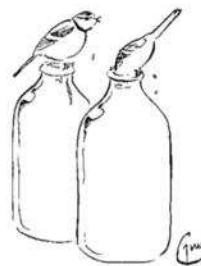
where she scored high marks in her examinations, went on to a top secondary school and now dreams of becoming a doctor. Asha Said, another Bridge parent, is a hairdresser in a slum salon. 'The teachers here are better than in a government school,' she told me.

Inside the Bridge classrooms I visited, teachers conducted lessons on a Kindle-like electronic device using the national curriculum. The teaching is entirely scripted and transmitted from a central office in Nairobi. The students appeared engaged, the teachers attentive, and at least twice a day Bridge's central offices monitor the performances of every student, classroom and teacher.

All Kenyans I spoke to about Bridge told me the schools enjoy an excellent reputation. Poor parents are keen to send their children to one if they can afford the fees — just over £60 a year. In the countries where it has set up business, nobody disputes that Bridge's exam results are consistently better than those of children from state-run schools.

Yet a caucus of charities and unions — many of them UK-funded — is determined to shut these schools down. In a recent letter to Bridge's investors, it urged them to 'exit in the shortest possible time from their investments [and make] no further financing commitments'. It accused Bridge of a 'lack of transparency, poor labour conditions and non-respect of the rule of law'.

David Archer, a senior official at Action Aid, told me Bridge was a 'clever American con trick' motivated by the founders' 'ego'. Sylvain Aubry, another campaigner, condemned Bridge as purely commercial in its aims. He described the schools as illegal and posing a 'threat to the fabric of society'.



'Oh my god, it really is as good as our forefathers told us.'

Bridge's adversaries gave me a litany of their crimes across continents — human rights abuses, health and safety violations — but across 600 schools, very few had led to a conviction or even a fine and none for serious offences. Most of the allegations were preposterous. One was a claim that Bridge violates the 'sovereignty' of African countries like Uganda. Uganda's education minister, Janet Museveni, the wife of the strongman Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled his benighted country for 32 years, has ordered all 63 Bridge schools in the country closed. Her government alleges Bridge schools teach pornography and 'convey the gospel of homosexuality'. Bridge dismisses these claims.

Bridge's opponents claim that pupils in Uganda can simply walk across the street and enrol in government schools. 'There is no evidence that Bridge has improved access to education,' Archer told me. 'If they were closed it would make no difference,' said Aubry. Yet recently crowds of Bridge families took to Uganda's streets, asking the government where they should send their children when the schools close, because in Uganda some 700,000 children are believed to be out of school.

In a report on UK aid for overseas education compiled last year by Britain's par-

More than 250 million children never see the inside of a classroom

liamentary International Development Committee, Uganda's legendary homophobia got no mention. Instead, the committee, headed by Labour MP Stephen Twigg, described the UK's support for Bridge schools as 'controversial', while endorsing the expansion of aid to state schools overseas.

Archer says Bridge aims to lure talented children away from state schools in order to boost their exam scores. He also told me that although Bridge children did not come from the very poorest families, they still faced sacrifices to cover Bridge fees. From what I have seen, this is true — but the fact that a poor African family values its children's education above anything else is surely admirable.

Education International is a global coalition of unions of which the NUT is a member. It is a leading attacker of Bridge, and its core policy is to oppose the privatisation of schooling. These organisations stick unstintingly to the line that privatisation of education in Africa is evil because it saps the will of governments to make their state school systems function properly.

On Twitter in February this year, Winnie Byanyima, the global executive director of Oxfam (and a Ugandan), praised Museveni's government for closing down Bridge schools. 'Well done,' she gloated, claiming the company's schools 'take advantage of poor people by offering low-quality education leading kids nowhere'.

We're not talking Eton

Low-cost schools are changing lives in the third world

JAMES TOOLEY

In private, Byanyima apparently believes the opposite. In October 2015 she wrote an email, which I have seen, in which she conceded that 'Bridge and other low-cost private schools are ... delivering education where public schools are — or are perceived to be — low quality'. This, she accepted, was due to 'unacceptable failures of public policy, the result of political and financial neglect of public education'.

While Byanyima celebrates the closure of private schools for the poor in her homeland, she had no problem with sending her own son, Anselm, to the elite US Choate Rosemary Hall in Connecticut. Ugandan media photographed Anselm puffing on a Toro Grande-sized cigar at his school graduation last year. One box of his Montecristos would cover the annual fees for two poor Ugandan children to attend a Bridge school.

With cruel hypocrisy, Byanyima and our own education activists argue that the way forward is to tell African governments to build more state schools, train more teachers and deliver better education services. They are hoping African governments will suddenly see the light: they will cease looting state coffers and purchasing fighter-bomber aircraft and invest in state schools instead. But after decades of failure, there is no evidence that schools are the top priority for African governments.

And while they try to close down Bridge schools, these are ever more needed. Even now in my home district of Laikipia County in Kenya, nearly half the boys from seminomadic families are sent out to herd cattle at the age of seven. At 13, the chances are that a girl will not be staring at a blackboard but at the knife about to circumcise her before she is married off to a much older man. Globally, more than 250 million children never see the inside of a classroom, the majority of them in sub-Saharan Africa. Among those who do, the majority of African children will fail to learn basic reading or arithmetic because many state-school teachers in Africa collect their salaries but do not bother to go to work.

A recent American study of African education found that 'no public primary schools in these countries offer adequate quality education'. A few years ago, the UK's main aid watchdog criticised British aid to education in African countries as 'poor value for money' because not enough had been done to prevent 'a large majority of pupils failing to attain basic levels of literacy or numeracy'.

Things will get tougher. Thirty years from now, one quarter of all humans will be in Africa. To keep up with the number of new children reaching school age in Kenya, we will need to build hundreds, if not thousands, of new schools each year.

Leftist ideology created the utopias in which countless millions perished. Today's crime of denying untold multitudes of African children a decent primary education is probably just as evil.

Private schools in the United Kingdom are affordable only to those on the highest incomes. But surprisingly to many, this is not true across developing countries, where low-cost private schools are ubiquitous and affordable to all.

For nearly two decades I've been researching this phenomenon. I've visited low-cost private schools in more than 20 countries, from the vibrant slums of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to remote mountain villages in South-east Asia and the gang-dominated *barrios* of Central and Latin America.

It truly is a global phenomenon, serving huge numbers of children. In Lagos State, Nigeria, alone, there are an estimated 14,000 low-cost private schools, serving two million children. In the slums of Monrovia, Liberia, enrolment in low-cost private schools is over 70 per cent — the same level that is common across urban sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In India, there are an estimated 400,000 low-cost private schools, serving 30 per cent of the rural population as well as the 70 per cent in urban areas. Why?

Poor parents are discerning, wanting schools that are accountable to them, with high standards and good discipline. They typically won't find that in government schools, which are largely dysfunctional. Teachers often don't turn up, and if they do, they don't teach.

Poor parents don't acquiesce in this. They vote with their feet, and entrepreneurs respond by setting up low-cost private schools. All this has deeply upset development experts and international teaching unions. The uppity poor taking control of their own lives? That means they're eschewing 70 years of development consensus since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Human rights or no, poor parents aren't listening to the experts. And it turns out they know best. Testing random samples of children, controlling for background variables, shows children in low-cost private schools doing significantly better than those in government schools. Moreover, private schools are affordable even to those on the poverty line: typically, poor parents can find schools that won't require them to spend more than 10 per cent of their

income on fees for all their children.

It's a misnomer in any case to think that government schools are free: parents still have to pay for uniform, shoes, books and transport. The price for a parent of sending a child to a low-cost private school might be only a third higher than the cost of a government school, taking these additional expenses into account.

Some governments see these schools as a threat. I recently visited Port Harcourt in Rivers State, Nigeria, to discuss with the education commissioner whether closing 2,000 low-cost private schools was a good idea. Where would he put the 400,000 children thrown out of school if this were the case? Could his state afford the extra places?

And in India, the Right to Education Act — an Orwellian name for a piece of legislation if ever there was one — has led to the closure of thousands of low-cost private schools. One government official in Punjab nonchalantly told me 'India is a big country' when I asked him about the nearly half a million children pushed out of schools their parents had chosen. Somehow I was meant to infer that this many children didn't really count in a country as populous as India.

It's not just governments that are trying to shut down these schools. As Aidan Hartley says, teaching unions have set themselves against Bridge International Academies, the largest chain of low-cost private schools in the world. One of the unions' criticisms is that because lessons are scripted in Bridge, as in other chains (including the one in Ghana of which I am chairman), teacher professionalism is being undermined. Is it really?

The only complaint one could legitimately make about Bridge is that it's in competition with existing low-cost private schools. But competition is good for the children — and that's what should concern educators the most.

Low-cost private schools provide the only realistic prospect of educating the world's poor. No one envisages that government schools can be put right in the medium term. It's time the left's ugly campaign against the legitimate educational choices of poor families was brought to an end.

An odd new feeling has crept up on me: sympathy for the police



Spring has come to my local park in its usual way. First the magnolias, then the cherry blossom, then the little silver ampules which once held nitrous oxide scattered in the grass. On Sunday the kids appeared, not a gang exactly, more a swarm of teens, angry and unstable.

A boy of about 14 raced a moped at breakneck speed around the toddler playground. ‘Can you stop?’ said a brave father. ‘You might run over a child.’

‘Fuck you,’ said the boy. ‘And I’ll fuck your mother too.’

On the way home, another spring staple: a police helicopter hovering over the Essex Road and below it the remnants of a raid: five vans, six cars, 30-odd coppers in body armour and two BBC cameramen just packing up. Once I might have made fun of them. Do you really need the BBC to make an arrest? But after four years in London N1, an odd new feeling has crept up on me: sympathy for the police.

If you lurk about on the Essex Road, you can see their daily grind in action: the angry drunks; the volatile drug-running teens. I’ve seen the gang boys’ weapons of choice evolve in a comically awful way: first kitchen knives, then machetes, then zombie killer blades. Samurai swords were fashionable for a while.

Not so long ago society policed itself a little. Britain’s tutters and shushers, the guardians aunts of civilisation, gave disrespectful teens what for. Not anymore. Who wants a knifing? So we leave the kids to the police.

That’s not why I feel sorry for them. It’s their job, and I suppose this is what a young cop is prepared for. But what does seem to me unfair is that the men and women on this grisly frontline are so routinely undermined by the politicians who should support them. They’re called racist by our Prime Minister, who insists that officers stopped and searched black boys disproportionately — though as her former speechwriter Alasdair Palmer revealed in this mag, she’d been shown evidence to the contrary. Then there’s the Home Secretary who’s loath to admit we even have a knife-crime problem.

Three people were stabbed in other parts of London last Sunday evening as the helicopter hovered over N1. On Monday an 18-year-old died of a knife wound in Forest Gate. As I write, Twitter is reporting two more stabbed in Kingston. Yet Amber Rudd’s explanation is not that gangs are out of control, but simply that the police are now gathering better data and reporting more crimes. Nothing to see here, she says, crime is still falling, so no more bobbies are needed on the beat — though a Home Office document has been leaked suggesting she knows very well that police cuts are a problem.

It’s one thing to do a tough job and be congratulated as a hero; it’s another to keep cracking on without support

Bill Bratton, the ‘supercop’ who turned the tide of violence in New York, has been holding forth about what he thinks our Met should do. London’s sick, he says. It needs the same medicine he gave NY in the 1990s. Bratton presided over not cuts but a huge training and recruitment drive and the acquisition of equipment worth hundreds of millions of dollars. ‘You get what you pay for,’ says Bratton. Quite.

Late last year the Police Federation, which represents rank-and-file officers, said its members were becoming increasingly stressed. Morale is low, cops feel undervalued and record numbers plan to quit. Well of course they do. It’s one thing to do a tough job and be congratulated as a hero; it’s quite another to keep cracking on when your political masters denounce you in public.

In the *Evening Standard*, Wayne, an ex-gangster from Plumstead, gave an interview in which he explained that the resettled kids

from war zones had upped the ante in gangland. ‘In the last ten years, since the Somalis and the Congolese came to London, they taught us a whole new level of violence. These people had seen family members mutilated, so when they said, “I’m gonna smash you up”, us guys would be shouting, “Yo blud, wot you mean?” and they would just pull out a blade and juk [stab] you in the chest. It upped the speed and level for us British-born guys. We had to arm up to protect ourselves. It created an upward spiral.’

Not Amber Rudd, not Sadiq Khan nor Theresa May would ever speak publicly about this, for fear of seeming racist. But isn’t that in itself racist? It implies that the problem is somehow to do with skin colour, when any poor kid forced into a civil war might well be brutalised by it. We absolutely have a duty to offer asylum to children fleeing horrific circumstances, but we also have a duty to acknowledge the increased dangers the police face as a result. If we don’t, these multiply.

In 2015, during her tenure as Home Secretary, Theresa May thought it a nice idea to recommend that the cops stop chasing kids without helmets on mopeds for fear they’d crash and injure themselves. The result of this kindly meant, politically expedient guidance was a huge increase in both moped-stealing and moped-backed crime. By 2017, gang kids were cruising around town swiping phones from passing pedestrians. They drove into cafés and snatched laptops from coffee-drinkers, then zoomed away. The guidance has been reversed but the die is cast. It’s contributed to a culture in which almost everyone thinks it’s a grand idea to mock the police.

Last summer I was standing outside a pub on the Canonbury Road when the sounds of a chase filled the air: the unmistakable high-pitched revs of a moped and police sirens behind it. The bike raced up the road past us, two of the usual kids on board, both with face masks. The group of young men drinking on the pavement beside me began to shout: ‘Take off your helmets, take them off, then the cops can’t chase you!’

Theresa May’s obvious disdain for the police had become a national hobby.



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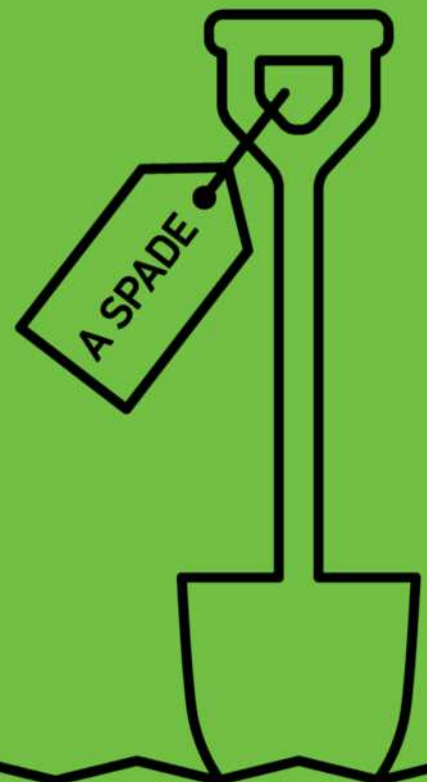
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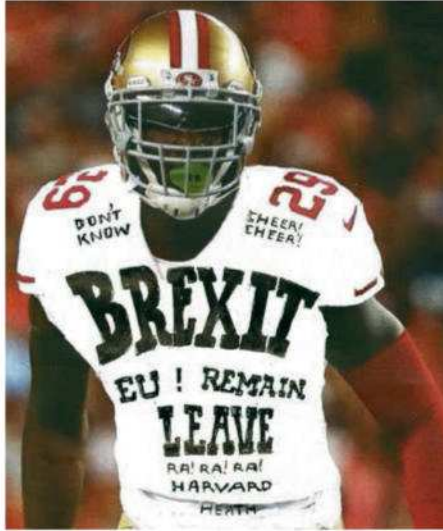
BOSTON NOTEBOOK

Radek Sikorski

My wife laughs that my love of gadgets is a remnant of my Communist upbringing, when western toys were objects of veneration. A couple of days ago, I found myself on a Lufthansa flight over the Atlantic indulging precisely that love: using an app, I could see live pictures of our house in rural Poland via the security cameras. I could also check that the alarm is on, heating system off and the new photovoltaic farm is producing more energy than the house is consuming. I suppose that's the consumerist heaven we fought for in those days, just as much as for freedom and democracy.

Back in Boston, I am reminded why I prefer museums created by the whim of a millionaire to those assembled by committees. The equivalent here of the Frick Collection in New York or Sir John Soane's in London is the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. At a time when you could still do it, she transported most of a Venetian palace to Boston and adapted it to the climate by building a glass roof over the courtyard. The collection is wonderfully idiosyncratic, reflecting her travels and contemporary fads, but that's the beauty of it. You get to see the objects, a feel for the era when they were assembled, and the personality of the collector. Every face lights up entering the cloister around the courtyard garden — which is how she had planned it. There is a nice Polish touch: a signed photograph from the celebrity pianist and future Polish foreign minister Ignacy Paderewski, the Michael Jackson of the *fin de siècle*. And all of it on an inheritance of \$1.6 million. A million dollars is clearly not what it used to be.

Across the street at the Museum of Fine Arts, there is an extraordinary collection of Georgian furniture and paintings from Boston just before the revolution. It all seems a lot more sumptuous than the sort of thing that would have been found in a



contemporary English town of 15,000. The colonials were, of course, more lightly taxed than the British, yet they rebelled. Might it have been to do with sovereignty and 'taking back control'? I suppose it worked out for them.

Still, when I asked my study group at Harvard's Kennedy School whether Brexit was a good idea, not a single hand went up. The consensus seemed to be that the European Union actually resembles the United States in the brief period between

the war of independence and the constitution — the era of confederation. Enough powers were delegated to the centre to annoy anti-federalists, but not enough to stop individual states from cheating on the agreed rules. Our quick study of the history of confederations suggests that they either evolve into proper federations, or collapse. The EU's dilemma is that actions which are necessary for its survival may not be politically possible. Unless events intervene. But thanks to Brexit, which has made the union more popular than ever in many European countries, a transition to some sort of federation is more plausible than in the past.

The credibility of President Trump's personal lawyer, Michael Cohen — and perhaps of the whole Russia collusion story — now turns on whether or not in the summer of 2016 he visited Prague, where he supposedly met senior Russians to scheme against Hillary Clinton. He denies it, but if he did, a key part of the Trump dossier put together by the former MI6 spook Christopher Steele would be dramatically vindicated. It seems quaint that thus far Cohen has been believed because he showed his passport without stamps by Czech immigration. His claims are now said to be shaky, because the FBI have just found out that under the EU Schengen system he could have landed in, say, Munich, and travelled overland to the Czech Republic without ever showing his passport. So thanks to President Trump, Americans are learning about Europe's common travel area. But in any case, can't they check the logs of his phone or his email account? Or scan Prague surveillance cameras with face recognition? Big Brother is watching us. It wouldn't be the first time that trouble for great powers had brewed in central Europe.



Presented by Isabel Hardman

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Radek Sikorski is Poland's former foreign and defence minister and is a senior fellow at Harvard.

Help! I've joined the cult of the sourdough breadmakers



This ought to be the perfect time for a rant about how we've reached peak sourdough. It's been all the rage for three or four years now and, really, someone needs to take a stand. As annoyingly over-rated foodstuffs go, it's up there with kimchi and goji berries and organic chia seeds: obsessively prepared by people with far too much beard, raved about in the *Guardian* and especially big in that epicentre of global communism, San Francisco. And it doesn't even taste like bread — more like Mongolian yak's yoghurt.

Problem is, I can't. Because, like Donald Sutherland at the end of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, I've been got. It began when the Fawn passed me this photocopy of a recipe, together with a jar with a white-ish substance at the bottom smelling faintly rancid. They had been sent as a gift by a colleague who'd got the sourdough religion and wanted to spread the word. 'Oh God, must I really?' I muttered as I pored over the complicated details.

But that was nine months ago and since then I've got it bad. At first you think it's going to be just a fun experiment: 'I've never tried making bread before, so isn't it brave and clever of me to start with just about the hardest type there is? And won't my friends and family be impressed when they taste the fruits of my labour?' Only a few weeks in do you realise that the person who sent you the stuff in the jar — your 'starter', as it's known — might just as well have given you a wrap of heroin. Once you've entered the rabbit hole, the only way you can go is deeper.

To start with, I tried the most basic recipe. One so simple and undemanding you didn't even have to knead the dough: you just had to mix it for no more than 30 seconds. When you do this, the result isn't at all bad: much tastier than a bog-standard loaf of unsliced white. But still, it gets you wondering: 'How much more amazing might it be if I did it properly?'

