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THE SPECTATOR

Next up, Nato

Trump's trade war is becoming a full-blown security crisis, says *Fraser Nelson*

**PAUL
DACRE'S
DIARY**



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Beyond Brexit

This week Brexit reached its Somme. The government has been bogged down in votes on amendments inserted into its Brexit bill by the House of Lords. Theresa May saw off the threat of cabinet resignations only to have a more junior minister resign, as he put it, in order to voice the concerns of his constituents (although, as has been pointed out, a majority of them actually voted to leave the EU).

It all looks a mess. The Brexit process would have been unpleasant enough with the small majority which the Prime Minister inherited from David Cameron. After losing even that, it has become a game of internal pork-barrel politics — Downing Street has had to offer potential rebels just enough to satisfy their eager snouts without undermining the whole purpose: to leave the EU, the single market and the customs union.

Conservative rebels like to point out that only the first of those things was included on the referendum paper faced by voters two years ago, and that there is room for interpretation on the latter two. But they overlook the Conservative manifesto on which they were (just) elected in 2017, which promised all three.

The government could not, in any case, possibly agree to an outcome in which Britain left the EU but remained in the single market and customs union. Far from a compromise, it would be a worst of all worlds in which Britain found itself having to obey regulations and apply tariffs imposed by Brussels but without any say in what those regulations or tariffs were. The freedoms promised by Brexit (foremost among them the ability to follow our own trade policy) would be lost.

Thanks to last year's manifesto promise, Theresa May was always likely to see off her rebels and somehow drag herself through this week's quagmire. Now that she is on slightly firmer ground, she should be seeking

unity by formulating post-Brexit policies which almost all Conservatives can support.

So much has been said of the negative aspects of Brexit — the undoubted disruption and uncertainty it is bringing — that it is easy to lose sight of the new freedoms which come with it. The Prime Minister should seize the initiative by first addressing the issue of immigration policy — one of the concerns, though far from the only one, that motivated Leave voters two years ago. She should emphasise, as the official Leave campaign did, that quitting the EU does not mean closing the door on migrants. Rather it means the ability to devise our own migration pol-

It is easy to lose sight of the new freedoms which come with leaving the European Union

icy to favour skilled workers and disfavour those without skills or earning potential.

It is absurd, as was revealed this week, that overly restrictive rules on allowing in skilled workers from outside the EU meant that 2,300 doctors were prevented from taking up positions in the NHS between November and April. Sajid Javid says he is looking into the cap on Tier-2 visas, which has been blamed for turning away skilled staff, but this on its own will not go far enough. The government needs to ditch its unrealistic target of limiting net migration to no more than 100,000 a year and adopt a new policy which is more liberal towards migrants with skills and less liberal towards those without. Once outside the EU's strictures on free movement we can have a policy that will not discriminate against workers from outside the EU. The main criteria for entering Britain should be what you will contribute to the economy, not where you come from.

At the same time the government needs to stop treating students as if they were undesirable, low-income migrants. While

students might physically be entering the country, their education is a UK export. It is madness that the Home Office should seek to thwart the growth of higher education as an export industry.

There will be plenty of battles to come over Brexit. Still, the EU refuses to talk trade — even though the UK has made the concessions which Michel Barnier said were necessary for trade talks to commence. If and when they do begin, they will bring more bruising battles and threats of rebellion. But at the same time, the intransigence and unreasonableness of Brussels's Brexit negotiating team has served to undermine further the EU's reputation in Britain. Meanwhile, the resurgence of the euro crisis in Italy has reminded everyone of the deep flaws in the EU's pet project, the single currency. There is little sign of significant change of opinion in Britain and nothing to suggest that if the referendum were re-run, the result would be any different — in spite of the apparent chaos in government.