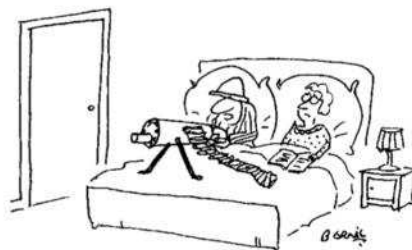
This was the point at which I graduated from the photocopied quick recipe to a more advanced one from the Bath-based sour-

dough expert Richard Bertinet. Suddenly, my original lovingly cared-for 'starter', which I kept in the fridge in a pot topped with muslin so it could breathe and which I fed with fresh flour and water every few days, was no longer enough. Now, I had to prepare something called a 'ferment'. This looks like a solid lump of dough, but when you break it open after a few days it smells faintly alcoholic and is full of holes as if infested with white worm. When it has reached the right point of yeastiness, you're ready to go ... through a laborious process that now takes half a day rather than your original half an hour.

A few weeks in, you realise the person who sent you your 'starter' might as well have given you a wrap of heroin

Once you've broken off bits of ferment and mixed them with your flour and water, you have to work it for about 20 minutes by stretching it repeatedly upwards and then allowing it to collapse like a breaking wave. Initially it's very claggy and on the first few attempts it gets stuck to your fingers. After a time, though, you develop a lightness of touch, and you begin to appreciate the subtly changing texture of the dough — as well as the weird masochistic buzz of going for nearly a whole half-hour in which you are quite unable to check your iPhone.

That's because your fingers are coated with a floury paste which befouls everything you touch and is a nightmare to get off. You



'A man has a right to defend himself in his own home, Verity.'

can't just rinse it off in the sink because your drain soon gets blocked. So instead you have to go through a process almost as laborious as the breadmaking: standing over a bin and rubbing your hands together till the flour achieves a bogey-like consistency and rolls off in little gobbets. Then you've got all the equipment to clean — the bowls, your marble work surface — which you can't just leave for the washing-up fairies, as you'd prefer, because it pisses off your wife.

Obviously, sourdough breadmaking isn't solely a male pursuit. But I do suspect there's something in it that is particularly appealing to the male psyche: the obsessive attention to detail; the endless permutations of batch variation; the quest for perfection which you know can never truly be achieved; the specialist kit.

You might think, as I initially did, that you can make sourdough with what you've already got. Wrong! At the most basic level, you need a banneton — the wicker basket in which you leave your bread to prove for about 15 hours — and your dough scraper and a lame (a curved razor blade) to slash the criss-cross pattern on the top. But once you're down the rabbit hole, a whole vista of complex new tunnels opens up, as I discovered when I visited a fellow sourdough victim, Celestria.

Up till then, I'd thought I was a bit of an expert. I'd reached the stage where I was offering friends advice and giving them pots of starter to take home with them. But when I saw Celestria's recent bakes, I suddenly felt a total amateur. Where my bread still looks a bit like thick cowpats, hers were fully risen and as handsomely artisanal as something you might get from a bijou bakery in San Francisco.

Which, inevitably, was where she'd got her recipe, about ten times more complicated than mine and requiring a digital thermometer so you can work the dough at the right temperature, and also an expensive cast-iron Dutch oven that you put inside your electric oven in order to give the bread that secondary rise known as 'oven spring'. Sad, isn't it?

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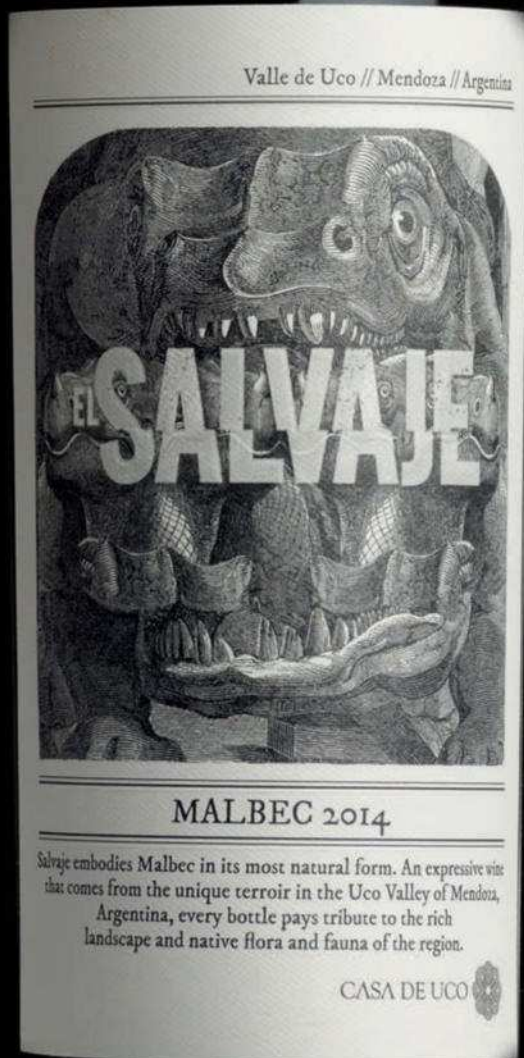
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Sit the snowflakes down

Sir: I was surprised to read Theo Hobson's article about 'snowflake' Christians in the C of E ('Holy snowflakes', 14 April). What most struck me was the timidity of the clergy, who instead of explaining Christian teaching to their gay and other 'snowflake' parishioners, merely kowtowed to them by removing a collage depicting an exorcism. Clergy need to teach those who are easily offended that nowhere in the Christian Gospels — as my many readings tell me — does Jesus condemn gays. (That condemnation belongs to the Old Testament, where God commissioned Abraham and the Patriarchs to breed abundantly and build a nation. But as gay relationships do not produce children, they were forbidden as a waste of 'seed', along with the 'sodomite' practices associated with pagan temple prostitution.)

Jesus Christ's central message in the New Testament, conversely, is one of grace, love and forgiveness for all, without regard to gender or sexual orientation.

And 'sin' has to do with murder, cruelty, greed, robbery, self-indulgence, and oppression of the poor, among other things — only with sex if it exploits others rather than being an expression of love. So please, ladies and gentlemen of the cloth, educate and explain things to your 'snowflakes' — and don't just cave in to them.

Dr Allan Chapman
Oxford

Good news is no news

Sir: Lionel Shriver is right that optimism appears pallid, catastrophism invigorating ('Catastrophising is my idea of a good time', 14 April). As John Stuart Mill said, it is not the person who hopes when others despair but the person who despairs when others hope who is regarded as a sage. In the eight years since I published a book arguing that the world was on the whole getting better all the time, I have been asked every year by those hosting talks, how come I still believe in my thesis in the light of, for example, Afghanistan, the euro crisis, Libya, ebola, Crimea, migration, Syria, plastic, Trump, or whatever is the *crise du jour*. Bad news is sudden, good news gradual, I reply.

Matt Ridley
Newcastle

Broken railways

Sir: Mary Wakefield makes many complaints about Virgin Trains which hit the mark, from their puerile advertising to their unappealing, unfriendly lavatory design (7 April). However, allowing them

to end their East Coast service early is a 'bailout of private enterprise' only on a simplistic analysis. They and Stagecoach have paid vast fees to the government under their contract. In this way, the government exploits its legislative and regulatory power to extract enormous sums from railway companies. Passed on to passengers, this undermines the economics of such devices. We saw the same before with GNER, whose excellent service was doomed by its payments to government. It is fair that transport providers should pay to use shared resources such as infrastructure. However, exploiting this in a way which promises large sums and ends up with broken contracts, overpriced tickets and frustrated passengers is a practice which is ethically doubtful, and has proven not to work on a grand scale.

Christopher Ruane
Lanark

Educating Taki

Sir: Taki (High Life, 14 April) is mistaken when he suggests that erotic interpretations of Achilles' relationship with Patroclus are a modern aberration. For the ancients,

the question was not whether Achilles and Patroclus frolicked 'in the tent and under the sheets' as he so memorably phrases it, but which of them took the role of the lover ('erastes') and which the beloved ('erumenos') when they inevitably did. Aeschylus presented warrior Achilles as the lover in his 'Myrmidons', whereas Plato's *Symposium* has Phaedrus argue that the older Patroclus surely assumed the active position. Xenophon was a lone voice in seeing the pair's bond as a chaste one.

As for Taki's suggestion that the inevitable next step would be inserting transgenderism into the canon, there is no need — again the Greeks are far ahead of us. The prophet Tiresias famously spent seven years as a woman before returning to a male form, and Aphrodite and Hermes' child (Hermaphroditus) was often depicted with both sets of genitalia.

Perhaps Peter Jones could help refresh Taki's memory of a few of the finer points of his homeland's mythology.

Emma Lyons
Bath

But how was the play?

Sir: Following Toby Young's article on funerals and the letter last week, I thought you might like to hear another example of British phlegm. My stepson, who is now a successful theatre director, was an assistant at Chichester Theatre. The audience tends to be predominantly pensioners. A few years ago when he was closing up the theatre, he noticed two people still in their seats. When he approached them the lady was very apologetic. 'I think my husband died in the first act,' she said, 'but we didn't want to cause a fuss.' He was indeed declared dead on arrival at the hospital, and my stepson could not but admire her stoicism. I particularly admired the fact that she thought 'we' didn't want to cause a fuss.

Johnny Cameron
Fyfield, Wiltshire


His life and his fart

Sir: Stuart Jeffries (Books, 7 April) asks whether farting in public is one of the human rights the French fought for in 1789. If so, it had not arrived by the time Balzac began to write, because he said he wanted to become so famous he could fart in public with impunity.

Michael Barber
London SW20

WRITE TO US


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All for that taste of Taylor's



I'm an optimist for trade despite the idiocies of politicians



I'm proud to be a member of the 661-year-old Company of Merchant Adventurers of the City of York, having qualified on the strength of a first career spent trying to sell British financial services around the globe from Hokkaido to Gdansk. Before our annual feast last week we prayed optimistically for the discovery of 'a better world' from which we might bring back treasure, spiritual and material — and I couldn't help thinking that UK trade prospects are a lot less straightforward today than they were in 1357, when the known world was eager to buy woollen cloth from English mercers as often as their little ships could cross the choppy North Sea. It was at another dinner with policy boffins and business folk a few days earlier that I was reminded just how little we should realistically expect after Brexit by way of help from Europe, America and the rest of the world.

The gist of it was this. Brussels is good at only one thing, which is the expansion of its regulatory dominion. To imagine its leaders might bend to allow the UK partial market access without full compliance, as a kind of farewell gift, was always delusional — and the lack of clarity in UK negotiating positions so far, driven by discord within Theresa May's cabinet, makes it all the easier for Michel Barnier to stand his ground until time runs out. As for the Irish border problem — there is no solution, however much fudge is applied, since neither side will accept manned or even camera-monitored customs posts and the UK cannot contemplate a special status for Northern Ireland that effectively leaves it in the EU.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump is obsessed with the enormity of America's trade deficit with China, which amounted to \$375 billion in 2017. That's seven times the total of all US imports from the UK, which happen to be roughly in balance with total US exports to the UK. In other words, US-UK trade is neither a problem nor a blessing but an insignificant factor in White House thinking and unlikely to win attention or favour any time soon. As for the rest of the world, yes,

there might eventually be deals that justify the existence of Liam Fox's Department of International Trade. But don't hold your breath or expect them to pay your pension.

Imagine the other side

Gloomy stuff, I know. But at both these gatherings there were other, more positive strands of conversation: about the fact that the internet makes it easier than ever before for small-to-medium manufacturers to export; about the opportunities for UK entrepreneurs in the next wave of technology, including artificial intelligence, and in the service sectors in which we excel; and about the need and the opportunity to present ourselves as a nation that the rest of the world wants to emulate, buy from, visit and invest in. Despite politicians' idiocies, there's treasure to be brought home: we just have to imagine what's on the other side of the choppy seas that currently confront us.

Roberto Who?

I said last week that WPP chief executive Sir Martin Sorrell was in 'a very exposed position'. Sure enough on Saturday he resigned from the global advertising giant he created and had run for more than 32 years. 'But he didn't "create" it,' one ex-employee told me, illustrating the internal resentments that seem to have contributed to Sorrell's downfall. 'He just made a lot of acquisitions and counted the pennies.' Whatever he did or didn't do, his departure was undignified and ill-explained. After he'd gone, WPP's board announced that its investigation into an allegation of financial misconduct against him had concluded, but 'did not involve amounts that are material' and would not be mentioned again. That left the world thinking that the resignation swiftly rebadged as 'retirement' was really about WPP's falling share price, driven by sentiment that the top man's time was up.

Pundits are now asking whether WPP's conglomerate model from the 1980s can

survive without Sorrell in a fragmented new world of advertising that's obsessed with the sorcery of social media and 'big data'.

The answer is that it probably can't and that the famous agency names within WPP will likely find new lives and new alliances. Meanwhile, we've been reminded that even in a company whose fortunes have for so long been synonymous with those of its founder, ultimate power resides with the board (a model of correctness, as it turns out, with three female non-execs and many nationalities) and the chairman.

The latter, three years in post, is Roberto Quarta, a seasoned but low-profile boardroom operator of Italian-American origins who was once a protégé of Owen Green, the famously tough chief of the BTR manufacturing conglomerate. On his way up, I gather, Quarta gained a reputation as a ruthless wielder of the corporate knife. In an interview long ago, when he was running an industrial group called BBA, he described his approach: 'As well as identifying people who can help you push forward change, you're also trying to remove those who are so entrenched in the old culture that they're not going to change.' If the full truth of Sorrell's departure ever emerges, perhaps we'll learn that he met his match in Roberto.

Where's the feelgood?

Toys 'R' Us, Carpetright, Maplin electronics, New Look fashions, MultiYork sofas, even the Bargain Booze chain you might think would resist any economic shift short of an earthquake... after a long winter, March's bitter weather reduced shoppers' footfall by 6 per cent compared to the same month last year, and (says Visa) even online sales fell by 1.2 per cent; now April brings revalued business-rate bills that will knock out another swath of struggling stores. Wage rises have just crept above inflation for the first time in a year, and there's a distinct absence of feelgood factor. Or is there? If you see short-term reasons to be cheerful, tell me: martin@spectator.co.uk.

BOOKS & ARTS



*'Flask with Beast', 1970s,
by Ian Godfrey
Martin Gayford — p47*

Stephen Bayley wonders which planet Elon Musk will muck up next
Agnès Poirier is exasperated by the unending stream of books on the 'end of France'

Violet Hudson enjoys the tea and taffeta parties of Angela Huth's youth
Melanie McDonagh counts the cost – in whales and egrets and beavers – of high fashion

James Walton is gob-smacked that the Korowai people were faking their culture for tourist money
Kate Chisholm wonders why we are so frightened of discussing Powell's speech

BOOKS

Lone Star individuality

Texas is beautiful, barren, corrupt, honourable, a red state with a blue majority. *Michael Moorcock* enjoys the startling contradictions

God Save Texas: A Journey into the Future of America

by Lawrence Wright

Allen Lane, £20, pp. 337

The subtitle of Lawrence Wright's splendid *God Save Texas* ('A Journey into the Future of America') would be alarming if I found it entirely convincing. It's hard to imagine a future where the Catholic Texan spirit of individualism would seriously overwhelm Yankee Puritanism, however mutated. In New England it's about hard-earned old money shrewdly invested. In Texas it's about striking it rich on a hunch, and new money rashly spent.

There are contradictions in Texas which allow you to select almost any argument you like from her. She is beautiful and she is barren; corrupt and honourable. Whatever you want to say about her, she will supply abundant evidence.

Texans are proud of their immigrant heritage, which includes indigenous, African, British, German, Czech, Central and South American and Vietnamese people. They have the largest Muslim population in the US. Texas census rightly classifies Mexican as white, though many are clearly of pre-Columbian descent. There is plenty of racism in parts of the state, but, when crossing the border from Louisiana, Oklahoma or Arkansas, relations between whites and minorities improve noticeably. It's no surprise that so many thousands of New Orleans Katrina victims, invited in by Houston, decided to stay rather than go back. Sophisticated black friends of mine were shocked to find far more prejudice in Boston than they ever experienced in Austin. They returned in some relief. 'Welcome home,' says the immigration officer in Dallas. 'Why are you here?' they ask in New York.

A quarter of a century ago, when I first moved to Texas, I sat drinking in a crowded cowboy bar in our small town when talk turned to politics and healthcare. Foolish-

ly, knowing the reaction this would have in most rural US communities, I found myself asserting that I'd voted socialist in the last British election. I guessed immediately I'd made a mistake. A silence fell. The juke box went quiet. Had there been a piano it would have stopped playing. Then a huge man in a black stetson got up and strode slowly towards me. My heart sank. I didn't really expect a fist fight but I wasn't looking forward to the almost inevitable in-your-face go-back-where-you-came-from bluster. The big cowboy stopped in front of me, looked me over for a moment, grinned and stuck out his hand. 'Machael,' he said, 'yore a true Texan.' It was a serious compliment.

Later, I learned that, early in the 20th century, Texan socialists defeated Republicans statewide before they slowly mutated into Democrats. My nearest neighbour, Bubba, tells me he's a socialist. The Houston Socialist Party sports a hammer-and-sickle flag and its members openly carry AK-47s.

Liberal Austin is second, after New York, on Kim Jong-un's list of nuclear targets

Most Texan socialists are milder social democrats. This year, 17 of them are running for high state office. Wright notes the growing number of Democrats, a majority in the big cities. He calls Texas a red (Republican) state with a blue majority.

Wright has observed most of the changes in his state since the 1950s. A native Texan journalist, he writes plays and film scripts and travels widely. He and his wife live in Austin, where he plays keyboard with a local blues band. In *God Save Texas* he tells the tale of modern Texas through personal anecdote and his own family's history. He argues it might be a matter of time before the whole USA becomes a Trumpian oligarchy but his evidence makes me wonder if it could as easily turn into a modern California. That's the fear of many Republicans.

Is it significant that liberal Austin is second, after New York, on Kim Jong-un's list of nuclear targets?

For all that his argument suggests the inspiration of a *New Yorker* editor, Wright's book is a critical, affectionate account of modern Texas, matched only by Larry McMurtry's great essay *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen* (1999). Wright, whose *The Looming Tower* tells how Islamic terrorism culminated in 9/11, also wrote one of the very best investigations into scientology, *Going Clear*. He admits his ambivalence concerning cavalier Texan politics, as through personal and family reminiscence he traces the peculiar nature of the state's history and how it got that way since Steven Austin and Sam Houston ignored laws forbidding slavery, wrested the territory from Mexico, and founded an independent republic.

With an economy the size of Australia's, Texas exports oil and gas but encourages 'clean' business, such as banking, healthcare, IT and insurance. Large retail businesses, notably Whole Foods, began here, and of course she is linked with the aerospace industry. Solar and wind power flourish. Her major cities are increasingly associated with electronics. Dallas is nicknamed Silicon Prairie; Austin is Silicon Gulch. They attract sophisticated professionals from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, California, South and Central America and the Indian sub-continent. This phenomenon has changed her cultural mix and her politics. A glorious building in Pearland, about 25 miles outside Houston, is only one of her many Hindu temples. Texas has America's largest number of mosques. Fort Worth has first-class art galleries. Houston has the remarkable Rothko Chapel, and an outstanding philharmonic.

In his well argued, ironic discussion of Dallas's recovery from national disgrace after Kennedy's murder, Wright remembers how tourists refused further conversation with his family after learning they



came from there. He thinks collective guilt played a big part in Dallas's flourishing cultural renaissance.

Texas has no income tax but supports her public amenities, such as they are, through VAT and increasingly unfair property taxes. Her legislature meets once every two years for five months and divides between practical, 'business' Republicans and finger-wagging, right-wing Bible Belters, who support 'toilet laws', anti-abortion and other 'morality'-based legislation. Since the 1990s, the gerrymandering of voting districts, the triumph of its chief architect Tom DeLay, Texas's since disgraced congressman, has kept Republicans permanently in power,

Most Texas voters support stricter gun control, but her laws allow people to carry assault rifles on city streets. She spends the least money of any state per capita on education; environmental laws of her 'grandfathers' allow dirty industries to flourish; she sanctions dangerous fracking; resists checks on industrial expansion; and her lack of zoning regulation creates eyesores everywhere. She elects some of the most corrupt, ignorant Bible Belt politicians in the South who close down Planned Parenthood offices and regard seat

belts, motorcycle helmets, texting-while-driving laws and Medicare as infringements of personal liberty. Wright sees all these negatives as providing a vision of what a Trumped American future will be like.