There is no going back on Brexit, but there can and should be every attempt to build consensus for what follows. Liberal policies on trade and migration ought to go a long way to satisfy those who interpreted the referendum result as a regrettable attempt by the British public to turn their country in on itself. It cannot be emphasised enough that this was not the intention of many of those who campaigned for Brexit. On the contrary, the EU's half-hearted commitment to free trade, compromised by its native protectionism on agriculture in particular, convinced Brexit supporters that Britain could grow a stronger economy outside the EU than inside it. Many Remainers, whether on the Conservative backbenches or in the wider population, will remain sceptical — but it is now in Theresa May's hands to formulate policy which will bring a little more unity to what has become a fractious country.



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CONTRIBUTORS

Paul Dacre's diary is on p7. He has been the editor of the *Daily Mail* since 1992 and is to step down later this year.

Robert Tombs is a Professor of French History at Cambridge and the author of *The English and their History*. On p28, he writes about Charles de Gaulle.

Boyd Tonkin is author of the forthcoming *The 100 Best Novels in Translation*. He reviews Juan Gabriel Vásquez on p35.

Susie Boyt, whose most recent novel is *Love & Fame*, writes about alcoholism and literature on p36. She writes a shopping column for the *FT Weekend*.

Frances Wilson is author of, among other books, a biography of J. Bruce Ismay, the chairman of the White Star Line who fled the sinking *Titanic*. She writes about the wisdom of Dr Johnson on p38.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK

EXCLUSIVE PHOTOGRAPH
OF TRUMP
INVADING G7
SUMMIT ON A
MOPED AND
BEING RUDE



Home

Negotiations over Brexit acquired an even stronger admixture of chaos and old night. Phillip Lee resigned as a little-known justice minister over Brexit, saying: 'The 2016 referendum is detrimental to the people we are elected to serve.' The government managed to reject in the Commons by 324 to 298 a Lords amendment on giving Parliament a 'meaningful vote' on a Brexit deal, after Theresa May, the Prime Minister, met rebels and promised that parts of an amendment by Dominic Grieve would be accepted. The white paper on Brexit will not now be published before the European Council summit later this month; warring cabinet ministers were invited to Chequers to discuss it. David Davis decided not to resign as Brexit Secretary after it was agreed that a backstop solution to the Irish border quandary (by retaining ties to the EU customs union) 'will only be in place until the future customs arrangement can be introduced', which the government 'expects' to be the end of December 2021. In any case, Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's representative on Brexit, said it was 'difficult to see how' the British proposals would 'deliver a workable solution'. The Queen, it was announced, had a cataract removed in May.

The number of people in work reached an unprecedented 32.4 million; unemployment fell to 1.42 million. Poundworld, with 355 shops, went into administration. House of Fraser is to close 31 of its 59 shops; conditional on

the restructuring plan is an agreement by the chain's Chinese owners Nanjing Cenbest to sell a 51 per cent stake to the Chinese owner of Hamley's, C.banner. An earthquake of magnitude 3.9, with its epicentre at Grimsby, struck Lincolnshire, with little effect.

Lady Wilson of Rievaulx, the widow of the Labour prime minister Harold Wilson, died aged 102. Teddy Johnson, half of a husband-and-wife duet with Pearl Carr, died aged 98. Danny Kirwan, the guitarist sacked from Fleetwood Mac in 1972, died aged 68. Peter Stringfellow, the nightclub owner, died aged 77. Nirav Modi, the Indian jeweller, was reported to be in London seeking political asylum.

Abroad

President Donald Trump of the United States shook hands for 12 seconds with Kim Jong-un, the ruler of North Korea, in front of flags of the two countries at Sentosa island in Singapore, before a 40-minute tête-à-tête and further talks with officials. Mr Trump told the press: 'I think he trusts me, and I trust him.' The two men signed a document in which Mr Kim 'reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula'. It made no mention of verification, though Mr Trump later said that it had been agreed; he also said that America would stop joint military manoeuvres with South Korea. For the time being, US sanctions against North Korea would continue. 'Well, he is very talented,' Mr Trump said of Mr Kim. 'I don't say he

was nice.' For lunch Mr Trump was given a choice of prawn cocktail and beef ribs or octopus with stuffed cucumber and cod with radish.

Earlier, after Mr Trump had seen on television Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, saying, 'Canadians will not be pushed around,' the US President repudiated a joint statement by the G7 (whose meeting in Canada he had just attended). Mr Trump called Mr Trudeau 'very dishonest and weak'. 'This was a difficult summit,' Theresa May reported back to Parliament. 'We expressed deep disappointment at the unjustified decision of the United States to apply tariffs to steel and aluminium imports.' Online media took much interest in the resemblance to some Baroque-era painting of a photograph by Jesco Denze, the German cabinet's official photographer, showing Mr Trump seated with arms crossed and Chancellor Angela Merkel leaning down confronting him, surrounded by other leaders.

A charity, SOS Méditerranée, in a ship that it operated with Médecins Sans Frontières, picked up 629 migrants from inflatables off Libya over the weekend, but was refused permission by the new coalition government in Italy to land them there; Spain accepted the migrants, who were to be taken to Valencia with the help of Italian ships. In Afghanistan, the Taliban, having killed over 60 members of the Afghan security forces in one day, declared a ceasefire for Eid al-Fitr. Tesla said it planned to cut its 37,000 workforce by 3,000. CSH

DIARY

Paul Dacre



Awake to the *Today* programme and ordure being dumped on me by Polly Toynbee while the *Mail's* legendary Dame Ann Leslie sings my praises. I recall how Toynbee penned a venomous piece about my predecessor, Sir David English, only days after he died at 67 (though, through a slip in the actualité, his *Who's Who* entry had him at 66). I never cease to be amused by the way the left demonise anyone they disagree with, but poor Polly's obsession with the *Mail* is almost psychotic. Roger Alton, the ex-editor of the *Observer*, wades in, writing to the *Guardian* that I am 'a very great man and a newspaperman of genius who has done as much to improve the quality of life in Britain as anybody I can think of'. It seems I'm a somewhat divisive character...

David's premature death was on my mind when I announced last week that, after 28 years — and six prime ministers — I will step aside from day-to-day editing to become chairman and editor-in-chief of Associated Newspapers by 14 November, when Prince Charles and I celebrate our 70th birthdays. At the Palace, I'm known, somewhat disparagingly, as The Twin. The *Mail*, which was unashamedly in Diana's camp, has over the years been a mite beastly to the prince, who's basically a good man. I thank my stars for a career that's been enthralling, privileged and profoundly fulfilling. My Twin, for his part, is yet to start his.

It's been a good week for the Dacre family. My sister-in-law, married to my fourth brother, editor of ITN when it was great, has been made a Dame for her presidency of the Royal College of Physicians. My wife Kathy, a professor who for a decade has campaigned to build the Shakespeare North Playhouse in Liverpool's Knowsley, one of Britain's most deprived areas, learns that key funding has just been secured. She grew up in a council house just down the road, and was a grammar-school girl. Today, it is hard to find a school in the area that teaches A-levels.

The *Today* programme again and this time Rachel Johnson, whose newspaper column gives banality a bad

name, is rejoicing that the future *Mail* will be less inflammatory and more inclusive ('and have the circulation of the *Guardian*', a proper columnist on another paper emails). If calling five racist London thugs 'Murderers' on the front page or carrying a picture of a swimming sea turtle swallowing a plastic supermarket bag is inflammatory, I plead guilty. As I do for using shock headlines that secured justice for the Omagh bomb victims, the release of Shaker Aamer from Guantanamo, and sanctuary

here for the army's Afghan interpreters — just a few of countless 'inclusive' *Mail* campaigns that have given voice to the voiceless. As for the other 'i' word, one of the main reasons Britain voted Brexit was the refusal by our ruling class, led by the BBC, to allow a mature debate on mass immigration which has nothing to do with race and everything to do with numbers. If the *Mail* promoted that debate and helped prevent the rise here of the kind of ugly right-wing political movements now festering across the EU, then I suffer my critics' obloquy with pride.