An admirer of the Texan political humorist the late Molly Ivins, Wright thinks she would have loved Mary Lou Bruner: a 70-year-old retired schoolteacher from Mineola who in 2016 ran as a Republican

Bible Belt politicians regard Medicare, crash helmets and texting-while-driving laws as infringements of liberty

for an open seat on the Texas Board of Education. Because ten per cent of the public school students in the nation live in Texas, the state exerts a great influence on the textbook publishing industry. During her campaign, Bruner posted on Facebook that Barack Obama had worked as a male prostitute in his twenties. 'That is how he paid for his drugs,' she reasoned. Bruner went on to assert that climate change is a ridiculous hoax; that school shootings are caused by students being taught about evolution; and 'dinosaurs are extinct because the ones on Noah's Ark were too young to reproduce'.

Wright describes the Texas legislature as 'more functional than the US Congress, and more genteel than the House of Commons, but a recurrent crop of crackpots and ideologues has fed the state's reputation for aggressive know-nothingism and proudly retrograde politics.' Yet Texans are amongst the most tolerant people in the nation, with a tradition of taking others on their own terms, living and letting live.

For all Wright's warnings, Austin, where the legislature sits, is not just 'the live music capital of the world'; it is one of the most humane and civilised places in the US, frequently topping lists of best cities in which to live.

Could Texas completely redefine WASP-land? I think not. The New England myth is one of civilising the world through expanding trade, religious and cultural purity and the establishment of universal laws. For Texas, it's about unself-conscious populism and absorbing local culture; hard-drinking freebooters battling at the Alamo; Indian fighting; rowdy cowboys driving trails; wildcatting; sudden wealth and sudden death. The two are better co-existing. In my opinion, therefore, Lonesome Dove will always make Rabbit Run.



Where are the heirs of Zola? The writer photographed in his sumptuous study

A deep malaise Agnès Poirier

The End of the French Intellectual

by Shlomo Sand
Verso, £20, pp. 304

Here is a detail that says a lot. In the French translation of this latest book by the Israeli historian Shlomo Sand, the title was followed by a question mark. In the English translation there isn't one. The author is making a statement, not asking a question. The French intellectual is dead, finished, a thing of the past.

If this is supposed to be polemical, it is an epic failure. Even if Paris still retains its unique aura, everyone knows that it no longer rules the intellectual and artistic world: the likes of Zola and Sartre seem to have produced no weighty legitimate heirs. So what will *The End of the French Intellectual* tell us that we haven't already heard?

I've lost count of all the books on this subject, or the end of French cuisine or simply the end of France. It's a profitable genre in itself, and an interesting one to decipher. When written by someone French, these works usually reveal a defeatist mentality, filled with existential malaise. The many such essays since the late 1990s have led a fashion known as *déclinologie*.

When written by a foreigner, they more often demonstrate some deep-rooted fascination that has grown bitter. Although partly educated in France, as a doctoral student

in the late 1970s, Sand belongs in the second category. Here he writes of his *amours de jeunesse* with the bile and bad faith of a spurned lover.

Let's begin with Sartre, one of Sand's Left Bank idols whom he now hates himself for having loved. 'The discovery of Sartre's rather unheroic action during the German Occupation created the first cracks in my image of him,' he explains. Was it unheroic to have escaped death at the hands of the Nazis? It's a strange way to describe someone who simply survived the war in one piece. Or is Sand insinuating that Sartre was a collaborator? He may have taken fewer risks than Camus, who was active in the resistance and also

Houellebecq only emerges from his den to promote his novels and never gives his views on world affairs

survived the war unscathed. But Sartre did escape from prison camp, create a resistance movement (which admittedly petered out after a few months) and from 1943 attend underground meetings of the CNE (Comité National des Ecrivains) — all activities which would have landed him in trouble with the German occupiers. For the rest of his life, for better or worse the war had a profound influence on his intellectual outlook.

Sand's book sets out to paint a portrait of the French intellectual and his many failings from the Dreyfus Affair — when the

word was coined — to the Charlie Hebdo attack when, according to Sand, the last few remaining specimens proved their irrelevance and racism. His principal argument is that the *judeophobie* which underlaid the French intelligentsia in the 1890s has been replaced today by Islamophobia. To prove his point, Sand directs his venom at the novelist Michel Houellebecq, the philosopher Alain Finkielkraut and the polemicist Eric Zemmour.

These are odd choices. Houellebecq is not a public intellectual. He only emerges from his den every other year or so to promote his latest novel and never gives his views on world affairs. Zemmour is a columnist, a ubiquitous and sometimes unsavoury media presence, and the French Left's favourite punchbag. It wasn't always so; but the more he was attacked by the *bien-pensant* Left, the more Zemmour veered to the Right. He now lives under police protection — a sorry state of affairs for all involved.

Only Finkielkraut can be described as a true public intellectual. Constantly accused of Islamophobia and fascism — again by the *bien-pensant* Left — he bears the blows with the same resilience that Sartre showed when attacked in the late 1940s for refusing to choose between the Gaullists and the Communists.

And Finkielkraut is perhaps the only person in Sand's book to offer a refutation of its central statement. He is not only a profound humanist (if a pessimistic one); he is also one of the last brilliant

universalists that France can boast. If anyone is the heir of both Zola and Charles Péguy, it is he — a Don Quixote of bold intelligence, denouncing stupidity wherever it comes from. He doesn't aim to please, only to enlighten. And that takes extraordinary courage today.

But to criticise Sand ends up being futile. The anti-Semites' favourite Jew, the anti-Zionists' beloved Israeli, the Francophile who says 'I'm not Charlie' three days after the massacre, is not interested in delivering a rigorous study of the French intellectual. Finding fault with his work, in his opinion, validates his position. So, apart from offering an interesting portrait of a Marxist contrarian, *The End of the French Intellectual* perhaps merely deserves a shrug. Anyone interested in the subject should read instead the late Tony Judt's *Past Imperfect*: based on facts and research, that book explains with brilliant cruelty the real roots of French intellectual decadence.

Paved with good intentions

Hugh Pearman

Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Social Housing

by John Boughton

Verso, £17.99, pp. 336

As a schoolboy, I used to go round to my best mate Mike's home. It was a good place: a cosy first-floor flat beneath the big, tiled, pitched roof, an anthracite stove in the kitchen. It faced onto a green and had a long garden at the back. It had a parade of shops nearby and a primary school. I didn't know then that it was on a council estate or that the more tightly packed newer housing developments nearby were private. These were just places where people I knew lived.

Mike's estate was (and is, for it still exists) a version of the 'municipal dreams' that John Boughton describes in his detailed history of social housing in the UK. Built in the late 1940s and early 1950s it is — despite being in a conservatively inclined part of the shires — a relic of the 'Bevan housing' of the immediate postwar years. Nye Bevan, housing minister among much else in the Attlee government, aimed his reforms primarily at the working class, but certainly did not envision ghettos of the poor — or what he called 'castrated communities'.

Boughton cites Bevan's famous 1949 speech in the Commons:

It is entirely undesirable that on modern housing estates only one type of citizen should live.... We should try to introduce what was always the lovely feature of Eng-

lish and Welsh villages, where the doctor, the grocer, the butcher and the farm labourer all lived in the same street.

This principle held for a while, thanks not only to the postwar political consensus on housing (Macmillan's Conservative administration built more social housing than any previous one) but also to earlier initiatives from late-19th-century charitable housing onwards. If yours was one of the many homes with no bathroom and an outside toilet, this was a lifestyle to aspire to.

Then the dream began to fade. Problems with the construction, management and maintenance of council estates predated the Thatcher government's dismantling of the system, which involved selling off the best stock to tenants at large discounts while not allowing councils to reinvest the money in new housing. The partial collapse of the Ronan Point tower in Tower Hamlets in 1968 — caused by a gas explosion — signalled the end of one particular era, that of the cheaply built highrise prefabricated concrete systems that had been favoured by the central government grants system since the Macmillan era. Better councils had by then started building high-density, lower-rise estates instead. Nor was it all bad anyway: the best council estates, high or low-rise, are now listed buildings.

But too many estates became monocultural housing of last resort, with all the problems of poverty. This was far from the original aim. Boughton relates the birth of the social housing movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: they weren't exactly for the well-to-do, the austere new tenement blocks and later semi-suburban estates in the Arts and Crafts manner, but they needed tenants with regular incomes and of good character. The artisan class — skilled or semi-skilled workers — provided the desired population. Meanwhile the destitute were more or less abandoned. It was the Victorian and Edwardian way.

Boughton outlines the single most obvious problem: social housing is not a commercial proposition. The sums never add up on an open-market basis. To keep rents

affordable for those on low incomes, there always has to be some form of subsidy. It used to come direct from the national coffers. Today the pious hope is to use sky-high property prices to cross-subsidise the social elements as council estates are 'regenerated' by private developers. But that has caused scandals, as developers take council estates, empty out the people, build luxury flats to sell to overseas investors and provide very little real social housing in return. Councils are being taken for fools.

Is it all over, then? Was the Grenfell Tower fire the tragic end of it all? No: one of the legacies of the Coalition government's Localism Act is that councils can build homes again. Many are. New social housing is emerging. Some of it even looks a bit like my mate Mike's old estate. It's a start.

The billionaire's toy box

Stephen Bayley

The Space Barons: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and the Quest to Colonise the Cosmos

by Christian Davenport

Public Affairs, £17.95, pp. 308

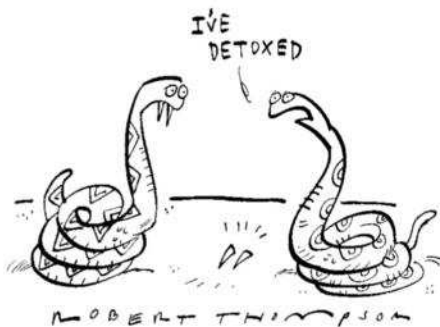
Today's VHNWI wants a PRSHLS. That's Very High Net-Worth Individual and Partially Reuseable Super Heavy Lift System. Or, in the demotic, the rich want space rockets.

'It's not rocket science', people say when describing the technique of making, say, an omelette — even if making an omelette requires a certain deftness of hand and nice judgment. So what is it? Rocket science is a mixture of ballistics, aeronautics, chemistry and computation, now cocktailed with extreme wealth, galactic obsessions and a faraway look in the eye.

Once, the prerogative of the rich was to assault the environment with fast cars, burning oil and cruelly crushing molecules of air as they progressed. Now, the billionaire's toy box contains rockets, which add new semantic richness to the concept of gas-guzzling. Robber Barons used iron and coal; Space Barons use liquid nitrogen and aerospace-grade titanium.

The environmental assault, however, continues. It's estimated that the last launch of Elon Musk's Space-X resulted in a 560-mile-wide hole torn in the ionosphere, compromising local GPS signals and exposing us to deadly death rays from outer space — and further exposure to Elon's lethal grin.

Jan Morris calls Musk 'the most interesting man alive'; but I think he may merely be the most annoying. Amazon's Jeff Bezos is his rival, although their characters are different. Musk, according to Christian



Davenport, is loud and fast, with a tendency to micromanage. Bezos is quiet and slow. He has a 'trademark maniacal laugh'. Yes, I bet he does. And let's not exclude our own Richard Branson, an eager cadet to Musk and Bezos in the matter of VHNWI rocketry.

What are the psychologies at work here? Significantly, both Bezos and Musk were interested in space before they built the businesses which made them rich enough to penetrate it. Bezos, a child maths prodigy with an unsettled background (the family name is that of his adoptive Cuban father), had made \$5 billion by 2005 when he was only 41. Genius was advertised early in a high school paper called 'The Effect of Zero Gravity on the Ageing Rate of the Common House-fly'. For his part, Musk has a parallel genius for deal-making: he acquired 197 acres, a test-bed and five buildings for his space programme at an annual rent of just \$45,000.

There are elements of Cold War nostalgia at work here. In 1957, Sputnik rebranded the USSR as technologically advanced, shaming Kennedy into the moon shot. In 1969, the year an American astronaut eventually took that giant step for mankind, Pan Am, in all seriousness, began selling tickets for future space rides.

Pan Am soon went bust. And after the glorious moon landing, Nasa never achieved anything of similar value either technically or in terms of PR. The Space Shuttle, for example, is now widely understood to be a dangerous, irrelevant and expensive waste of time and money. Thus, it's tempting to see Bezos and Musk as Trumpian patriots making America great again. Space exploration was once the province of sovereign nations; now it belongs to the super-rich. What does that do for your ego?

Savour the absurdities. Musk is having difficulty manufacturing his Tesla Model 3 cars in the numbers he promised, so what chance do we give him of conquering the cosmos? In any case, why name a car

after someone who thought wiggling your toes increased IQ, and shared a room in a New York residential hotel with pigeons? Musk says his interest in space is insurance against an 'eventual extinction event' — something, what with conflagrations and autopilot crashes, is already a daily possibility for Tesla drivers.

Bezos's insistence on a reusable rocket, the important element in his outer-space business plan, is a rare concession to environmental responsibility. Back on earth, Amazon manages huge server farms powered by diesel generators and cooled by toxic air-con. It runs godless warehouses, creepily known in evangelical English as 'fulfilment centres', whence fuming vans are launched to clog cities, distributing made-in-China junk wrapped in too much brown corrugated cardboard.

Amazon is an environmental atrocity, yet Jeff is going to save the planet with rockets. Musk wants us to become a 'multi-planet species', while we busily muck up the only planet we have. For an apex-predator billionaire, the attraction of space may be that there is no finish line. As displacement activities go, rockets have a lot to be said for them.

Davenport is a staff writer on the *Washington Post*. *Space Barons* is fastidious and engrossing, but written in that irritating facsimile reportage style familiar to anyone who reads quality US print media. On the whole he resists the very considerable temptations of satire available here: to the sceptical English ear, his voice is too slavish and adoring, and his account a bit episodic.

Who knew that the internet was going to become an oligopoly, with the world's information and shopping controlled not by a networked democracy but by amateur rocket scientists? Mark Zuckerberg has not gone into space yet, but don't bet against it. Lunatics were disturbed people who stared wistfully at the moon. Now we need a bigger word. Galactics?

Debs, dances and big-game hunting

Violet Hudson

Not the Whole Story

by Angela Huth

Constable, £20, pp. 311

Never Say No

by Duff Hart-Davis

Left Field Editions, £14.99, pp. 288

Angela Huth, the broadcaster and author of some 18 books, has now written her memoirs, *Not the Whole Story*. And though it may not be the whole story, what a story it is.

Huth is the daughter of the actor Harold Huth and the flighty Bridget Nickols, who had an *amitié amoureuse* with the King of Portugal and several affairs. Huth's enjoyably monstrous grandmother, with a pen-

Huth's secondary school had no geography teacher for an entire year, and no one saw fit to complain

chant for couture, a private account at the Bank of England and the world's most valuable pearl, is vividly described. Once, in the V&A, she

found a magnificent collection of... dozens of pieces in all, hand-cut glass that slightly pricks your fingers. Each piece was engraved with a VR; it had been made to celebrate Queen Victoria's Silver Jubilee. 'I'll take all that,' said my grandmother, presumably thinking she was in a large department store.

Huth is marvellously gossipy: we learn that Princess Margaret had a phobia of dolls and mannequins and that John Betjeman found the notion of a 'cocktail dress' exquisitely funny. But she manages never to be bitchy and not a mean word is said about anyone. Nor does she ever show off. Film stars 'happen' to come to dinner; Huth just 'comes across' famous writers. We meet Marlene Dietrich and Britt Ekland, Sofia Loren and Rex Harrison, Keith Richards and Iris Murdoch, Liberace and the Queen Mother. It could all be a bit Jilly Cooper, what with the debutantes and the dances, the country weekends and courting. Everything is frightfully good fun. But Huth is too funny and modest to let her memoirs slip into caricature.

Her best chapters are about her school days, and the sort of education that doesn't exist any more: plenty of dancing and picnicking and reciting poetry. Once, at her secondary school in Malvern, there was no geography teacher for an entire year: no one saw fit to complain.

In 1956, she came out as a deb, and her chapter about the season is sweetly nostalgic, tinged with irreverence about that mad-

The Fox

My soul is a fox with a hen in its maw
 And the tingle of blood in its tooth and its claw
 That slips through the curtain of half-conscious dawns,
 Its ears always pricked for the hounds and the horns
 Of its past and its future, its life and its death,
 With the kill in its mouth and the shriek on its breath,
 Into mornings of calm, when there's nothing to hear
 And the air is quite still, and the sky is quite clear,
 And the prey is at peace, and the fox in its den
 That has lived one more day in this strange world of men.

— Jonathan Steffen

dest of English traditions. She spent a few years at art schools in Paris and Florence — grim and inspiring respectively — and travelled round America at a time when the presence of a black girl at the same table as a southern belle was enough to reduce the latter to hysterical tears. Huth races through her career at *Queen* magazine, the BBC and selling nighties on the Fulham Road. We swirl through a succession of houses and friends. Novels are written, TV programmes made, marriages entered into and children born.

But there is plenty left out, as suggested by the title. She skims over her divorce from her first husband Quentin Crewe. On one page they are companionably writing in adjoining rooms, looking after their young daughter Candida and restoring a house in Bedfordshire; on the next, they are splitting up, with no reason given. (She is scarcely more revealing about her present marriage, to the academic James Howard-Johnston.) But there is no doubt that she is a thoroughly good egg: ever cheerful, a wonderfully loyal friend and as amusing and engaging a writer as one could hope to find.

Another writer, Duff Hart-Davis (whose novelist wife Phyllida was at school with Angela Huth), has also published a memoir. But *Never Say No* couldn't be further removed from the taffeta and tea parties of Huth's world. Hart-Davis's travel stories are straight out of the *Boy's Own*, all discontented lieutenants and big game hunting.

In his youth, he was one of the first Westerners to drive through Russia when the borders opened to tourists in 1957 (and the first Englishman in the Crimea), alongside his godfather Peter Fleming. The Russians were astonished by their car; 'clearly,' one of them said, 'it is not possible for a private citizen to own such a vehicle.'

In 1970 Hart-Davis drove some 6,000 miles from Delhi to England with his wife, following the hashish route and taking in the Khyber Pass and Persepolis. Other trips were to Ascension Island, Kenya and Nigeria. With the keen eye for detail that makes him such a good reporter, Hart-Davis notices everything, including peoples' heights and the makes of cars.

And he has been to some extraordinary places and met some amazing people, among them Oleg Gordievsky, 'the most valuable double agent the West has ever had', and King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev of Nepal, the living incarnation of Vishnu. Yet there is no sense here of how living his life actually feels. Apart from an enthusiasm for cricket and flying, and a dislike of taxes and communism, we learn little about him. The everyday textures — food, clothes, even much description of his children — are sadly lacking. He's a Joseph Conrad Englishman: bold, brave and restrained. Fans of *Heart of Darkness* will find plenty to enjoy.



NATIONAL FOLKLORE COLLECTION UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN IRELAND

'An Irish Peasant Discovering the Potato Blight of their Store', by Daniel MacDonald (1847)

The sorrow and the pity Honor Clerk

Misère: The Visual Representation of Misery in the 19th Century

by Linda Nochlin

Thames & Hudson, £24.95, pp. 176

In 1971 the late Linda Nochlin burst onto the public scene with her groundbreaking essay, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' Unlike other apologists, she made no claim that there were, in fact, great overlooked women artists but shifted the ground of the question to ask why circumstances made it impossible for women to be great artists.

If it might seem an obvious question now, that is in part because she made it so, and almost 50 years later she has brought the same clear-eyed approach to the representation of *misère* in 19th-century art. In one sense, of course, what she is writing about is economic poverty, but the *misère* of her title carries with it the more profound and degrading connotations that the French sociologist Eugène Buret identified in his 1840 *De la misère des classes laborieuses en Angleterre et en France*: 'the destitution, the suffering

and humiliation that result from forced deprivation'; poverty 'felt morally', afflicting 'the whole man, soul and body alike'.