I secure a correction from the BBC, which has linked the *Mail* to phone hacking — something we never did despite the best efforts to prove otherwise by that pervert Max Mosley, with his racist past, and a cadre of loopy lords, priapic actors and small-town academics (is there anything more ludicrous in British academia than media studies?). This makes me think of the address I have been asked to give at Peter Preston's memorial service. He was a great editor in the days when the *Guardian* was a journalistically brilliant liberal, but not knee-jerk leftist, paper — before it was financially crippled by his successor who, like so many retiring leftie media nabobs, has punted off to be the figurehead of an Oxbridge college. Will Chris Patten now recommend me for the BBC? I jest, dear reader. But ask yourself, why do such positions never go to people from the right?

Receive many lovely letters from public figures, of which the warmest are from Gordon Brown and David Blunkett. David Davis complains that I have stolen the thunder from his threatened resignation. A top historian wails that my move is the equivalent of the ravens leaving the Tower. All tosh, of course, but what moves me most are the countless messages from readers worried about whether the *Mail* will continue its support for EU withdrawal. My answer to them — and others — is unequivocal. Support for Brexit is in the DNA of both the *Daily Mail* and, more pertinently, its readers. Any move to reverse this would be editorial and commercial suicide.

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The pressure on May is rising

Cans kicked down the road, last-minute concessions made, the process kept on track — just. This is how many people expected the Brexit negotiations between the United Kingdom and the European Union to go. But that is just a description of the situation at Westminster.

We still don't know whether the government has the votes in the Commons to take Britain out of the customs union. Theresa May avoided a rebellion on the issue this week by, essentially, promising the rebels they would have the chance to vote on this before the summer is out; the chief whip has guaranteed to them that the Trade Bill will return to the Commons before the summer recess. But, as May herself recently acknowledged to the Brexit inner cabinet, the EU won't engage seriously with any of the UK's customs proposals until it sees that the government can carry the Commons on this.

Optimists in government hope that something might turn up which will allow them to win on this issue. They think that the government having a position on what kind of customs arrangements it wants, which it finally should do by then, might sway a few MPs. They also suggest that if the June summit sees agreement on a UK-wide 'backstop', the government might just have enough momentum to get over the line on this.

As May said to the Brexit inner cabinet, they 'all knew that the EU's preference was for the UK to stay in the customs union'. One doesn't have to be a conspiracy theorist to wonder whether the EU will want to do anything at the June summit that would help the government win a customs union vote.

The other parliamentary event that will have been noted in Brussels this week is the shenanigans over the Lords 'meaningful vote' amendment. The government defeated it but only after offering concessions that further chip away at what the Article 50 bill established, that if no deal can be done between Britain and the EU then this country leaves without a deal and trades with the EU on World Trade Organisation terms.

Ever since Theresa May lost her majority, it has been doubtful that a 'no deal' Brexit could pass through parliament. But what has been less clear is by what mechanism MPs could stop it, short of bringing down the government — a step that nearly every Tory MP would be reluctant to take, given that Corbyn

is the leader of the opposition. However, the concessions that have allegedly been offered to Dominic Grieve and the supporters of his amendment begin to offer a route for the Commons to force the government to back away from 'no deal' without bringing it down.

This will interest Brussels, because it reduces the risks to them from the talks collapsing. If they end up squeezing Britain so hard that Mrs May feels she has to walk out, there is now a mechanism emerging for parliament to get the government back to the negotiating table.

All this means that the scenario which would result in no economic disruption for the EU and show other member states the futility of trying to leave — with Britain staying in the European Economic Area and a

We still don't know if the government has the votes in the Commons to take Britain out of the customs union

customs union — is closer than before. For Britain, this would be an awful deal. It would leave this country as, essentially, a non-voting member of the EU. It wouldn't be able to strike free trade deals, would have to obey EU regulations and would have to accept free movement continuing. It would also have a corrosive effect on our democracy, since it would be clear that the spirit of the referendum result had not been honoured.

This heaps more pressure on Mrs May to find a better deal than that. The next big step in the process will be the publication of the government's white paper which will set out, in detail, what the UK wants its relationship with the EU to be after Brexit, and how it

will work. This white paper will be the UK's offer on the future relationship.

David Davis wanted this white paper published before the EU council summit in June, but he lost that argument with No. 10. Instead, the whole cabinet is expected to meet at Chequers early next month to agree on the document's contents.