Rooted firmly in Buret's notion of *misère*, Nochlin's book is essentially a collection of five case studies that enable her to explore the ways in which artists responded, and still respond, to the phenomenon. For all its occasional academic language, there is nothing abstruse in her method or her concerns. In 'The Irish Paradigm', for instance, she addresses the ethics of the depiction of human suffering, the self-imposed limits that prevented artists conveying the full horror of the situation to the general public, the art historical pedigree of the recurring imagery of mother and child and, conversely, the lack of precedence for the depiction of mother and dead baby.

She analyses the merits of illustrations of *misère* in both the graphic arts and photography and contrasts these with the amateur sketch or the unaesthetic snapshot which arguably gives a more immediate and authentic

account and goes on to discuss the value of the documentary image once it has become a cliché. Finally, she considers late 20th-century Irish famine memorials in Sydney, Boston and New York. In the latter's Battery Park an entire smallholding, including walls, grass and a real abandoned Irish fieldstone cottage, seems to have been tipped into a high-rise city setting.

Just as in her seminal essay on women artists, here too Nochlin shifts our perspective and grounds of enquiry. She cites images of prostitutes — at work, asleep, waiting for a medical inspection — in works by Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec and others and asks where, in an age and milieu in which syphilis was all but endemic and its symptoms were often the subject of caricature and popular art, are the high art images dealing with the indignities suffered by men? The answer, inevitably, is that the works we know are all the product of male artists. The female view is so rarely heard that when Nochlin quotes Flora Tristan, a French social theorist, writing in 1840 about the degradation of prostitutes in London, it is intensely shocking. 'Oh,' she writes, 'if I had not witnessed such an infamous profanation of a human being, I would not have believed it possible.'

Nochlin is characteristically good at choosing and discussing her cases. Géricault's

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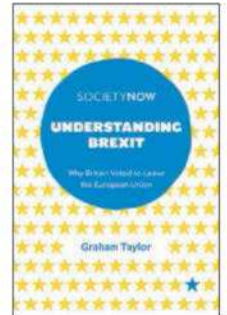
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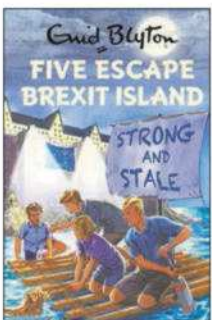
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'Migrant Mother' by Dorthea Lange (c. 1936) has been called the 'ultimate' photograph of the Depression era. Lange wrote of the woman, whose name was Florence Owens Thompson: 'She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed'

deeply compassionate series of London lithographs contrasts with Goya's *de haut en bas* drawings of beggars. Courbet, the subject of Nochlin's doctoral thesis, unsurprisingly is well represented, while the last case study features the little known but powerful paintings of Fernand Pelez (1843–1913) wonderfully dubbed the 'Master of Miserable Old Men'. Nochlin describes his style as 'a blend of detailed realism and emotional distance' and the works reproduced are both affecting and disturbing. At over 6 metres wide his 'Grimaces and Misery: the Saltimbanques of 1888' is a tour de force of exhausted, bored, disillusioned performers. The now lost canvas 'A Morsel of Bread', a multi-panelled grisaille commissioned by the French state and completed in 1908, depicts a row of old men in a breadline that seems, in pathos, humanity and composition, to prefigure Sargent's 'Gassed' of some ten years later.

'I have lain awake for hours,' wrote the American philanthropist Elihu Burritt, frustrated at the inadequacy of language to do justice to the tragedy of the Irish famine, 'struggling mentally for some graphic and truthful similes, or new elements of description, by which I might convey to the distant reader's mind some tangible image of this object.' It is to Linda Nochlin's credit that she has found the words to match the images that form the heart of this beautifully produced book. Don't be put off by the title.

Alternatives to God Stuart Kelly

Seven Types of Atheism

by John Gray
Allen Lane, £20, pp.182

G. K. Chesterton, in one of his wise and gracious apothegms, once wrote that 'When Man ceases to worship God he does not worship nothing but worships everything.' John Gray, one of the most pernicky and carnaptious of contemporary philosophers,

*Gray is on the strange intersection
of not believing unbelievers
and not believing believers*

presents here a kind of taxonomy of not atheism, per se, but of the vacuums and nothings into which the loss of belief has rushed. It is, as one would expect, an exhilarating read. The title winks to Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, and he appears as one of the figures in these essays.

One might think that atheism is a fairly simple proposition. There is no God. The argument here is that in the absence of God, atheist philosophies supplant a (mostly) Christian version of religion in terms of salvation, destiny and the defi-

nition of the human. Gray does look at other faiths, but tends to rely on a sleight of hand between practice and belief. You can observe the injunction on not wearing wool and linen (Deuteronomy 22:11) and not actually believe in Yahweh, or that He made the world and the heavens. You just stick to what your people have chosen to do. His comments on Hinduism, Tao and Buddhism follow the same form. The Bad Christians set up a dangerous story and the happy heathens just got on with being nice to each other.

So what are the seven types of atheism? The Dawkins style is airily dismissed in the first chapter as almost beneath serious intellectual scrutiny. Chapter Two takes in Ayn Rand and John Stuart Mill — not the easiest of bedfellows, but comfy down here — as representatives of secular humanism. The third chapter is on how science has overwritten religion, from Mesmerism to Transhumanism, a topic Gray explored in his previous book, *The Immortalisation Commission*.

He goes into full cerebral bruxism in the next chapter, where political utopias are severally severed. You have to give it to him: from the chiliastic fantasies of the Munster atrocities during the Reformation, to Robespierre and the Revolution, to Lenin and the Bolsheviks, to Hitler and evangelical liberalism, in this part he doesn't so much analyse as machine-gun every idea that top-down thinking would make bottom-up living better.

It's a routine he has performed before (in *Black Mass*, for example), but it is nevertheless bracing and rigorous. Empson finally appears in the fifth essay, alongside Dostoevsky and the Marquis de Sade. Curious company indeed, and it would have been intriguing to be at that dinner party. This piece is devoted to the 'God-haters'; and if they believed in God enough to detest Him, they are, by definition, not atheists. Finally we get two essays where Gray gives us his 'good' atheists — Joseph Conrad and George Santayana, reconciled to a godless world yet unblinkered about humanity's failings; and then the 'mystical atheists' — Schopenhauer, Spinoza and Shestov.

Gray is possibly the most genial pessimist with whom one might share company. The book's target is not theology or anti-theology, but teleology. The imposition of purpose, or meliorism, is a futile and actively negative set of beliefs. Humans, even humans as interesting as Gray, are exceptionally rubbish at incarnating humanity, or the humane. We all end up as hummus anyway. There is a Kantian undertow to much of his thought: 'Of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing may be made.'

The book does have its sins of omission rather than commission. In dealing with

the problem of nihilism, it is surprising not to see those who had a form of solution to it, specifically Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Bonhoeffer. In terms of the atheists, it would have been useful to have more analysis on Lucretius, one of the few thoroughgoing unbelievers, and who later became a crucible of myths against his own writings.

Gray's own practical answer is that 'there is no need for panic or despair. Belief and unbelief are poses the mind adopts in the face of an unimaginable reality. A godless world is as mysterious as one suffused with divinity, and the difference between the two may be less than you think.' This is eloquent, even poetic, though it does not amount to much more than 'Keep calm and carry on.'

Gray is adept with the skewer — sometimes brilliantly, witheringly so — but provides little in the way of shield. Although I relished an atheist eviscerating atheists, and was heartened that the book was powdered through with the power of literature, my final qualms were unquieted. In such a universe, what does goodness mean? Why should anyone be altruistic? If Christianity is Patient Zero of a particular kind of triumphal messianic thinking, why do the Gospels seem so often to reject that? Gray, like other thinkers such as Richard Holloway and Raymond Tallis, is on the strange intersection of not believing unbelievers and not believing believers. Stay terrified and pray like hell.

When worlds collide

Kate Webb

Happiness

by Aminatta Forna

Bloomsbury, £16.99, pp. 312

In her keynote lecture for a conference on 'The Muse and the Market' in 2015 Aminatta Forna mounted a powerful advocacy for the political novel, challenging the assumption that politics or 'subject' undermines literary aesthetic. 'A political novel can fail as a work of art as much as any other novel,' she argued, 'but the fact that it is political does not sentence it to failure.'

Her own approach to fiction is something like Paul Klee's approach to his art: where Klee talked of taking a line for a walk, she says: 'When I write a novel it is like taking a thought for a walk.' In *Happiness*, Forna's fourth novel, the thought up for consideration is that in the West many people's lives are so sheltered they have become terrified of suffering, pathologising even ordinary loss or grief as trauma. Perhaps this desire for safety, she speculates, has also led to a fear of incomers — a fear expressed in blindness to the many migrants at work across the city, or in anxiety when confronted with

wild creatures in urban territory, with the sudden 'opalescent eye shine of an animal' in the road.

These fears are scrutinised, and countered, in *Happiness* by Attila, a debonair Ghanaian psychiatrist visiting London for a conference on PTSD, and Jean, an American wildlife biologist in the capital to study urban foxes. They are both adapting to life after recent losses: his incurred by the death of a beloved wife, hers by a divorce that has separated her from her son.

The two collide on Waterloo Bridge one winter evening and then again in a nearby underpass when they intervene to stop a white beggar from being attacked. These collisions are followed by many more, to the point where London, the novel's third major character, is depicted as a place that continually puts one kind of person, or animal, in the path of another: a Bosnian street performer opens the door for a fox meandering through the National Theatre; a Sierra Leonean traffic warden notices a boy loitering alone by the Thames; and a flock of parakeets makes a home in Nunhead Cemetery, aggravating the local council but delighting the joggers and dog-walkers.

Not all encounters are welcome or convivial: one frightened woman crosses the road to avoid coming face to face with a recently bereaved acquaintance. Against such antipathy, Forna proposes that rather than fencing off our lives in fantasy ('prelapsarian gardens'), the best hope for survival, and indeed for happiness, is to cultivate 'a sense of something that goes beyond ourselves'.

Once worlds collide it takes curiosity, empathy and will to draw people together. When Attila tells Jean about his runaway nephew, caught up in an immigration sting, she realises she can help him, having knowledge of the city from tracking foxes. She also has access to a network of people who assist in monitoring the foxes' movements: migrant road-sweepers, traffic wardens and security guards, all with expertise in London's street culture. And they volunteer to search for the boy. The reason they are willing to help is their sense of solidarity, something echoed in the silent nods of acknowledgment that pass between Attila and other black people as they make their way through the city.

The correlation of Forna's idea that some in the West have become insular and enclosed, is that those most exposed to suffering — having learnt from it — may have developed greater emotional resources. In her rather Nietzschean novel, which emphasises knowledge, tenacity and resilience over victimhood, this is demonstrated time and again. Which is not to say that Forna is an idealist. *Happiness* is an outward looking book, yet in passages that punctuate the London story, set in Bosnia, Sierra Leone and Iraq, the ravaged places where Attila has worked with civilian and combatant victims

of war, there is no doubting the suffering that human beings inflict upon one another, and upon other species.

Here, Forna thinks deeply about our responsibilities and how we can all get along. Attila tells Jean: 'Some in my profession believe animal cruelty is an early indicator of worse to come'; while she points out that foxes have moved into cities not, as widely held, because we stopped hunting them in the country, but because fast food means 'the sidewalks have turned into "all you can eat buffets"'. Where Jean is fascinated by the culture of the natural world and interspecies relationships, Attila responds to the horror he's witnessed by cultivating his love of food, dance and language, conversing with a colleague in Esperanto, the dreamed-up speech of international fellowship.

The novel ends with Attila's own conference keynote lecture in which he calls on the work of Frantz Fanon, R.D. Laing and the anti-psychiatry movement, to argue that 'trauma does not equal destiny'. He also returns to his love of Robert Graves, who went back to the trenches, deciding 'he preferred the suffering of war to the insufferability of civilisation'. *Goodbye to All That* might well have provided an alternative title to Forna's piercingly intelligent and interrogative novel which, like the earlier book, registers tectonic shifts taking place in the world and provokes us to think anew about war, and what we take for peace and happiness.

Plucky young rebel

Claudia FitzHerbert

Astrid Lindgren: The Woman Behind Pippi Longstocking

by Jens Andersen, translated from the

Swedish by Caroline Wright

Yale £25, pp. 343

Pippi Longstocking is a nine-year-old girl who lives alone with a monkey and horse in a cottage called Villa Villekulla at the edge of a village close to the sea in an unnamed part of Sweden. She is a tender-hearted braggart, brilliant but unlettered, with a punning, pulling-the-rug wit. She lives as she likes — sleeping with her shoes on the pillow is something children always remember about Pippi, along with the carrot-coloured plaits at right ankles to her freckled face and her superhuman strength.

Pippi burst upon the world in 1945 and her main adventures were over by 1950 — a few later books elaborated on scenes already laid down. Her creator was a previously unknown writer of occasional magazine stories who had been born into a farming community in southern Sweden and moved to Stockholm in her teens. She had worked as a secretary before marrying in 1931 and settling down to a life as a stay-at-home wife and



Inger Nilsson as Pippi Longstocking in the Swedish television series. Astrid Lindgren drew deeply on her own childhood for her books

mother. During the war she had gone back to work — in the censorship department of neutral Sweden's central post office. The first Pippi stories were written to amuse her nine-year-old daughter when she was bedridden with a sprained ankle.

The immediate success of Pippi Longstocking — first in Sweden then Denmark then the rest of the world — set Astrid Lindgren on a path to becoming one of the best known figures in Swedish cultural life. In 1948 she joined the permanent panel of *20 Questions*, the country's most popular radio programme, and was soon being canvassed for her opinion on everything from child-rearing to world peace (she reckoned they were connected).

But mainly she continued to write children's books and they continued to be phenomenally successful, despite frequent changes of genre. She moved between the magic of the *Karlsson-on-the-Roof* series to the realist 1930s pastoral of *The Six Bullerby Children* and onto the more robust adventures of *Ronia the Robber's Daughter*. In the English-speaking world none of her subsequent series matched the popularity of Pippi, though two of her stand-alone titles — including the enchanting *Seacrow Island* (1964) — have recently been republished in the *New York Review Children's Collection* list, a sure sign of canonical favour.

Like many successful writers for chil-

dren, Lindgren drew deeply on her own childhood. Astrid Ericsson was the eldest of four children born in 1907 to pious tenant farmers in Småland, a pastoral paradise which she later described with such vividness that it afflicted some German readers with a condition known as Bullerbu Syndrom, whose sufferers are possessed by yearning to emigrate to rural Sweden. But the interest of Andersen's biography lies more in the story of her youthful rebellion against this world than his dutifully plodding account of her later career.

Ericsson left school at 16 to become a trainee journalist on the local paper, a strikingly modern figure in cropped hair and hiking boots like Hilde Wangel in Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. Then, like Rebecca in *Rosmersholm*, she became entangled with the paper's businessman proprietor who was more than 30 years older and already married to his former housekeeper. Finding herself pregnant, she escaped to Stockholm. Meanwhile her seducer and his angry wife entered a legal wrangle which ended in their divorce

two years later. Ericsson gave birth to a son in Copenhagen and left him with a foster mother. She kept in touch with the father of her child but refused to marry him and become stepmother to his eight children. He found a substitute and continued, like Bernick in *The Pillars of Society*, to play the big man in the small town that Astrid Ericsson had fled.

She worked as a secretary in Stockholm, saving money for trips to see her son who was growing up Danish. When he was three, she persuaded her parents to look after him, while she embarked on another affair with a married employer. This time the battle-scarred stenographer was ready to go respectable. Sture Lindgren divorced his wife to marry Astrid, who retrieved her young son and soon provided him with a sister. The boy-cut became a bob beneath a married cloche, and the experiment in free-thinking defiance seemingly went underground.

It emerged in the exuberant anarchism of the Pippi books and again, arguably, in titles such as *Mio, My Son* (1954) and *The Brothers Lionheart* (1973), both of which dared to breathe life into death — presenting an unconventional subject for children to chew on.

Lindgren later became a prominent spokeswoman for a number of liberal causes, but the books, at their best, are much odder and more original than her public perso-

na. 'Love children, and their behaviour will take care of itself' she said, when asked for her opinion on how best to bring up the next generation.

But Pippi isn't loved, exactly. She lives alone and exhausts any adult who has dealings with her. Sometimes we see her wistful in the face of other children's comforts. 'Rather pathetic really' is the standard response of a defensively pitying world when faced with the solitary brave enough to acknowledge that something is missing.

Pippi only pretends to let pity in; she no sooner acknowledges a gap in her ecosystem than she fixes it. There's much for modern children to mock in the books — Pippi's friends Tommy and Anneka, for example, are so tightly fixed into gender roles that Peter and Jane of *Ladybird* fame look mildly trans by comparison. But a generation which regards social self-

*'Love children and their behaviour
will take care of itself' was
Astrid Lindgren's motto*

sufficiency as a form of suicide has plenty to learn from the strongest girl in the world, whom we last see sitting at her kitchen table, unaware of the eyes of her friends as she blows out a candle and disappears alone into the darkness.

After treating the drama of Lindgren's early years, Andersen appears to lose his nerve about delving further into her personal life. We learn that her husband left her for a bit in 1944 and died of drink in 1951, and that her son — who died in 1986 — was a depressive, whose early unsettled life haunted his mother for the rest of hers. Also that she had a close friendship with a German lesbian, who would have liked something even closer. But Lindgren, like her most famous creation, was good at being alone, and appears never to have wobbled in the widowhood which lasted for more than half a century. Andersen is content to quote from her blandly unrevealing diaries. He calls no witnesses, and asks no further questions.

This makes for dullish reading, but perhaps he was warned off. In the second volume of Karl Ove Knausgaard's sprawling autobiographical novel *My Struggle*, mention is made of another author who has had the temerity to publish a book about Astrid Lindgren's views on religion, loosely based on conversations he claims to have had with her before her death. This author has the humiliation of seeing his book withdrawn by the publishers in the face of complaints from Lindgren's estate. Karl Ove is coldly unsympathetic, saying: 'He had only himself to blame.' Is the moral that you can write what you like about your parents, partner and children, but even Knausgaard knows not to speculate about the belief system of Astrid Lindgren?



ARTS

Call of the wild

Melanie McDonagh is seduced and appalled by a show about fashion's fascination with the natural world

One of the prettiest pieces in the V&A exhibition *Fashioned from Nature* is a man's cream waistcoat, silk and linen, produced in France before the revolution, in the days when men could give women a run for their money in flamboyant dress. It's embroidered with macaque monkeys of quite extraordinary verisimilitude, with fruit trees sprouting all the way up the buttons.

And what we know is that they were derived from the Comte de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle, générale et particulière*, of 1749–88. As Edwina Ehrman, curator of the exhibition, observes in her introductory essay, 'choosing monkeys from Buffon's publication... to create an embroidery pattern for a waistcoat reflected the fashionable success of Buffon's encyclopedic masterpiece among Europe's educated, wealthy classes... in turn, its wearer demonstrated his learning and awareness of the interest in natural history at the highest levels of society.'

The waistcoat's lucky owner, then, was both terrifically on trend — monkeys were a fashion thing in pre-revolutionary France, in interior decor as well as clothes — and expressing a contemporary fascination with the natural order. But the waistcoat itself, being linen and silk, was also derived from nature. And it is this dual aspect of fashion,

Monkeys were a fashion thing in pre-revolutionary France, in interior decor as well as clothes

both inspired by nature and using natural material, often in problematic ways, that this exhibition is about.

The V&A is perhaps the world's best dressing-up box, and this exhibition has exquisite pieces from its archive of more than 75,000 items of clothing. One dress makes the point vividly that the global nature of fashion was evident long before our day. It's a dull-pink court mantua — a

formal dress — of quite preposterous dimensions, being nearly as wide as it's long with a big cane pannier underneath. But what the description makes clear is that while it was from silk woven in Lyons and made up in England, its component parts were from far-flung places — the silver lace trimmings came from the Potosi mines in Bolivia, while the stoat who provided the tail trimmings may have been Russian. As for the dyes, they came from plants and insects, some from the Middle East and North America. The agents that fixed the dye included iron; the process used copious water.

So, what seems to be merely a striking dress raises all manner of concerns that are explored throughout the exhibition: 'the exploitation of non-renewable global resources, the promotion of built-in obsolescence and the release of pollutants into the air and water supplies'. Precisely the same issues, then, that arise in connection with the denim jeans on display elsewhere, the obvi-



From left to right: embroidered linen jacket, 1620s; pine marten fur hat, Caroline Reboux, 1895; man's silk waistcoat embroidered in silk with a pattern of macaque monkeys, 1780–89



© VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

ous difference being that the dress is beautiful in terms of design and execution, and, unlike our fashion, only a small number of people could afford it.

The underpinnings, the corsets made from whalebone or cane, were similarly problematic, in that the whaling industry was depleting stocks of the creatures to hold women up and in (and for other things like soap). Even so, I'd love to try a whalebone corset.

This exhibition is an interestingly two-sided affair. It has — especially the ground-floor part, from the 17th to the 19th centuries — some strikingly interesting and often beautiful clothes that derive their design inspiration from nature. There are lovely, intricate designs for cotton based on seaweed by the Irish artist William Kilburn, which would look fabulous now (Laura Ashley would have snapped them up). This is the nice bit: our fascination with nature (reflecting wider scientific interests) expressed in design.

And then there's the problematic part:

how fashion uses materials from the natural world to make clothes, and how its production depletes nature and degrades the environment. So, we go from the pretty fans of the 18th century made from mother of pearl or turtleshell or ivory — all made scarcer by the industry — to the use of albatross breast feathers inside ladies' muffs. Part of you deplores all this but there's another part that thinks, subversively, that they must feel fabulous.

There were quite early concerns about the killing of species for fashion; the early bird conservation movement began in the 1860s. By the turn of the century, you had satirical magazines showing women as harpies — there's a cartoon here — with claws, swooping on unfortunate birds for fashion. Some feathers seem unproblematic — if you eat pheasant why not wear 'em? — but egrets did badly out of women's millinery, as beavers did from men's.

So did hatters. One top hat from the col-

lection is wrapped in plastic; it's still toxic after a century from the mercury used in its manufacture, which turned the hatters mad. It wasn't the only problem raw material; the connection between slavery and cotton hardly needs making.

But it's the contemporary fashion in the upstairs exhibition that is really damaging, both in the materials used and the scale of demand. Nylons come from petroleum but other products like PVC are worse. What's clear is that it's not just synthetics that are damaging. Cotton grown in climates where vast amounts of water and pesticides are required are as bad. What's needed is better labelling. If clothes have a disastrous environmental impact, what's wrong with putting it on the label, as we do with cleaning products? The environmental audit from one dress is shown here as a till receipt; it's a good idea.

The exhibition, however, sets out to be optimistic, with solutions as well as problems. So we meet new materials that use

natural resources sensitively rather than importing them from across the world. (In this context, another exhibition, at the Nunery Gallery in Bow on London's indigent garment industry, is apposite.) But really, we should do what our parents and grandparents did: reuse and alter garments, brush them down after use, and look after them, not buy new stuff endlessly. If there's a moral from this complex exhibition, it's that we should Make Do and Mend.

Fashioned from Nature is at the V&A until 27 January 2019.

Music

Bringing in the trash

Igor Toronyi-Lalic

**David Hoyle/London Sinfonietta;
Concrete Lates**

Queen Elizabeth Hall

Kammer Klang

Cafe OTO

Imagine the National inviting RuPaul to play Hamlet. Or Tate giving Beryl Cook a retrospective. The London Sinfonietta offered a similar cocktail of mischief and insanity in devoting the opening concert of its return to the Queen Elizabeth Hall, after a three-year refurbishment, to the nihilistic drag act David Hoyle. It had me grinning from ear to ear. Mostly from watching the other critics squirm. The woman next to me, an off-duty member of the Sinfonietta, was spitting words into her hand: 'Patronising bollocks'.

It was one of those nights. Half the audience stony-faced and tensed with anger. The

*Half the audience were stony-faced,
the other half creased double
and whooping*

other half creased double and whooping. It's what you get if you transfer the trashy camp of a gay mecca like the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, Hoyle's usual home, to this sexless temple of high modernism.

The *Gender Agenda* was a new work by the composer Philip Venables, a game show with a gobby host (Hoyle) instead of a soloist, catchphrases standing in for pitch material. 'Let's destroy the military-industrial complex!' he enjoined us, in the way Brucey used to announce the presence of a cuddly toy. The Sinfonietta, squished to the back of the stage, were consigned to squirting out goblets of rancid Gebrauchsmusik. Then a sudden burst of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto. This set off an alarm warning us on a big screen that we were exposing ourselves to 'Homosexual Music'.

It was hard not to agree with my neighbour's analysis during the game itself, in which audience members were dragged up on stage to draw and then guess various sexist scenarios. Too didactic. Too much preaching to the converted.

But the value of this work was not in the detail but in the kamikaze boldness of the whole. It was also a fine up yours to my doubts about the QEH. I had arrived at its familiar heavy doors sceptical. Did anyone really miss this bunker? You could argue that closing it had invigorated the scene. The past few years had felt like the adults had gone on holiday. An explosion of forms and ideas, spurred on by DIY necessities, had resulted. We now have half a dozen great little venues scattered across London catering far more generously to the needs of what composers are actually composing today. Why reopen this old place?

But then I hadn't counted on Venables storming the modernist fort. Mainstream critics have dismissed the postmodern unravellings of half a century ago — which expanded what was musical material to include movement and gesture, speech and play — as fads without followers. Well, those ideas are back. And if only to remind people where we are, this work felt important.

That said, I wish the experimentalism had been extended to the game show itself, which was allowed to proceed as predictably as a classical sonata. And I wish they'd worked out their politics. Saying gender was a 'waste of time', while also obsessing over every element of it, didn't strike me as fantastically logical.

The second half consisted of a proper little zinger. Venables's *Illusions* marries the anger and energy of the first half with a stuttering score, Hoyle back again, berating us, provoking us, coaxing us to dabble in some sodomy (I'm not sure the audience needed much encouragement).

More oblique rage was to be found at Cafe OTO, which is to the 2010s what QEH was to the 1970s. One regular night there, Kammer Klang, devoted a programme recently to the greedy, Gesamtkunstwerky composers of the New Discipline school. Jennifer Walshe's new work was astonishing. She manages to devour the mess and madness of social media, the tweets, posts, junk ads, political poison, spurious stats and Reddit rants, and turn all this garbage into something truly, bleakly hilarious and poignant and very great.

Is It Cool To Try Hard Now? ends doped-up, with Walshe floating out the phrase 'I will fight this/ with every fibre/ of my carbon-based being'. Is she blissed out? Or concussed? 'Humans. Are. The. Next. Platform', she sings, climbing beyond her vocal range, climbing, climbing, till her voice has become a faint scream.

Despite the Sinfonietta's best efforts, the QEH will not regain its primacy over

this scene. But it might not need to. Last Friday I sampled Concrete Lates, its new monthly night of experimental dance music. As I wandered around the clubified foyer, the sound system filling this strange space deliciously, red and blue neon shocking the concrete into life, the exquisitely controlled sonic geometry of Giant Swan electrifying the audience, the building for the first time suddenly made sense. QEH's real contribution to the future of music might from now on be found in the foyer, not the hall.

Radio

Speech impediment

Kate Chisholm

It was a provocative decision by the producers of *Archive on 4, 50 Years On: Rivers of Blood* (Nathan Gower and David Prest) to base their programme around a full exposition of Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 speech on immigration, all 3,183 words of it, spoken by an actor (Ian McDiarmid) as if he were giving the speech in front of an audience. Why give further publicity to a speech that gave such offence at the time, and so dangerously expressed such inflammatory opinions? But the explosive reaction to the Radio 4 programme on social media, even before it went out on air, explains and justifies their decision.

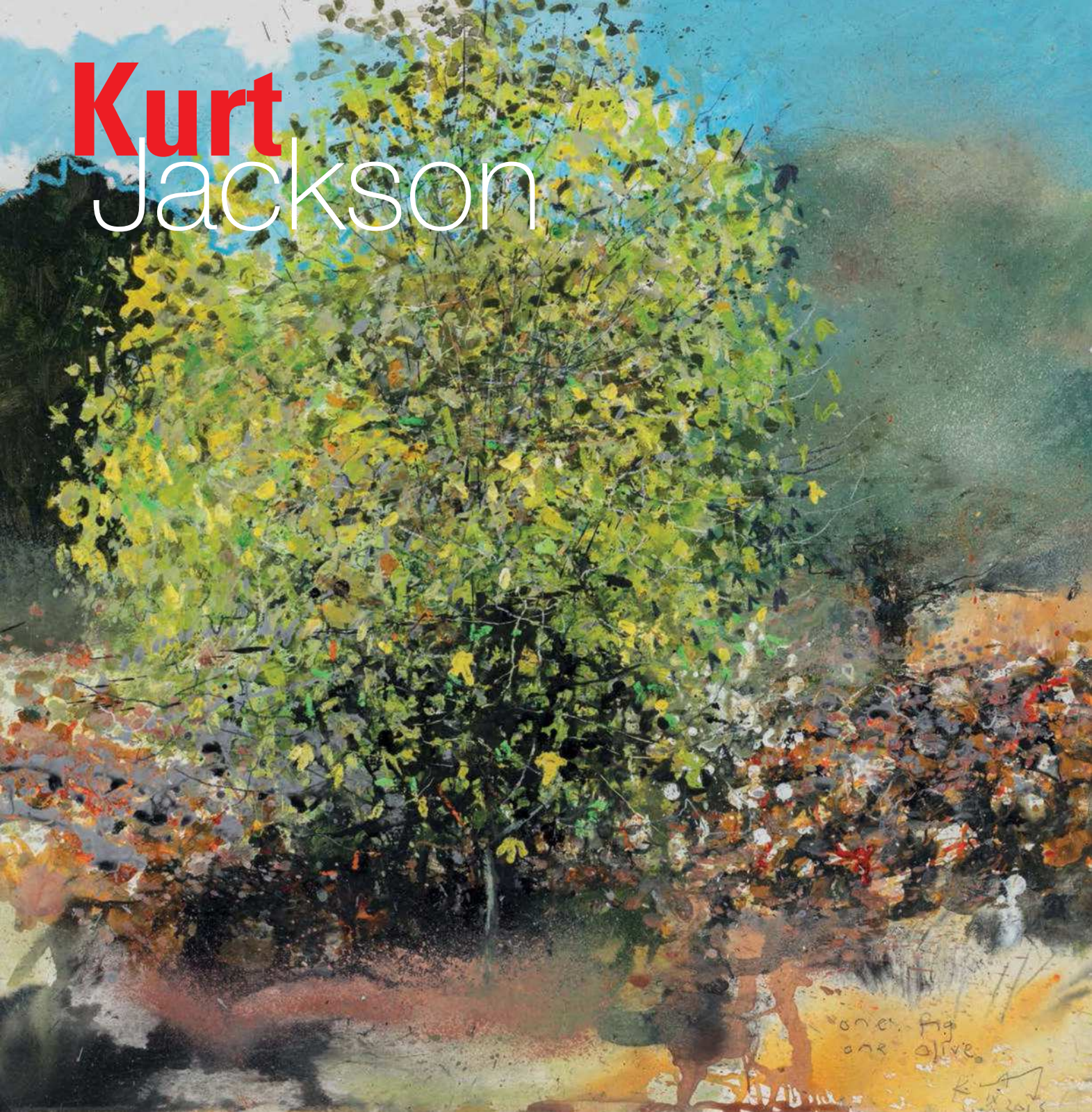
The speech, given in Birmingham just two weeks after the assassination of Martin Luther King, is constantly referenced, yet very few people ever heard it all the

*Powell's speech is constantly
referenced, yet very few people ever
heard it all the way through*

way through or read the full text. Why not get beyond the 'rivers of blood' quote we all know (which is in full, 'I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood') to hear the whole speech, and in context? Why be so frightened of it now? Why, when we read and listen every day to so many heedless words and senseless tweets, should what Powell said not be analysed and seen in detail for what it is? (Ironically, it was the presenter Amol Rajan's unguarded tweet in advance of the broadcast that set off the tumultuous reaction in the first place.) The speech, after all, is an event, or rather is representative of a point of view, that is (as Rajan points out) part of postwar British history, whether we like it or not (after the speech there were strikes in support of Powell among steelworkers, dockers and the meat traders of Smithfield).

In any case, Powell's words were not given to us on Saturday night as one long spiel, as if allowing Powell full sway, without question or interruption. Every few min-

Kurt Jackson



One fig one olive. 2015
mixed media on wood panel
60 x 60 cms 23½ x 23½ ins

'As you leave Claviers and climb uphill out of the village following the narrow sun-splashed and shadow-striped road, you reach the terraced slopes of St Marc. There the contours of this once forested rocky land have been shaped by the villagers for thousands of years, melded and moulded into an arboriculture where the olive tree reigns supreme.' Kurt Jackson

This recent journey has resulted in 55 paintings contained in an exhibition entitled **Olive and Fig** on view **2nd – 25th May (noon)**

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utes Rajan paused the text to question and debate what had just been uttered, along with a team of commentators, among whom were Powell's biographer Simon Heffer, and Matthew Parris of this magazine, but also the politician David Lammy, the academic David Dabydeen and Pauline Black of the two-tone band the Selecter. There was enough balance in the interrogation to ensure that what emerged was measured, effective and essential listening.

I never knew, for a start, that before giving the speech Powell was reported as saying, 'This speech is going to go up "fizz" like a rocket.' He knew what he was doing, and he wanted to make a storm. Nor did I remember that the speech was made in the midst of the passage through Parliament of the race relations bill. Not content to ramp up the rhetoric with phrases like 'The black man will have the whip hand over the white man', Powell also played upon the fears of his Wolverhampton constituents, suggesting that immigrants were

Powell knew what he was doing and he wanted to make a storm

clogging up the NHS, using up vital school places and threatening the job prospects of the 'existing population'. Does any of this sound familiar?

After such a discomfiting listen, it was a relief to hear the calming voice of Radio 3's Penny Gore on Monday night's *The Essay: Secret Admirers* as she divulged her passion for the music of Leos Janacek. 'I don't know why it is that a certain composer's voice can speak to you in a way that others don't.' She first heard Janacek's brassy *Sinfonietta* on a tinny record player from one of her father's treasured LPs, and found that something in it resonated with her. 'Thrilling, and yet somehow troubling. Powerful and yet uncertain. All at the same time.'

She thought it might be something to do with the fact that, like her, Janacek was from 'somewhere small' (in his case a village in 1850s Moravia, now part of the Czech Republic). She left to work in London where she 'felt sure people would find out that I didn't know what I was doing'. Only later did she realise that 'confidence is something you can put on like a piece of clothing'. In Janacek's music she sensed that same blend of assurance and insecurity, 'It seemed to connect; it seemed honest.' Even his titles are conflicted, she says: 'On an Overgrown Path' or 'The Diary of One Who Disappeared'. In talking about his music, and its impact on her, and the story of his life, she gave away something of herself.

His most 'breathtaking' works (*Katya Kabanova*, *Intimate Letters*, *The Makropulos Case*) were all written in the last few years before he died. Saddened by the death of both his children, the unhappiness of his marriage, and his unrequited love for

a much younger woman, he went back to live in the village where he spent his childhood. It's as if, says Gore, he found his 'true voice' again. Janacek himself wrote that 'the inward environment of childhood is perhaps of most crucial importance for the artist's work. That's the root of originality of a piece of art.' Words used to give meaning to music.

Television

The great pretenders

James Walton

For a while now, the Korowai people of Western Papua have been the go-to primitive tribe for documentary-makers. The Korowai were unknown to the outside world until the 1970s — but they've certainly made up for it since, with their Stone Age tools, jungle treehouses and penis gourds becoming almost as familiar to TV viewers as Brian Cox on top of a mountain.

No wonder, then, that Will Millard's introduction to *My Year with the Tribe* (BBC2, Sunday) smacked of mild desperation as he sought to distinguish his new series from its many predecessors. (No fixers laying on anything in advance! Not just one snapshot of Korowai life, but four over 12 months!) In the event, however, he needn't have worried. Although he clearly set off with the customary aim of presenting the Korowai as a last, precarious remnant of our hunter-gatherer past, what he discovered instead was far stranger and more surprising than that.

At first, everything went pretty much as you'd imagine. Millard and his crew pitched up in Mabul, a village on the edge of Korowai territory, and inquired where the more traditional tribal members could be found. They then loaded several small boys with heavy kit and began macheteing through the jungle while Millard commented wonderingly on how people could live in such isolation. A few hours later, he'd arrived at a treehouse where a penis gourd-wearer called Markus proudly showed off his naked family and fine collection of pigs' teeth. He also agreed to take Millard on a hunting expedition — although, somewhat anti-climatically, in search of insect grubs.

Only later that evening did we get the first sign that not everything was as it seemed when Markus's family demonstrated an unexpected knowledge of how Millard's smartphone worked. The second came the following day, as Markus led a two-hour jungle trek to meet his nearest neighbours, and at one point stopped to chop theatrically at a tree with his rudimentary axe. Asked by Millard why he was doing that, he looked distinctly puzzled by the need for the question. 'For the filming,' he replied, in the patient

tone of a man explaining something obvious to a good-hearted simpleton.

Even so, the penny didn't really drop until the two men reached their destination, where another Korowai family were sitting naked in a treehouse. Initially, these neighbours gamely tried to pretend this was how they passed an average day. But once they realised that this particular day might go unpaid, the truth started to emerge. 'This is not our home,' pointed out a family member. 'These houses were commissioned by Canadians for filming.' 'I was told we should be here with our clothes off,' added one of the two wives.

Her husband, meanwhile, helpfully laid out the business plan of which this was a crucial part. 'I lie around until there are guests,' he told Millard. 'And then I get naked and they photograph me.' He also provided a handy price list, ranging from £5 for a basic photo to £50 for the full insect-grub hunt.

And with that, Markus also broke the fourth wall, admitting that he lived in Mabul

Savvy locals faking their own culture for tourist money has now spread to the remotest parts of the Earth

but had come to the jungle when he heard that Millard was the latest westerner keen to see the authentic Korowai way of life. 'If you've enjoyed being here,' he unambiguously went on, 'you pay me well.'

Faced with the awkward fact that he was in something between a Potemkin village and a theme park, Millard reacted with an understandable mix of gloom, embarrassment and existential crisis. Not only did he now realise that the Korowai have built an economy on 'selling brand Korowai to rich tourists and TV crews', but he also acknowledged that this was because of people like him. 'Look around you, mate,' he told himself in one especially bitter moment. 'You made this.'

And yet, my guess is that not many viewers will have shared his disappointment at the way the programme turned out. After all, which would you rather have? Another plod through the standard stuff or the jaw-dropping revelation that the phenomenon of savvy locals faking their own culture for tourist money has now spread to the remotest parts of the Earth.

With two programmes still to come, I've no idea where *My Year with the Tribe* goes from here: Millard is continuing to plunge ever deeper into the jungle in the quest for traditional Korowai, but so far all he's really established is the power that denial can exert. Either way, though, Sunday's episode wasn't just startling in itself (not least because it took the unusual step of allowing its findings to emerge naturally rather than advertising them at the beginning). It was also a rare example of a TV documentary that proved a lot more interesting than it intended to be.

'Massive blue bowl',
1991, by Gordon
Baldwin



Exhibitions

Pot heads

Martin Gayford

Things of Beauty Growing: British studio pottery

Fitzwilliam Museum, until 17 June

A friend of mine once owned a vase by the potter Hans Coper — until, that is, her teenage son had his friends around for a party. It wasn't clear who knocked it off the shelf, but it was an expensive accident; a similar Coper pot sold last month at auction for almost £400,000. But then the tricky thing about studio pottery is where to put it — in more senses than one.

It isn't just whether it will be safer on the mantelpiece or in a cupboard. There is also the problem of how to categorise the stuff: is it art or is it craft, and what's the difference? Such conundrums perplexed me as I walked around *Things of Beauty Growing* at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

This is billed as 'British studio pottery', but quite a few of the exhibits, including several of the most beautiful, were made in the Far East about 1,000 years ago. A Song dynasty vase near the beginning is as refined and elegant as an abstract sculpture by Brancusi. And indeed that was much how the aesthetes of London thought about their oriental ceramics. Roger Fry, the artistic guru

It's much better if potters make items in which you might place flowers, soup or coffee

of Bloomsbury, extolled a Song dynasty bowl for the 'perfect sequence' of its curves.