The last such meeting took place in February before May's Mansion House speech, and that only involved the Brexit inner cabinet. But what happened then is instructive. Brexiteers left that meeting believing that 'divergence has won the day'. But over the next few days, that victory appeared to be less clear-cut. As one influential Brexiteer laments, 'Winning one meeting doesn't mean you've won in Whitehall.'

The Chequers gathering could be a stormy affair. Both Boris Johnson and David Davis want a big, last-ditch effort to change the course of the negotiations. They both feel that the government mustn't agree to pay the divorce settlement to the EU, much of which is a goodwill gesture, without some enforceable commitments on trade. They also both feel that the UK is being salami-sliced in these negotiations, and that the government's approach needs to change. It is a sign of how badly Brexit is going that not all the cabinet are thrilled about the prospect of being invited to this session. 'Some of us were hoping to avoid being implicated in all this', says one cabinet minister, only half-joking.

The UK went into the Brexit talks with a decent hand. But through mistakes — triggering Article 50 before knowing what we wanted, the lack of preparation for walking away, and the loss of the Tory majority (which made the EU far less worried about what the UK would do in the event of no deal) and a contradictory approach to the Irish border, that position has been squandered. The question now is what can be rescued from the situation in the short term.

In the long-term, the consolation for Brexiteers is that any deal that doesn't result in the UK taking back a substantial amount of control will be politically unsustainable and will lead to pressure for a future government to renegotiate. Hopefully that government will have learnt from this government's mistake, and will make sure that the country is as prepared as possible to walk away before entering the talks.



'Dad's a lot easier to buy for now that he's a woman.'

THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

'Trudeau or Trump?' was a choice which Theresa May, with unusually ready wit, evaded in Parliament on Monday. No doubt I am in a minority, but I feel that, of the two, Mr Trudeau — the G7 host at La Malbaie — is the more absurd figure on the world stage, being just as vain as the President and far more pointless (if you doubt me, compare the two men's tweets). In the same parliamentary statement, Sir Vince Cable asked 'What is the point of the G7?' It is part of President Trump's subversive skill that his actions prompt people to ask such questions. There is no need for such annual meetings, and the whole concept of the G7 is out of date anyway — with the European Union heavily over-represented — because of the shift of economic power in the world. The original idea of a 'summit' was that it was called for a specific reason, so that the relevant heads of government could sort out a major problem. Now it has degenerated to the globalists' equivalent of the 'Season', with the G7, climate conferences, etc playing the roles of Henley and Ascot. The bland communiqués which gloss over reality do more harm than good. The 'initiatives', in which participating nations compete to invent programmes, take our money and bypass our democratic power. By contrast, what has just happened in Singapore was undoubtedly a summit, and undoubtedly matters. Trump or Kim Jong-un? Weird if the answer turns out to be 'Both'.

'He looked as if he was wearing a pink frock,' said Kate Guthrie when I rang her to ask after her husband. She was referring to the hue of the bruises on Field Marshal Lord Guthrie, who slid from his horse at the Trooping the Colour on Saturday, probably after fainting. The bruises were the effect of his cuirass on impact. I rode with Charles Guthrie from Knightsbridge Barracks a few years ago, and he told me then that it is no joke carrying all the metal that his uniform as Colonel of the Life Guards demands. Last year, after he had fallen seriously ill in Thailand, the Queen forbade him from taking part in the parade. This year, he said he was well



enough and she asked the Knightsbridge riding-master to get him fit. Prince Philip did not stop riding on formal occasions until he was 81, and the Queen herself still rides her Fell ponies every week, aged 92; so possibly Guthrie, who is a mere 79, felt he must keep up with the Windsors. He is, as Kate, who tried to stop him, says, 'a stubborn old bugger'. In the parade itself, a groom noticed he did not look well, but Guthrie insisted on continuing. When he slipped off, his dear horse stood perfectly still and made no trouble. No one said, 'Is there a doctor on a horse?', but there was — the doctor of the Household Cavalry — who prompted dismounted, inspected Guthrie, skilfully removed his jackboots (it is a well-known hazard of going to A&E in riding boots that they cut you out of them, which is fatal to the welfare of the boots, rather than pulling them off) and accompanied him in the ambulance to St Mary's, Paddington. The good news, as I write, is that Lord Guthrie probably has nothing worse than a broken collarbone. He is sitting up and giving orders.

Recently Jon Thompson, the head of HMRC, claimed that Brexit customs changes would cost £20 billion. After Briefings for Brexit produced a study questioning this amazing figure, HMRC admitted double-counting £6.5 billion. The *FT*, which had made so much of the original horror story, did not report the correction. What are we to think of our next tax bill?

From the terrace of our house, we get a good view of the fields across the stream. At present, the gates of three fields are open and, for some days now, about 30 cows have been moving restlessly back and forth through them. The cause is a bull, who has been put in among them,

presumably with sexual intent. He chases and chivvies the cows. Sometimes they run towards him together, sometimes away. We have christened him Harvey Holstein. For the avoidance of doubt, I should add that Mr Holstein denies all charges.

Thinking of bulls, I really will miss Paul Dacre when he steps down as editor of the *Daily Mail*. There have been times, I must admit, when I have attacked the *Mail's* grotesque behaviour and stupefying hypocrisy, but the following are good and true points to be made about Paul. 1) He fully, properly edits, and his proprietor has the sense to let him do so. 2) He values good writers, and pays them accordingly. 3) He is brave, especially in not minding the disapproval of polite society; and this courage has enabled him to crash around in the china shop of political correctness at a satisfying decibel level. For us in Sussex, there may be a compensation for Paul's departure. One of the large estates he has acquired by standing up for the ordinary people of Middle England over so many years lies close by. Now that he has time on his hands, I hope we shall see more of him.

The death of Mary Wilson last week brought back happy memories of her poems, the first collection of which sold 75,000 copies in hardback. As teenagers in the 1970s, we used to declaim them with, I am afraid, satirical intent. Unfortunately, I cannot find the family copy of *Selected Poems*, but I suspect they deserve more serious study as the work of a thoughtful, religious and rather lonely woman. The titles tell one something of this — 'You have turned your back on Eden', 'If I can write before I die', 'The Virgin's Song'. The only lines I can call to mind are a final couplet, 'And all night long, like heralds of the dawn./ The Chinese geese are honking in the park'. These words used to make us cry with laughter, but now they seem poignant — an image of the Prime Minister's wife lying awake in Downing Street, her quiet but proudly provincial spirit trapped in the wasteland of Westminster politics.

Next up, Nato

Trump's trade war could turn into a full-blown security crisis

FRASER NELSON

For Theresa May, the most worrying part of Donald Trump's talks with Kim Jong-un came two days before the two men met. The US President had arrived in Singapore early after escaping the G7 summit in Canada, still sore at being upbraided by his European and Canadian counterparts about tariffs. With time on his hands, he took to Twitter to hit back by switching the conversation to defence and one of his favourite bugbears: Nato.

'Germany pays 1 per cent (slowly) of GDP towards Nato, while we pay 4 per cent of a MUCH larger GDP,' he announced. 'The US pays close to the entire cost of Nato-protecting many of these same countries that rip us off on Trade (they pay only a fraction of the cost-and laugh!)'. This situation, he said, would soon end. 'Change is coming!'

This was, for once, an understatement. The future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation looks shakier now than perhaps at any time since its inception in 1949. Six of the G7 are in Nato, and the US spends more on defence than its 28 other members together. But the alliance only works when its members can present a united front: hard to do when the US President routinely describes Nato as a scam and openly muses about leaving its members to fend for themselves. Without faith in Nato, there is no Nato.

This is precisely why there is such concern in London. Before the G7 summit, Theresa May briefed her ministerial colleagues about the seriousness of the situation — and how the row over tariffs might turn into a full-blown security crisis. The G7 is supposed to be a forum through which Britain, America and Europe deal with China, she said, but this no longer worked because Trump thinks he can handle China all by himself.