Some early 20th-century Britons began making similar objects themselves. Bernard Leach (1887–1979) spent more than a decade living and studying in Japan before returning to Britain in the 1920s and setting up a pottery in St Ives. He formed close friendships with Japanese potters, including Shoji Hamada who worked with him in Cornwall for three years (and thus features in this exhibition).

Another pioneering British student of Far Eastern ceramics was William Staite Murray (1881–1962). A convert to Buddhism, Staite Murray had an almost mystical approach to pottery. Oscar Wilde, you will recall, lamented that he found it 'harder and harder every day' to live up to his blue and white Chinese porcelain. Staite Murray suggested that cultures could be judged by their pottery; it was the purest art, the best guide to the 'finesse' of a country's sensibility.

His own best efforts, such as 'Very Tall Pot' (1937), with its faint suggestion of a human silhouette — bulging at the shoulder and waist, narrowing at the neck — are in the class of contemporary sculptures by Hepworth and Moore. The same is true of Leach's work. In his case, some of the most appealing pieces emulated the rustic brown and cream earthenware made in 17th-century England. His 'Charger, Tree of Life' (1923–25) is wonderfully romantic, woody and, well, English (though Shoji Hamada also worked happily in this idiom).

Leach, Staite Murray and their successors — such as Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and

Norah Braden — made many of the most successful pieces at the Fitzwilliam. Collectively, they seem to have regarded pottery as a sort of spiritual exercise: Zen and the art of throwing pots, you might say. Michael Cardew, a Leach pupil and another master, talked of seeing beautiful things ‘growing up in front of you’ without conscious intention — that is, if you were lucky and respected your materials, and lived a long time (as many of them did).

Unfortunately, studio pottery is not all about subtlety and Zen. Its potential for ghastliness is suggested by a group of Victorian vases designed by Christopher Dresser. These have a horrible, triffid-like vigour. Some of the later pieces at the Fitzwilliam are just horrid, without the manic vitality.

On this evidence, it is bad for potters to think of themselves as artists (they may sometimes make works of art, but that is a different matter). The closer they come to doing the kind of things that painters and sculptors usually do, the more awkward the results. There are, admittedly, a few exceptions. Grayson Perry can get away with it, but then he actually is an artist. Hans Coper, I admit, was able to make vases with the force of a figure by Giacometti.

For the most part, though, it's much better if potters make items in which — at least theoretically — you might place flowers, soup or coffee (as both Perry and Coper do). When they roam into the area of installation, or fashion nameless abstract objects, the question arises with which I began: where on earth do you put this?

Opera

Russian ragout

Alexandra Coghlan

Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk

Royal Opera House, in rep until 27 April

Teseo

St George's Hanover Square

There is famously no door into the late-night diner of Edward Hopper's 'Nighthawks'. Its three silent patrons are trapped behind the plate-glass window — specimens of urban disaffection and isolation. In Richard Jones's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* it's the windows that are so disquietingly absent.

John Macfarlane's designs propel the action of Shostakovich's final opera through an endless enfilade of rooms. There are doors aplenty, and thresholds — of morality, sexuality and social status — are gleefully breached and breached, but each ultimately leads only to another domestic hell. If Hopper's characters are goldfish in a glass bowl, then Jones's are rats in a cage, and with the rat poison in view from the start the scene is rank with foreboding.

There's a delicious squalor but also — more surprisingly — a disarming pathos to Jones's production, seen here at the Royal Opera for the first time since 2004. Updating the action of Shostakovich's Soviet-censored opera from pre-revolutionary Russia to the 1950s, Jones steers away from any overt politicking in favour of kitchen-sink intimacy — a claustrophobic operatic close-up that refuses to pan to the wide shot, crushing a chorus of workers and even a brass band into the close confines of the domestic space.

The apartment (papered in signature Jones prints, natch) that Katerina Ismailova shares with her lecherous father-in-law Boris and her husband Zinovy may be grubby and bleak, but a baby-pink fridge and mint-green kitchen units speak pathetically of aspiration — of a fantasy of bourgeois domesticity long-since tarnished by life. It's these gestures of hope — Katerina's green stockings, defiantly bright even as she heads to the Siberian prison camp, the wallpaper she hangs as a back-

It's no longer the slick shock and awe of Tarantino but the grimy, pitted banality of Martin McDonagh

drop to her new life with lover Sergei — that stab deepest in a production that isn't short on violence.

Last seen over a decade ago, this *Lady Macbeth* may have returned with many of the same cast, meticulously revived by Elaine Kidd, but after the watershed of #MeToo its perspective seems altered. If there was previously a Tarantino-esque gloss and glibness to the production's unusual black humour — the severed heads, brandished axes and exuberant gang rape — there now seems to be a more ragged urgency, a makeshift quality to action that turns domestic abuse into three murders. It's not the slick shock and awe of *Kill Bill* (off whose shiny surface all emotion slides cleanly) but the grimy, pitted banality of Martin McDonagh that we now see here.

Shostakovich's score is a cornered animal that lashes out in furious volleys of brass and snarling woodwind. The sheer power of the thing — instruments spilling out into the boxes either side of the stage — overwhelms. But where some fight their way out with brute force, Antonio Pappano's account goes for sly cunning and sardonic wit — that detumescent trombone glissando at the height of Katerina and Sergei's passion has rarely sounded more knowing.

Calculated exaggeration in the orchestra meets quieter truths in the cast, generating the friction that ignites this 'tragi-satirical' opera. Eva-Maria Westbroek's Katerina is bravely unbeautiful — singing us the scars of this damaged woman — while American tenor Brandon Jovanovich's Sergei licks them open again with the probing ardour of his delivery. John Daszak's Zinovy and John Tomlinson's Boris (the latter tending just a

little cartoonish) add their textures to this delicious operatic ragout of horror. Revenge may be a dish best served cold, but even after 12 years Richard Jones's *Lady Macbeth* shows no sign of cooling down.

Musical temperatures were also raised at St George's Hanover Square this week as the London Handel Festival approached its end with performances of Handel's *Teseo* by period ensemble La Nuova Musica and student soloists from the Royal Academy of Music. It takes a certainchutzpah to tackle a piece designed with the thrill-seeking London audience in mind — a magic opera whose absurd plot, rich in visual spectacle, was chosen to show off the 'machinery' of the theatre — in a concert performance in a church with some of the worst sightlines (and most uncomfortable pews) in the city, without even the assistance of surtitles.

Compensating for this dramatic lack with their musical atmospherics, David Bates and his players served up an overheated account of this delightful (if lightweight) score. Tempo surged and swayed to slightly nauseous effect, and a fine young cast were audibly unsettled by the bullying force of the band. There were a sequence of lovely oboe solos from Leo Duarte, a measured, authoritative Egeo from Frances Gregory and fizzing thrills from Ilona Revolskaya's Agilea and Alexandra Oomens's minxy Clizia, but what started off in the overture as unfettered musical joy and release transformed by the end into a manic instability. *Teseo* is no *Giulio Cesare*, but this divertissement has an innocent appeal that we never quite heard here among all the histrionics.

Cinema

Peake performance

Deborah Ross

Funny Cow

15, Key Cities

Let the Sunshine In

15, Key Cities

Two films about women this week. One, *Funny Cow*, is about a woman who daringly takes on men at their own game while the other, *Let the Sunshine In*, is dressed up in French art-house garb but basically has Juliette Binoche tirelessly running round Paris in thrall to every fella she encounters. I certainly know which I preferred. However, if you look at review aggregate sites, like Rotten Tomatoes, you'll see *Sunshine* achieves the far higher score. But then most film critics are male and probably wouldn't mind Juliette Binoche tirelessly chasing them round Paris, or anywhere else. (I have just asked a man if this is so and he has confirmed: 'I wouldn't mind at all. And it could be Bournemouth.')



Male order: Juliette Binoche as Isabelle in *Let the Sunshine In*

Funny Cow, which is set in the 1970s, is loosely based on the life of Marti Caine, the Sheffield comic who worked the northern working men's clubs for 15 years before winning *New Faces* and becoming a household name. I remember her, and can't recall being a fan especially, but can now see she was fantastically heroic. The film has its shortcomings, it pains me to say, but it also has Maxine Peake, who is a wonder, and more than holds it all together. She doesn't so much act as burn. She burns with intelligence, burns with anger, burns with a fierce, blistering energy. I kept expecting the screen to go up — whoosh! — like a firework.

Directed by Adrian Shergold (*Pierpoint: The Last Hangman* and for TV *Holding On, Persuasion, Dirty Filthy Love*), and scripted by actor Tony Pitts, who makes his screen-writing debut, the narrative is episodic and hops about in time. But essentially we follow *Funny Cow* (she is never awarded a name) from the childhood beatings inflicted by her violent father (Stephen Graham) through to her marriage to an abusive man (played by Tony Pitts) and then on to the comedy that will eventually lead to stardom. Along the way, there's the veteran comic (Alun Armstrong) who attempts to dissuade her — 'no job for a woman, love... women just aren't bloody funny' — and her affair with a middle-class bookshop owner (Paddy Considine). But don't worry, this doesn't go all *Educating Rita*

on us. He takes her to see *Macbeth* and she's bored shitless.

To be clear, this film, while occasionally funny — I laughed at John Bishop's cameo — isn't about being funny. It is about getting to somewhere no one else wants you to get to because you belong 'at home', and if your husband beats you, that's just marriage. Even the jokes *Funny Cow* delivers as part of her set aren't funny and may begin with: 'A Paki, a poof, and an Englishman...' Some have taken

Peake burns with intelligence, burns with anger, burns with a fierce, blistering energy

offence, but they are plainly nuts, as this is of its time, and it is saying something about the culture. Previously, we'd seen the Armstrong character tell racist gags and she's playing the men at their game, remember. Plus, if we're to understand where we are now, we need to understand where we were then.

Now on to the shortcomings, alas. Most markedly, you don't get any sense of *Funny Cow*'s genesis as a comedian. She insists that she has an intrinsic 'funny bone' but there is scant evidence. And Shergold's style is somewhat mannered. The film is broken up with intertitles that say 'the first bit' and then 'the next bit', which seem unnecessary, as does the business of having the adult characters meet their childhood selves. But the story is

wholly worth telling. And Peake is blistering.

On to *Let the Sunshine In*, if we must. Directed by Claire Denis (*Chocolat, Beau travail*), who co-wrote with Christine Angot — the fact that there are two women behind this can only be inexplicable — the film stars Juliette Binoche as Isabelle, a divorced artist who visits the various men in her life: a banker, an actor, her ex-husband, a gallerist played by the Token Black Man, then Gérard Depardieu. Some have been lovers, some are lovers and some may become lovers, and what she wants to know is: which one, if any, is the one? Yet her encounters do not let the sun in, as everyone talks in endless circles, tiresomely and pointlessly.

Meanwhile, there is no attention paid to Isabelle's identity as a mother (she has a little girl; you only glimpse her once) or as an artist, aside from one scene where she splashes paint about like Jackson Pollock, but a crap Jackson Pollock. In short, she does not exist except in relation to men. And throughout she wears a tiny miniskirt teamed with thigh-high boots and while a point is doubtless being made, I couldn't fathom what it was, and was mostly put in mind of Dick Whittington. I kept wanting her to slap her thigh and ask the way to London town, which may have enlivened proceedings considerably. Perhaps this is meant to be a satire of the romantic narrative but if it is, it was too subtle for me. Also, it did not burn.

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Theatre

Question time

Lloyd Evans

Quiz

Noël Coward Theatre, until 16 June

The Way of the World

Donmar Warehouse, until 26 May

Quiz by James Graham looks at the failed attempt in 2001 to swindle a million quid from an ITV game show. Jackpot winner Major Charles Ingram was thought to have been helped by strategic coughs emanating from Tecwen Whittock, a fellow contestant on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Graham, best known for his gripping political dramas, can't muster any passion for this story or his characters. Ingram is a posh, weepy lummock. His wife, Diana, comes across as a blur of aloofness, cunning and banality. Whittock, who claimed to suffer from a persistent throat condition, is a clueless hobbit with a wonky Welsh accent. And Diana's brother, tangentially involved in the drama, is an amiably bumbling spendthrift.

The material has a built-in problem. Whose side are we on? The story is about some fairly rich people trying to rip off some very rich people, so are we rooting for the greedy but twerpish Ingrams or for the cocky, obsessive and mega-wealthy Paul Smith, owner of the *Millionaire* format?

I wasn't sure whether the Ingrams had done anything wrong and I wasn't sure why I felt so unsure

Graham addresses this problem by directing our attention elsewhere and he bungs a bit of everything into the script. We explore the Ingrams' early marriage. We get a brief history of British TV quizzes. We examine the difficulties faced by Smith and other format-mongers as they seek broadcasters for their shows. And we enter the twilight world of quizzers and scammers who meet in dank pubs and swap notes about how best to swindle TV game shows. Even these diversions aren't enough to pad out the evening to the full three hours so the actors enlist the audience in parlour games and questionnaires.

There are a couple of decent performances here. Sarah Woodward is impressive as an icy QC and she adds an amusing cameo as a *Coronation Street* star. Keir Charles delivers a hilarious impersonation of Chris Tarrant, the show's curmudgeonly host, who guessed that something was amiss but couldn't work out what. Graham's script never quite coheres, even at the climax of the trial. The jury convicts Charles and Tecwen but fails to reach a



Haydn Gwynne gallantly plays the ageing sexpot Lady Wishfort in *The Way of the World* at the Donmar Warehouse

decision on Diana. The judge intervenes and rules that this split decision invalidates the prosecution's case that all three defendants took part in a single conspiracy. So the foreman changes his mind, without consulting the jury, and finds Diana guilty.

Did that happen? (I checked later and discovered that this shorthand version is accurate in its essential details.) But to leave this off-kilter judgment in the script without any clarification is to create more confusion. I left the show in a state of bafflement. I wasn't sure whether the Ingrams had done anything wrong and I wasn't sure why I felt so unsure. Director Daniel Evans deserves top marks for turning a colourless script into a handsome, zingy, fast-moving theatrical spectacle. It's fun but unfulfilling.

Has anyone noticed that Congreve's rarely performed classic, *The Way of the World*, defies intelligibility? The densely plotted play opens in a London coffee shop where two self-satisfied wags exchange gossip about their cronies, relatives, ex-playmates and future lovers. Their list of contacts is exhaustingly long, and the characters have obtusely silly names (Foible, Fainall, Waitwell, Wishfort, Witwoud). Worse still, some of these personalities fail to materialise for an hour or more, and the audience is expected to remain alert to their attributes without seeing them in the flesh. It's hell to follow.

The script's greatest virtue is its dazzling literary elegance and the director,

James Macdonald, has created a luxuriously effective production. The acting is fine. The spare, unfussy set offers a suitably muted back-drop for Congreve's literary fireworks. The ladies' dresses are perhaps a bit wedding-cake and the men's costumes feature several ingenious and deliberate anachronisms that work very well. But what a ghastly crew of characters. The men are poseurs, cynics, embezzlers or fools, and the women are hysterics, adulteresses, nymphomaniacs or fools.

Congreve's wit too often expresses mere nastiness. 'Anger aids complexion, saves paint,' says a wag, appearing to mean, 'I like women when they're upset.' 'She is the antidote to desire,' observes a dissembling suitor of an ageing sexpot. This famous jibe — perhaps the cruellest in our tongue — is aimed at Lady Wishfort, gallantly played by Haydn Gwynne. Her ladyship is a rich drunken matriarch tyrannised by three contradictory forces: her rampaging libido, her fear of public censure and her obsessive attempts to conceal her wrinkles behind a tub of slap. Yet Lady Wishfort is in her mid-50s, younger than Madonna, and it's hard for a modern audience to sympathise with her frustrated lust or to find her insane desire for male attention credible. Her contortions before the mirror, and her humiliating efforts to impress a potential lover (who, like all the men in this piece, is a misogynistic liar), seem rather sad and remote. Not funny at all.

University Challenge

By Henry Jeffreys

One programme that still shines out as a beacon of intellectual rigour among the sea of dross on television is *University Challenge*. As always, teams of four students from Britain's best universities battle it out for the series championship. Rather than assuming the viewer is an idiot, like most factual programmes, it works on the basis that we have a shared culture. There are always questions on kings and queens of England, Shakespeare and classical music. Even if the viewer doesn't know the answer — and the questions are often fiendishly hard — the producers expect us to understand the question, except when it's about quantum physics.

The top teams are usually spectacularly good on high culture but struggle with more contemporary arts. Questions about Booker Prize winners are usually met with a blank shrug and last month nobody recognised Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven*.

University Challenge began in 1962 with Bamber Gascoigne asking the questions until 1987, then was revived in 1994 with Jeremy Paxman in the chair. My neighbour was in the 1977 series, representing Pembroke College Oxford, which lost narrowly in the opening round. A photo of his moment in the limelight is the first thing you see in his house and it always makes me jealous.



Wolfson Cambridge, with the famous Monkman

What makes the show so watchable is seeing the student personalities emerge, marvelling at their cleverness or wincing at their gaucheness. Most years someone becomes a cult figure — as Gail Trimble, nicknamed the human Google, did in 2009, and the deadpan Alexander Guttenplan in 2010. Last year was all about Eric Monkman, a Canadian as imagined by Aardman Animations, versus Bobby Seagull, a jolly east Londoner.

Paxman spends some shows full of fury, as if he's grilling Michael Howard rather than presenting a TV quiz, but on others he has an avuncular twinkle. His pronunciation can get mid-Atlantic at times — RENaissance for instance — but for all his faults he gives the show an intensity that lifts it above a normal quiz. The spin-off episodes featuring

professionals instead of students don't work because the atmosphere is too clubbable.

I hope when Paxo is finally carted out, the BBC doesn't meddle with a winning formula. Inevitably a programme that makes no compromises about its elitism has some detractors. Oxford and Cambridge, represented by individual colleges, tend to dominate the panels. There is also a distinct lack of female contestants. In an article last year, Jane Prescott, headmistress of Portsmouth High School, suggested that this was down a 'confidence gap'. It is also true that showing off your trivia knowledge, like trainspotting or stamp collecting, is largely a male pursuit. There's now talk that all teams should have to field at least one woman to be eligible.

My tip to take this year's prize, Merton College Oxford, does have a woman on board: the team's deliciously serious captain Leonie Woodland. It also has this year's human Google, Akira Wiberg. But my favourite team was Fitzwilliam Cambridge, which went from joker to dark horse before being knocked out in the quarter-finals.

The programme is, of course, bigger than any contestant. Male students might wear bows in their hair and some teams answer all the questions with questions, but watching *University Challenge* makes me feel that civilisation is safe for another generation.

Travel & General

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General

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'I hope the pianist is promoted to the status of having a face fit to be seen by people eating shellfish'
— Tanya Gold, p62

LIFE

High life Taki



New York

Remember when the internet, Twitter, Facebook and other such useless gimmicks were supposed to usher in an era of transparency and knowledgeable bliss? This technology makes George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* redundant: no longer science fiction; more Knights of the Round Table. Big Brother is more powerful and more all-knowing than ever before, and we have that Errol Flynn lookalike Mark Zuckerberg to thank. There is no such thing as privacy any longer, unless of course one writes letters by hand and does not possess a smart telephone. (Include me out — I own a mobile but use it only when on board a sailing boat.)

Yes, the world has changed, but some of us still stick to the Old Testament, which means using a rotary telephone, allowing women to enter and exit first when using a lift, resisting the urge to drop one's trousers in front of a lady unless asked by her to do so, refusing to give gender-neutral names to grandchildren, and refraining from offering insights into one's character and one's bank balance to strangers.

I guess that makes me sound rather old, but what the hell, at least I'm not gender-neutral, whatever that is. Ageing has become the equivalent of the big C, something people are ashamed of. Everyone has caught the dreaded Hollywood plague of telling others how well they look. When I was young, no one volunteered an opinion on how people checked out except to comment when someone was extremely hung over and looked it. Now the first thing you hear is how brilliant you look and other such bullshit.