Before Trump was elected he had described Nato as 'obsolete', but Mrs May told her ministers he only backtracked on this because of pressure from the British government during their meeting in Washington in January last year. The big concern

now is the Nato summit in Brussels next month, and that what began with Trump slapping tariffs on European and Canadian steel could turn into a trade war, which the President might then escalate by threatening to walk away from his allies. For Trump, defence and trade are very much linked: his tariffs were introduced on grounds of national security and the need to rely less on imports from supposed allies.

Ivo Daalder, a former US ambassador to Nato, has been frank about what Trump's



conflation of trade and defence means for Nato. 'The lifeblood of the alliance is trust,' he said recently. 'So a trade dispute based on national security — that's what hurts.'

But it also hurts because there is so much truth in Trump's criticism. Each of the 29 Nato members agrees to spend 2 per cent of its economic output on defence, but only four do: Greece, Estonia, the UK and the US. Germany, the richest country in Europe, spends just 1.2 per cent of its GDP on defence. Angela Merkel's offer to raise this to 1.5 per cent is still seen by Trump (and her own defence officials) as insultingly low. Together, European governments are saving about £140 billion by skimping on defence. They do so in the knowledge that the hole will be filled by Uncle Sam.

It's not just Trump who objects to this. Successive American presidents have been losing patience. Even Barack Obama would complain about 'the Europeans and the Arab states holding our coats while we did all the fighting'. Britain only agreed to observe the 2 per cent defence spending minimum because Obama had told David Cameron that, without the money, he could forget about a 'special relationship'. And keeping UK defence spending at this bare minimum has left the British army with fewer soldiers than at any time since the Napoleonic wars. Still, Britain at least has a functioning military. It's not clear that the same can be said of other Nato allies.

Take Germany, the target of so much of Trump's recent ire. While defence is a low priority among a largely pacifist German public, mindful of their country's history, a report for the German parliament earlier this year revealed the extent of the decay of its army, navy and air force. At the end of last year, the Bundeswehr had 128 Eurofighters, of which 39 could fly. It had six submarines, none of which were working when the report was compiled. Of its 13 ageing frigates, only five could sail. Of its 93 Tornado jets, 26 were ready for action. German air force trainees struggled to qualify because so few aircraft were ready for use.

Its staffing is also in crisis. Hans-Peter Bartels, armed forces commissioner to the German parliament, reported recently that 21,000 officer posts are vacant. 'We spent 25 years cutting the defence budget,' he said. 'We thought everything could be solved through negotiations, agreements, co-operation and partnerships.'

Wolfgang Ischinger, a former German envoy to Washington, said it was 'undignified' that the most that Germany could contribute to the US-led fight against Islamic State was reconnaissance flights. 'We take photos, but we leave the dirty business of shooting to others,' he said. 'We should not

develop the reputation of being one of the world's greatest freeloaders.'

The reputation of the Germany military has not quite recovered from such fiascos as when, four years ago, soldiers in the Panzergrenadierbataillon went on an exercise with painted broomsticks instead of guns because of a shortage of weapons. They were part of Nato's 'Very High Readiness Joint Task Force'.

Trump's language about Nato may be vulgar and intemperate, but US officials have been running out of ways to express their frustration. Robert Gates, appointed defence secretary by George W. Bush, warned that Nato would be consigned to 'military irrelevance' unless European member states stumped up. Obama seethed about 'free riders'. When James Mattis was appointed as Trump's Defence Secretary, he lost no time in warning European leaders that 'Americans cannot care more for your children's security than you do.'

So Trump's tweets are just more succinct expressions of a message that America has been trying to send to Nato for years: patience in Washington has worn thin and it's time to pay up. If you don't, then you'll end up fending off Russians with your

Each Nato member agrees to spend 2 per cent of its economic output on defence, but only four of them do

broomsticks, pretend bombs and broken helicopters.

America's focus was already shifting away from Europe and towards China. Trump tends to see foreign affairs mainly in terms with his relationship with Xi Jinping, and he is quite open about the low value he places on the alliances he inherited. 'I believe in relationships,' he said a few months after taking office. 'And I believe in partnerships. But alliances have not always worked out very well for us.'