America is a nation of strivers and everyone's striving for happiness. It's in the Declaration of Independence if you don't believe me. And it's old Tom Jefferson who put it in: the pursuit of happiness is what American life is all about. But are Americans happy? I think that those who live in Wyoming are, or Montana, or Texas, New Mexico and Arizona,

Maine, North and South Carolina, West Virginia, Iowa, Ohio, and even New Hampshire. But the rest are all bloody miserable and scared to death of dying. Nothing in American culture prepares its people for leaving this life. Everything is promised in television commercials except how to drop dead with dignity. Yep, it's a sin to grow old, and a mortal sin to die, in the Land of the Depraved. The antidotes to sin are diet, exercise, alternative treatments and more baloney.

Oh yes, I almost forgot, money also brings happiness, and one very happy fellow right now is a chap by the name of Madison Cox, somebody you have probably never heard of but will soon enough. He is an expatri-

Nothing in American culture prepares its people for leaving this life

ate American who is 59 years old and at this moment he is very angry with a friend of mine, Christopher Petkanas, the author of a book called *Loulou & Yves: The Untold Story of Loulou de la Falaise and the House of Saint Laurent*.

The title is bit of a mouthful, perhaps, but the book nails Cox and how he ended up as a billionaire by doing what comes naturally to some and extremely unnaturally to the likes of me. Cox was married to Pierre Bergé, Saint Laurent's bum boy, and if this confuses you, I'm not surprised. The designer and Pierre Bergé, one of the world's most unpleasant men — a short, stout, preening Frenchman but a business genius — were a couple of boys in love and then another boy, called Madison, entered the equation. After Saint Laurent died, the two made undisturbed whoopy together. Just before Bergé died, he married Madison, and when he was ten feet under Madison Cox was revealed to be a billionaire. Nothing wrong with that except I'm old-fashioned and believe that only sons and daughters should inherit.

Never mind. Loulou de la Falaise is a distant cousin by marriage, and was a fine girl

who was Saint Laurent's muse, whatever that means. Petkanas believes that Madison Cox stopped a scheduled speech about his book (he certainly has the financial muscle to do so). If that's so, it's rather rich. Cox marries a very old man, inherits his estate, and then goes around trying to stop a book that has very little to do with him but isn't that nice about him when he is mentioned.

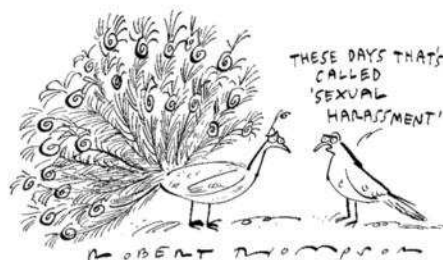
The reason Madison Cox may be angry is that in the book it is revealed that while the old boy Bergé was around, so was a certain Jaimal Odedra, a longtime boyfriend of Madison's. Zut alors! What these naughty girls were up to is amazing. What I don't understand is why, now that they've got their hands on the Saint Laurent-Bergé loot, they care what people think. I guess that is the only chink in their armour. Madison Cox now wants it to look as though he made his money in the same way certain peasants did, peasants called Ford and Rockefeller and Getty. No way, Jose.

Low life Jeremy Clarke



A week ago I plucked my eight-year-old grandson Oscar from the bosom of his rumbustious young family and took him on an orange aeroplane to Nice, and from there up into the hills of the upper Var to spend 11 days in our breeze-block shack. His second visit. On his first, last August, the temperature hit 45 degrees Celsius and we were roasted alive. This one, though, was relentlessly cold and wet and the mop and bucket were in constant use in the living room. Confined to barracks, we played Dobble, a card game akin to snap, but more complicated and requiring sharper wits. Several games of Dobble revealed beyond all argument that grandad's dementia was much more advanced than had previously been thought.

The rain and grandad's dementia did not, however, prevent us from going out to dinner one evening. Boring for an eight-year-old, potentially, I thought, but perhaps a useful introduction to the social classes existing an



ear-poppingly four or five levels above his own. Over drinks and nibbles the hostess privately asked me to guess where her political sympathies lay. I guessed that they could be summarised as Corbyn God, Trump Satan. Wrong. She was not only a Brexiteer but also a fan of President Trump. On hearing this, I nearly fell over. She was the first middle-class or above person I have ever met to frankly admit it. I felt like a tattered and exhausted Mungo Park coming across a lonely gallows on the Upper Niger and shouting for joy because it meant he had reached civilisation at last.

We trooped into the dining room and sat down to eat. These days what normally happens at dinner parties where people haven't met before is that some nitwit will check via a throwaway but calculated comment that we are all going to heaven and Lord Adonis is of the company. It's the unfathomable reckless stupidity, the reassured nitwit might go on, of those who voted to leave that he or she can't understand, and everyone nods sadly. Past experience has taught me to keep my head down at this point and keep chewing. Not only because I am indeed unfathomably stupid, not to mention inarticulate, but also because I can quite see his point, which is that allowing your slaves to vote is simply asking for trouble. What on earth was Mr Cameron thinking about?

But on this occasion, as I've mentioned,

we weren't all singing from the same song sheet. Instead of moving on, after the inevitable derogatory asides or jokes about Brexit and Mr Trump, to the exciting subject of the exchange rate or boxed sets, the early light-hearted exchanges quickly descended into contumely and argument. Our Brexiteer hostess bravely credited Mr Trump with wisdom, especially with regard to his foreign policy. And one of her guests wasn't having that, not for a second, diagnosing instead an extreme case of cretinism — though without feeling in the least bit sorry for him. In fact, the assertion that President Trump could be anything other than a cretin beyond reach inflamed her to raving apoplexy in a fraction of a second.

Our hostess, incidentally, was a mesmerising beauty. She was Nature bragging. I, too, think Mr Trump is a fantastic president. But even if I had been undecided, her beauty alone would have convinced me of

the rightness of her opinions, irrespective of the cogency, reasonableness or even truth of all counter arguments.

The debate about Mr Trump's IQ had reached such a pitch of surliness and acrimony that I was asked for my opinion; presumably in the hope that a piece of arrant poppycock might lighten the tone. The argument at that point had strayed to the character of Hillary Clinton.

'The Clintons are a crime family, aren't they?' I said. The anti-Donald faction was outraged. And what evidence had I for this? I had none whatever, I said. It was something I'd read somewhere, and the juxtaposition of the words 'Clinton' and 'crime family' had greatly appealed. But hadn't Saint Christopher Hitchens written an entire book on the subject? I added. Well, yes, OK. But had I read it? No. Sorry. I hadn't. I'd only heard of it. Well, why bring it up, then? Really. How does an

Best Words

Everything has built
to a temporary stop, Jengas
of papers, old notebooks, one
gift catalogue held open
at a page headed *Medieval*
selling genuine beeswax church candles
and other fragrant thoughts
that don't count. The trick
is not to touch
anything: cold coffee, lipsalve,
a peppercorn, the ripple
in the tacky oilcloth made by
the zigzag weight of the books,
nosegay of sharpened pencils,
vase of dead
montbretia meditating on autumn;
open your notebook not at a
fresh page go in anywhere
write sideways in the margins upside-down
cross-hatched or at the end of a long
insertion mark, hide your words in words
and leave them in the dark.
Come back after a week to seek
them out — a picture puzzle — *Find the Tiger*
hidden in the shadowy
forest of pencil strokes;
dress it in its slinky Sunday
coat of fur and ink.

— Susan E. Holland



unfounded accusation like that contribute to an intelligent discussion?

I hung my head and apologised. Then I turned to Oscar, who was seated beside me, uncertainly wielding the poshest knife and fork he had ever seen in his life over the bloody flesh of a lamb, and I put my arms around him and gave him a loving kiss and a prolonged cuddle for putting up so patiently and for so long with this impassioned yet uninteresting argument. 'Rock on, Tommy, you little liar,' he said. (We've been enjoying the northern comics Cannon and Ball on YouTube lately.) 'Pick up the piggin' phone, Tommy,' I said.

Real life

Melissa Kite



'If this madness goes on, I will not be able to leave my house without downloading the app,' I told my friend, who had been exhorting me to download the app for something.

In fact, I had been trying to book a fun ride. Every year, my horsey friends and I go on these cross country jollies during the summer months. And every year all we do is ring or email the secretary of the relevant riding club, say we are coming, send a cheque, get our start time and turn up in our trailer on the appointed day.

Not any more. The riding clubs have discovered apps. And so now, when one tries to register to go on a fun ride, the antithesis of fun begins.

You cannot ring or email anyone to book anything anymore, let's face it. For pretty much everything, including all horse events from showjumping to fun rides, you have to go to a website. The one for horse events is called... wait for it... horsemonkey.com.

Oh, kill me now, I thought, as I logged on to this exercise in 21st-century torment.

All my friends have registered, so on I went, encouraged by them to just log on, just enter my details, and just pay online. And if I couldn't be bothered with any of that, then, as one friend so hilariously told me, I could — drum roll — download the app.

Seriously? You think it will be easier for a woman in midlife with two kinds of failing eyesight (I can't see either up close or far away) to input every detail including her inside leg measurement into a small phone touchscreen? Do you mean me to register as Nafoffa Shite riding a horse called Farty?

'Do not tell me to use the app,' I told this friend. 'I will log on and register on my laptop, but even that is going to be hit and miss.'

And so it proved to be. The horrors that await you on horsemonkey.com are truly beyond the limits of endurance.

The home screen is full of what I think they call pop-ups. So there are windows within windows, showing millions of events and you have to click and click and scream and scream as you minimise boxes by mistake then open boxes you don't want.

'How is this fun?' I thought, as I clicked everything I could just about see through contact lenses and reading glasses to find the fun ride. I longed for the time — wasn't it only last year? — when dear old ladies were on the end of phone lines telling you where to send your cheque and that they looked forward to seeing you.

Eventually, I managed to get the opening screen of the log-in process up and running, only to be greeted by this message: 'What type of monkey are you?' I kid you not. That is what it said. There was no box to tick for 'I am not a monkey.' The choice was 'Rider' or 'Organiser'. So I ticked rider and that led me into the second circle of Horse Monkey hell where I had to fill in my details. This had an option to tick gender — male, female or dash. So I picked dash. If they are going to be bloody awkward, so am I. Oh yes, I feel very dash-gendered today.

Email, password, date of birth. Add photo. Whether of you or your horse, it

When one tries to register to go on a fun ride, the antithesis of fun begins

wasn't clear, so I uploaded a picture of Darcy galloping past the finish post alone, stirrups flying, after she had dumped me at a fence.

Tick the box saying 'I am not a robot' — but I soon will be. Then it was on to another stage where a whole deeper level of info was required, including your VAT number.

From there, I achieved clearance to a screen showing the following choices: My Diary, My Results, My Invoices, My Banana Credits, My Monkey Bank...

I'm sorry, banana credits and monkey bank? How old are we all now? I mean, it did say you had to be over 18 to register on this site. Was this a code?

No. It was all meant to be amusing, no doubt. Like funkypigeon.com or compare-themeerkat or GoDaddy. Go to hell, daddy, is all I can say. We are becoming morons.

An unhappy monkey face kept popping up every time I didn't give it all the information it wanted.

Fax number? Are you kidding me? Since when did monkeys have fax machines, pray?

A few minutes after I finally sated it with every piece of me it wanted, I got the inevitable email, probably the first of thousands to come. 'Hello! Welcome to Horse Monkey's world!' I had registered successfully. Days later, I have still to work out how to book myself on the fun ride.

Bridge

Susanna Gross

If I had to name my favourite bridge player... actually, I can't, there are too many. But the young Danish superstar Dennis Bilde is certainly a contender. I've always been struck by his charm, his lack of arrogance, and his limitless energy — especially for fun. Even during major tournaments he's been known to stay up all night partying or gambling; yet he still manages to play flawless bridge the next day.

Bilde was brought up on a farm, and taught to play by his parents; at 18 he became Junior World Champion; now, ten years on, he's a member of the mighty Team Lavazza (sponsored by Madam Lavazza — think coffee). He's wonderful to watch: speedy and fluid. While other experts often take aeons to think — their heads in their hands as though in pain — Bilde makes it look so easy. Maybe he sees things more quickly, maybe it's youthful confidence — who knows? Take this hand from the recent Vanderbilt trophy (he was North):

Dealer West

NS vulnerable

♠ K Q
♥ 8 2
♦ K J 10 3
♣ K 8 7 6 2

♠ A J 8 2
♥ 9 6 3
♦ 9 7 4
♣ A 10 4

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 9 7 5
♥ Q 10 7 5
♦ Q 2
♣ Q J 9

♠ 6 4 3
♥ A K J 4
♦ A 8 6 5
♣ 5 3

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♣	pass	1♥
pass	1NT	pass	3NT
pass	pass	pass	

In the other room, the auction was identical. So was the lead: the ♠10 to West's ♠A, and a spade continuation. When North decided to cash the ♦A and finesse the ♦J, the contract was doomed.

Dennis Bilde, however, quick as a flash, cashed his ♦K and ran the ♦J. He won East's ♦Q with the ♦A and led a club towards his ♣K. West ducked; he won and finessed the ♥J: nine tricks in the bag. Was he just lucky? No: he worked out almost instantaneously that for the contract to have a chance, West must hold the ♣A. The lead suggested West held the ♠AJ. That came to 9 points. If West also held the ♦Q that would be 11 points — and he might well have opened the bidding.

Chess

Fischer redivivus

Raymond Keene

The Berlin qualifying tournament to determine the challenger to world champion Magnus Carlsen has ended in victory for the American grandmaster and Olympiad gold medallist Fabiano Caruana. Caruana will be the first homegrown American contender since the days of Bobby Fischer in 1972. The world championship match will take place in November in London. This is the first time it will have been held in London since 2000. (Before that, they were held there in 1986 and 1993.)

It is clear that mental preparation will form a key part of Carlsen's approach to the London shootout. I have a theory that his style is based on that of Emanuel Lasker, world champion from 1894 to 1921, whose forte was to keep the position in flux, either with a slight advantage or even disadvantage, so long as a draw was not on the horizon. Eventually, his less skilled opposition would crack and Lasker would pounce. After the Berlin tournament, I put this assessment of Carlsen to Caruana, who was of the same opinion.

Here are some extracts from Caruana's victory.

Kramnik-Caruana: Fidé Candidates, Berlin 2018 (see diagram 1)

In this very complicated game Kramnik has gained the upper hand which he could now maintain with 46 Bc6. Instead he played a very natural move that appears to be immediately decisive. **46 Rb8 Rxa7 47 Rg8** This seems to win as there appears to be no good counter to the threat of 48 Rxc5. However, Caruana found an incredible resource. **47 ... Bf6!!** Now after 48 Rxc4 Black has the reply 48 ... Kf5! which wins by attacking the white rook and threatening 49 ... Ra1 mate. Kramnik found the only way to stay in the game. **48 d8Q Bxd8 49 Rxc4 Bf6 50 Rg6 Rb7 51 Be2 Rxb4+ 52 Ka2** The position is now about equal but, after further adventures, Caruana went on to win. **52 ... Nc2 53 Rc1**

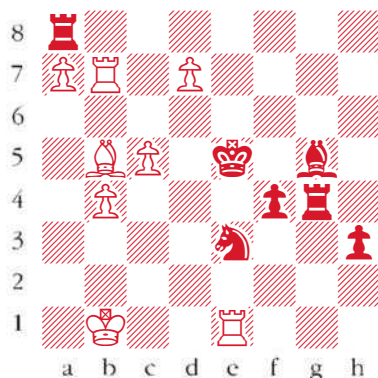
PUZZLE NO. 502

White to play. This position is from Karjakin-Caruana, Berlin 2018. This game was Caruana's only reverse in Berlin. Karjakin now simplified down to a winning endgame. What was the key move? Answers via email to victoria@spectator.co.uk by Tuesday 24 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 Rc1

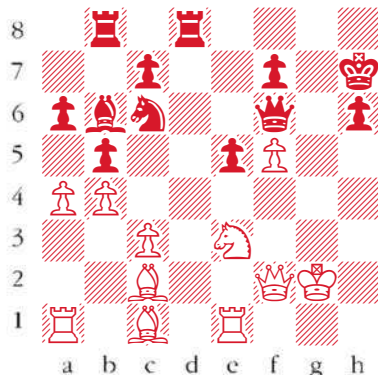
Last week's winner Roy Bland, Penzance, Cornwall

Diagram 1

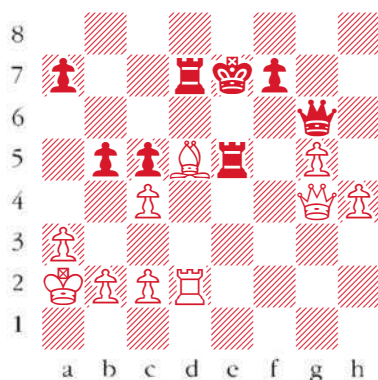


Nd4 54 Bd3 Ra4+ 55 Kb1 Nb3 56 Re1+ Kd5 57 Kc2 Nd4+ 58 Kb1 Nf3 59 Rd1 Ra1+ 60 Kc2 Rxd1 61 Ba6 Rd2+ 62 Kc1 Bb2+ 63 Kb1 Kxc5 64 Bb7 Ne5 65 Rf6 f3 66 Rf5 f2 White resigns

Caruana-Aronian; Fidé Candidates, Berlin 2018



Aronian has made an imaginative piece sacrifice and should now continue with the amazing 31 ... Nxb4!! 32 cxb4 Rd4 when, despite the two piece deficit, Black has a huge attack and stands better. Instead Aronian chose the wrong plan and Caruana wrapped up easily. **31 ... e4 32 Rh1 Rd6 33 Bxe4 Rg8+ 34 Kf1 Ne5 35 Qf4 c6 36 axb5 Rg5 37 bxa6 Qd8 38 f6+ Ng6 39 Rxh6+ Black resigns**



Competition

Let's talk about sex

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3044 you were invited to provide a lesson in the facts of life courtesy of a well-known character in fiction.

There is space only for me to commend Jayne Osborn, who recruited Dr Seuss: 'Doing sex is good fun, and it's easy to do./ Let me demonstrate, using Thing One and Thing Two...' and salute the prizewinners below, who each receive £25.

As any fule kno, gurls are utterly wet and weedy and no boy in his rite mind wish to speke or pla with them. This is why they are kept in there own skools with names lik gingham hall, where they will not hav to witness the savage antiks of boys and we will not be driven madd by there silvery giggles.

But when our skooling is finished and st custards spew us forth into the world, we will be expected lik other generashuns befor us to sukum to marriage and even sektual interkorse, which sound revolting beyond imajinashun, tho my grate frend Peason hav mags with nakid piktures that sa it is kwite the wheeze. When one, ahem, body part enlarj itself and demand attenshun, they sa a gurl can give even more satisfakshun than your own praetissid hand. But love lede to emoshunal kaos and large gins. *Chris O'Carroll (Molesworth)*

The care of wands, my dear boys, and their proper use is my theme today. As headmaster of Hogwarts it is my duty to ensure that magic is used responsibly. It has been wisely observed that your wand has a mind of its own, but of course you are responsible for its proper control. Naturally your wand will react agreeably when you stroke it, even producing for you an impressive explosion of power, not unlike the gush of a fountain. Such is magic. You will also find that mere thoughts can set your wand into action; without your handling it at all it will rise up, ready for some magical feat. But the magic in your wands is best seen when others are involved and I will now take you through the elements of the Science of Insertion, with regard to when and where this art is appropriate. *Frank McDonald (Dumbledore)*

My boy, it is indeed your mother who has brought forth our blessed offspring. But as a wife she is not alone as the source of the miracle of life — in short, a husband is also requisite. So it is my glad duty now to prepare you for the role that manhood will in time bestow upon you. Unlike your sister, as you are doubtless aware, you are endowed with a nether appendage for the purposes of aquatic relief. As you approach man's estate that appendage will rise to perform a higher function. In short, it will become a fount of fertility. So when you take a wife and clasp her in connubial embrace it will pour forth unto her that vital stream which mingled with her own propensities will create, DV, a newly embodied soul. In simple terms, young Micawber, that is the answer to your question. *W.J. Webster (Mr Micawber)*

Listen carefully, child, for this is very impotent. You have reached an age at which it is approximate that you acquire a serviceable understanding of the human reproductive cistern. When you sit constipating the birds and the bees, do you ever wonder whence they came, how they were created? Permit me to complain. To make a baby, whether a bird, a bee or a splendid homo sapling like yourself, first is needed a mother and a father. The mother produces an egg in her aviary, while the father makes millions of little tadpoles called spume in his vestibules. The father then allows the spume to become acquainted with the egg by means of saxophone intercross (we'll say no more about that). The spume infantilises the egg in the Filipino tube. After nine months congestion the mother has contraptions and — lo and behold — we see the miracle of curation. *Joe Houlihan (Mrs Malaprop)*

'Excuse me,' said Alice. 'Can you tell me the facts of life?'

Humpty Dumpty swallowed hard. 'What? Evolution?'

'No,' replied Alice. 'Old Mr Darwin explained that. It's about lady finches selecting the fittest mate with a big — I think he said beak. Because of their nuts. My governess said I was too young for the other facts.'

'Well, you're a Victorian girl,' said Humpty Dumpty. 'You won't need them till you get married. It's embarrassing, and involves nakedness.'

'Like when nice Mr Dodgson takes my photograph?' asked Alice. 'Does he know these facts of life?'

'People will be discussing that one for a good few years,' replied Humpty Dumpty. 'OK, let's say that one day you meet a nice boy...'

'What about a nice girl? Or both?' interrupted Alice.

'Then you could self-identify as non-binary.' 'What does that mean?'

'Whatever you choose it to mean. There's glory for you.'

Brian Murdoch (Humpty Dumpty)

Sir. Your Esteemed Father, with the natural fastidiousness of a True Born Englishman, has requested that I appraise you of Certain Facts, now that you have achieved manhood, with the blessings of matrimony to come.

If (for the sake of modesty, let us call the male appendage The Good Ship Standfast — which, we can assume, bears the natural qualities of the Captain) you should be encouraged by it in the manner of a Cargo Ship to approach a port of the female persuasion, you should be circumspect.

But, should you receive an unequivocal acceptance of your firm entreaty to enter said Port, you may proceed forward and unload your cargo, keeping ejaculations of the vulgar sort to a minimum, and without committing by word or deed any action which might bring a blush to the cheek of a Young Person. *Ann Alexander (Mr Podsnap)*

NO. 3047: BETWEEN THE LINES

You are invited to supply an imaginary testimonial for a high-profile figure, living or dead, that is superficially positive but contains hidden warnings to a potential employer. Please email entries of up to 150 words to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 2 May.

Crossword
2355: 13 16
by Lavatch

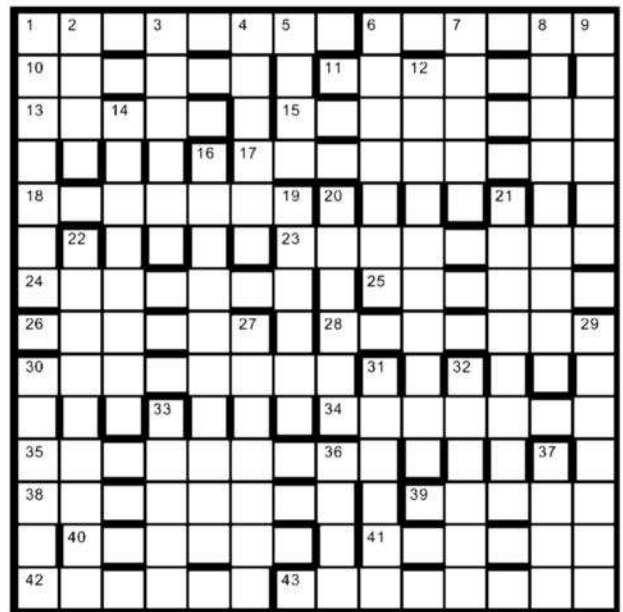
13 1A 23 22 is an eight-word quotation by 34 in *ODQ*. Other unclued lights, including one of three words, are unrelated, but each has 13 1A 23. The two lights which make up the title each have 13 1A 23 which needs highlighting (9 cells in total). Elsewhere, ignore two accents.

Across

- 10 Ascetic existence by Tyneside (6)
- 11 Like a prison that's more guarded? (6)
- 15 Emergence of new colonies (8)
- 18 Silk worms around, in the main around clovers (7)
- 24 Curse glue that's fixed beam (7)
- 25 Albatross or goshawk's swallowed sweet plants (6)
- 26 Soldiers covering head in grasses (6)
- 28 Loose women receiving love round trees (7)
- 30 Gather around, wanting games and wine (8, two words)
- 35 Coppers look to arrest bishop, one in programmes (9)
- 38 Army go on manoeuvres, managing in rural areas (8)
- 39 Nameless Gaelic poet, or Italian (5)
- 40 Chinese dog's overcoming inhibition (6, hyphenated)
- 41 Note on proper time in musical works (6)

Down

- 1 Man saw subsidy for farmers (7)
- 2 Flimsy leader leaves game (4, hyphenated)
- 3 Old film from Spain and Italy went backwards (6)
- 4 Relative's extremely nice, thank God! (6)
- 5 Papers keen to uncover foreign notion (4)
- 6 Device on railway is in bundles (7)



- 7 View tons wrapped in plastic (5)
- 8 Sweet drinks, hits in court (9, hyphenated)
- 9 Most reasonable home's under it (6)
- 12 Dish of sticky stuff, fine coated in older nuts (10, hyphenated)
- 14 Inflexible German dined around one (8)
- 19 Walked endlessly in plain (6)
- 20 Slides of photographs picked up (6)
- 21 Urges to consume bread or Chinese food? (8, two words)
- 27 Small, bowed American is fleshy (7)
- 29 Broadcaster's trouble with material on vessel (7)
- 30 Old Asian rhino's spasm also doesn't end (6)
- 31 Greek character gathers pointer for Rhea (6)
- 32 Two bishoprics in foreign palace (6)
- 33 Bard's forehead or cheek (5)
- 36 Stars about to take off stretchy material (4)
- 37 Monkey and songbird on island (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 7 May. 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 2355, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name

Address

Email



SOLUTION TO 2352: UPRIGHT CHARACTERS

'THE WRITING ON THE WALL' (Daniel 5.5) at 12/22/41 was 'MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN' at 23/16/26, according to *Brewer*, which also gives 'IF YOU HATE GRAFFITI, SIGN A PARTITION', at 19/1D/7, as an example of GRAFFITI.

First prize C.V. Clark, London WC1
Runners-up Francesca Charlton, Sleaford, Lincs; A.R. Wightman, Harpenden, Herts

No sacred cows

Tips on how to get your child into the best state school

Toby Young

Monday was ‘national offer day’, which means that more than half a million parents across England were notified about which primary school their child got into. For most, the news was good, with nine in ten parents securing a place at one of their top three choices. But for some — particularly in London — the offer letters brought disappointment. In Kensington and Chelsea, for instance, just 68.3 per cent got their first choice of school. Not surprising, then, that parents have been resorting to fraud.

In some cases, desperate parents end up spending so much money to game the system it would be cheaper to go private. Mumsnet commissioned a poll which found that 18 per cent of parents admit to buying or renting a house in the catchment area of their preferred school. That can backfire, of course. According to a story on the front page of the *Times* in 2016, the school in England with the smallest catchment area is Fox Primary in Notting Hill, with parents needing to live within 107 yards of the front gate. Not many can afford to rent or buy in Notting Hill, where the average house price is more than £3 million, but anyone who did so to get their child into Fox’s this year will be disappointed. The school’s governors were so concerned about its privileged intake that



Anxious middle-class parents are more influenced by herd opinion than objective data

they have introduced a lottery-based admissions policy.

I’m in the unusual position of having helped create three primaries, so I’ve become something of an expert on this subject. Indeed, I’ve thought about setting up a consultancy that advises parents on how to get their kids into the best state schools. But in the meantime, here’s some free advice.

To begin with, parents wildly overestimate the effect that attending a ‘good’ school will have on their child’s life chances. I recently co-authored a study which showed that the type of school that children go to accounts for less than 1 per cent of the variance in their exam results if you control for general cognitive ability, parental socioeconomic status and various genetic markers. Admittedly, that piece of research just looked at secondary schools, but a study of different types of primary schools using the same methodology would yield similar results.

Which isn’t to say that some schools aren’t better than others, but here’s another thing: parents are often unreliable judges. In my experience, anxious middle-class parents are more influenced by herd opinion than objective data, such as a school’s most recent Ofsted report. If they visit a school on an open day, they’re likely to be unduly affected by the manners of the child who shows them round, as if that child is typical rather than a charmer hand-picked by the headteacher. They wander from classroom to classroom gazing at the wall displays and seeing the neat exercise books open on desks, unaware that what they’re looking at is a Potemkin village. Instead, ask the headteacher

to see the data recording what progress pupils have made in reading between key stages 1 and 2. A score of 0 means that, on average, the pupils achieved similar results at the end of key stage 2 to pupils in other schools with similar key stage 1 results. Typically, schools will record scores of between -5 and +5, so look for a score of +3 or above. If you’re a parent who has been offered a place at a school that wasn’t among your top three choices, compare the progress data of that school with the others. You could be surprised to discover that it’s actually better.

Some schools may be easier to get into because they’ve just opened, not because they’re poor. Most free schools have difficulty filling all their places in year one, but primary free schools are twice as likely to be rated ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted as all other types of school and they get the best key stage 1 results in the country. Worth a punt if you can’t get a place at the local ‘good’ school.

Finally, if you’re determined to get into the local middle-class ‘oasis’, ask to go on the waiting list — and call once a week to check where you are. It’s particularly worthwhile calling just before the autumn census data is collected, since the school will need to be full on that day to ensure it’s fully funded. That usually falls in the first week of October, and your chances of being offered an in-year place just before then is higher than at any other time. Best of luck — and, remember, schools are less important than you think.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH



Spectator Sport

I love this Pep-mania, but don't forget Klopp

Roger Alton

Fittingly, it took a dire performance from a dismal and dreary United against the worst team in the Premier League to push Guardiola's magnificent project over the line. And fittingly, too, Mourinho greeted it with one his most awful displays: lashing out at his players and painfully recalling his own record of title wins as well as his defeat of City. It marked a new low for José's gracelessness and that's quite a crowded field.

There's nothing not to admire about Pep: from his golf swing to his ability to fill a grey rollneck to the fact that he liked to shoot the breeze over lunch with Johan Cruyff at Ferran Adrià's El Bulli restaurant in Barcelona (quite a surfeit of excellence, but you wouldn't half like to be there). Oh and he has also produced a sublime football team, the best we have ever seen. Probably.

But amid all this Pep-mania, don't forget that other great foreign manager working in England — Jürgen Klopp, King of the Kop, and not a man to let the opportunity for some massive overexcitement ever go to waste. Klopp deserves a special place



Klopp has inspired heroic performances from two players considered superfluous at rival clubs

not just in the hearts of the red half of Merseyside, but of anyone who likes to see the English game flourish.

Not only has he guided Liverpool to the semis of the world's premier club competition, but he has done it with heroic performances from two players considered superfluous at rival clubs. Take a bow James Milner, formerly of Man City, and ex-Gunner Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain. What a pity Milner seems adamant he's not available for the World Cup. The Ox must have made a case for being in Gareth Southgate's starting line-up in Russia — which is quite a turnaround for someone mocked by one of our leading sportswriters as 'the ultimate premier mediocre player'. Harsh words and not a bit true.

As an exercise in getting England's aspiring cricket players ready for two Test series this summer, the first round of county championship matches was a farce yet again. April is the daftest month for preparing future international players — pudding pitches that make stroke play a lottery and give swing and seam bowlers a towering advantage. James Harris took nine for 48 in Middlesex's win over Northants at Lord's; only slightly fewer than he took for the county in the whole of last season.

For real gut-busting excitement you need the Indian Premier League:

too big, too rich, too brash. Cars, tyres, cement, phones and everything else that makes the modern world work are all pouring in big money. Plus they have Virat, MSD, all the Aussie legends, the Afghan upstarts and the biffing Brits. Look on and admire... and when it is done we put on our whites and play on the Downs and the Dales, but never pretend we can match the IPL, because it has gone and done what the Premier League set out to do in football — just done it better and faster.

Team spirit of the year was at the Commonwealth Games when England's girls won netball gold. A brilliant photo of the victory pile-on summed up what it meant — and how often do you get netball on the front of the *Daily Telegraph* and on spreads in the *Daily Mail* and the *Times*? The event was not diluted by the Commonwealth Games factor — all the top teams were there, so it was effectively the Olympics and the World Championships as well. Women of all ages have been taking up netball, and the best result would be for women and girls to realise the brilliance of team sports. We are cricket world champions, Olympic hockey champions and now Commonwealth netball champions. So much more fun than pulling on some overpriced leggings and heading for the gym. Being part of a team increases enjoyment tenfold.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. My husband and I are excited to have been invited to dinner by our most important neighbour. However our neighbour is fairly correct so I imagine it will go down like a lead balloon if I ask for his wifi code as soon as I walk in. The problem is that now I own a smartphone, everyone knows I'm accessible at all times, and I like to discreetly glance at my emails to reassure myself that there is nothing urgent. Should I pop in earlier in the day with flowers and ask for the code then? — S.C., Tetbury

I fear you are out of date. Your emails will continue to flood in as normal without your host's wifi code. The only reason to need it would be if staying overnight and, for example, wanting to download expensive content without using your data allowance. Meanwhile, if your 'most important' neighbour can go without monitoring his emails during dinner, then why don't you employ a proxy to monitor yours at the same time?

Q. My daughter is getting married this summer and I foresee a problem when the guests come to the receiving line and I kiss them all *except* my own daily of 35 years, who in fact will be one of my favourite people present. I think we would both feel awkward if I kissed her. Nor would I want her to feel it was a precedent. I know that many

people today are touchy-feely with their dailies but ours is a rather feudal village and such behaviour has never been known. — Name and address withheld

A. Not to kiss one individual in a line would feel odd to both parties. You should loudly exclaim, 'Oh Mrs Murgatroyd, I hope you don't mind but on a day like this you must let me give you a kiss!'

Q. I'm helping to organise my boyfriend's 21st birthday at his family's house this summer and I have a conflict of loyalty. His parents and I were planning a marquee, a delicious dinner for 100 with incredible wine and a live band. But he's said what he really wants is a sleepover for just 15 mates (11 of them male) with beer, a barbecue, a hot tub and a bonfire. If I warn his lovely

but naive parents what these lads are like on limitless beer (I am at university with them) and without a balance of female company, they'll insist on the marquee. But if I don't and things go wrong then I'll feel responsible. — Name and address withheld

Let the sleepover go ahead but arrange for it to start early with a strenuous group bonding activity, for example a five-mile run and some wild swimming. Next invest in high-quality organic ale which promotes feelings of benevolence rather than the aggression brought on by the chemicals in cheap beer. Finally, arrange bean bags around the bonfire with someone warbling ballads with guitar accompaniment. Hypnotised by the flames, the exhausted youths may fall asleep sooner than you could have hoped for.

Food

Too grand to be joyful

Tanya Gold



Bentley's Oyster Bar & Grill is on Swallow Street, an alley between Piccadilly and Regent Street, which swallowed most of Swallow Street in the early 19th century. But that did not give it the name. Property developers only memorialise their crimes accidentally and Swallow Street is named for Thomas Swallow, about whom I know nothing else. He does not appear in Ed Glinert's *The London Compendium*.

Bentley's is both inside and outside a squat, ugly and very interesting yellow brick house. It preens like an ugly clever man. It has fine large windows with angry brick eyebrows. Outside, diners sit under square black umbrellas and behind a partition, with glass, in a parody of a private members' club, but in the middle of a street. There is topiary, heating, an ornamental bicycle and even a carpet. The signage is electric, and bright green, as if written by a copywriter who is also a witch.

It is quite formal for outside dining but Bentley's is old (it is 102) and very grand. It makes me ponder what

The signage is electric, and bright green, as if written by a copywriter who is also a witch

Oslo Court would look like if it was partially outside. A rose garden full of chickens probably. The absence of cars ensures they do not choke to death on exhaust fumes, but it still feels mad — a private members' club near a bus lane made for shoppers when George V was on the throne, and who are now dead. The catch of the day is on a blackboard, but this is the smooth and monetised heart of the West End of London, and the harbour at Newlyn feels far away.

Inside, there is a long room with a bar and red booths. It is pared down: there is nothing gaudy here in this restaurant that used to look like the Royal Opera House but no longer does. Someone jumped in and made it generically tasteful; but I have a weakness for themed restaurants and have to be prevented from dining at the Rainforest Café in a giraffe-style hat and then writing about it in *The Spectator*. A luckless pianist plays behind a curtain opposite the cloakroom. This is weird, even for London

W1: why would you employ a pianist you did not want to see, unless it is a sort of Elephant Man pianist in a pillowcase with eye holes, or the actual Phantom of the Opera, in debt and playing in restaurants? In fact, he looks normal, if slightly aggrieved, and I hope he is promoted to the status of having a face fit to be seen by people eating shellfish. I do not know why they do not put him in the street near the bicycle. My companion frets about him, but she has been known to suggest to tramps that they take a course at the Open University.

Because Bentley's is grand, there are many very literal private rooms (one is called the Crustacea Room, another the Rib Room) but we eat in the dining room upstairs. It is a sombre grey with a polished wood floor, and it is hushed, serious and slightly forbidding. It is not louche, like J. Sheekey, but that is off the Charing Cross Road; and it is not flouncing like Rules. It is for the seafood-eating austere and they are as much fun as they sound.

Here, then, in this poised dining room we eat excellent food from Richard Corrigan's kitchens: smoked salmon with sour cream and potato blinis, grilled sea bass and Elwy Valley lamb. The fish is better than the meat, of course, and very proper, but Bentley's is too calm to be joyful, and too self-important to be imaginative. It is a restaurant for people who don't wish to be surprised. They should release the pianist.

Bentley's Oyster Bar & Grill, 11-15 Swallow St, London W1B 4DG, tel: 020 7734 4756.



'Good evening. My name is 10.453.82 and I'll be your server.'

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Scoff

Scarcely a sober breath has been drawn in my house all week for celebrating the 90th anniversary of the completion of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This stupendous achievement, in 15,490 pages by 1928, drew on more than five million quotations from old books sent in by volunteers. In 1879, when the heroic James Murray became editor, the Philological Society appealed to Americans to read 18th-century books — any, except for about 100 already combed.

One, I was intrigued to see, was *A Travestie of Homer* written in 1762 by Thomas Bridges, under the name Caustic Barebones.



The Philological Society spelt his name Brydgy, but I can't find that he did likewise. Bridges' *Travestie* went into revised editions until 1797. Its slangy translation in octosyllabic couplets used bathetic or clever rhymes, with a touch of Samuel Butler and a vigorous vocabulary like that of Nashe. There was a lewd strain to it too. In today's *OED*, 77 quotations from Bridges illustrate words such as *butter whore*, *grand-dad*,

hermaphroditish, *snickersneeing* and *tails* (of a coin). It seemed the Philological Society's reader had not wasted his time, until I found that at least ten quotations in the *OED*'s current online edition had not been in the edition of 1928, nor the second edition of 1989. Computer-aided lexicographers must have panned Bridges for gold afresh. Bridges's *grand-dad*, for example, in his 1764 edition, comes decades before the citation from Byron's *Don Juan* that was the earliest before the entry was updated in 2015.

Bridges throws new light on *scoff* (that *Beano* word). In the mid-19th century it was borrowed

from Cape Dutch *schoft* ('quarter of a day', hence each of its four meals). But earlier it existed in English in the form *scaff*. Bridges has the couplet 'How the hungry whoresons scaff'd; / How eagerly the wine they quaff'd.' That may indicate a pronunciation 'scoff' (though *quaff*, to some, rhymes with *laugh*).

By a clear 70 years, Bridges also gives the first example of *eat one's hat*: 'I'll eat my hat, if Jove don't drop us, / Or play some queer rogue's trick to stop us.' Politicians often promise this, but don't do it. They want to have their hat and scoff it.

— Dot Wordsworth

NEXT WEEK
FREE WITH THE SPECTATOR



SPECTATOR

LIFE

Trinny's revenge

*Forgotten by TV, reborn online.
Lara Prendergast
meets Trinny Woodall*

BOUNCING BACK
*Toby Young on the art
of self-reinvention*

**WOULD YOU HAVE
A BABY WITH
A STRANGER?**
*Emily Hill on the new
modern family*

TIME LORDS
*How smart is
your watch?*

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