His theatrical style of leadership, on full display in Singapore, is anathema to Europeans — it also underlines the essential difference in worldviews now driving Nato apart. His decision to pull out of the Iran deal was made in defiance of the pleas and protests of his allies, including the UK. Trump believes in nation states, strong leaders and chemistry between leaders. He loathes the idea of committees and consensus. Especially when, as he believes, it leads to America being stiffed.

Officially, Britain says it isn't worried about Nato — given America's longstanding commitment. Privately, ministers are in a panic and running out of options. Gavin Williamson, the new Defence Secretary, has warned ministers that Trump's annoyance with Germany may soon spread to other countries and that Britain might not be exempt from the President's ire. As *The Spectator* revealed last month, May is plan-

Another Deposition

We scattered Father's ashes in Glencoul
where he was born. We poured out some of it
on the little part-time islands opposite,
some on the river where he learned to swim,
along the shore. I often think of him
and the lost brothers. If I had my way
I'd open the window on a windy day
and let my fragments free where I was born.
But it depends on those who live there: *Turn
the dryer* from your own still dripping hair
one sunny morning, blow in the plastic urn
till all my powder's gone into the air
and floating through the gulls and ferry boats
seasons the roofs and roads of Liverpool.

— Alistair Elliot

ning a massive cash boost for the NHS to mark its 70th birthday next month. That implies less money for defence and a military kept on the bare minimum, with declining capabilities, when threats are increasing both on land and in cyberspace. Williamson was frank with Mrs May: if she wants to protect the special relationship, extra defence spending is the only language that Trump understands.

Philip Hammond, the Chancellor, dislikes expensive solutions to any problems and is proposing that Britain instead applies pressure on Germany. His latest idea is for Britain to suggest that Germany assuages Trump on the trade front: by making more BMWs in South Carolina. Trump, he believes, needs to be offered an industry-related 'deal' in return for at least pretending to believe in the G7, Nato, and the other institutions through which Britain and Europe try to wield power and influence.

But after Singapore, the President will be harder than ever to bring to heel. Whether the summit with Kim will be remembered as a breakthrough or a stunt, he believes that his style of diplomacy has been vindicated and that it's time to see what else he can do. If he wants to scare European nations into spending more on defence by threatening to

leave them to Putin's mercy, then he'll probably try that too — to see how they respond.

When Trump last visited the Nato headquarters in Brussels, to unveil a monument to the 9/11 victims, he took the opportunity to tear into countries who don't 'meet their financial obligation' to Nato in a way that is 'not fair to the people or taxpayers of the United States'. His speech did not include an explicit endorsement of Article 5 of the Nato treaty, a declaration that an attack on one member state is an attack on them all. This was supposed to have been the point of his speech. The White House said afterwards that it should go without saying, but diplomats were left with the impression that the omission was deliberate.

The threat is not that America will choose isolation, as it did in the 1930s, or that Russia will send tanks into Europe. If Vladimir Putin did chance his luck in Estonia, or send submarines on cable-cutting sabotage operations on the Atlantic seabed, no one doubts that the US would lead the response: it still has a military designed to fight wars on two fronts at any one time. But the risk is that Nato will lose its remaining capacity to deter as a united group, making lower-level Russian adventurism more likely. When Putin spots weakness and division, he likes to prod, test and watch the reaction — as Ukraine has found out.

Europe has for years bet that this is a risk that America would not run: that it might complain about Nato, but would not do anything to undermine it. But Donald Trump's election has changed a great many things. And now, the unmovable force of Europe's refusal to invest properly in defence is meeting the unstoppable force of Donald Trump on a mission. The next few months will show us whether Nato survives the collision.



The rise of the pop-up brothel

Part-time landlords should beware...

JAMES INNES-SMITH

I had been in Los Angeles for less than a month when I received the call from a concerned neighbour back home in London. 'Why are there men queuing up outside your flat at 3 a.m.?' It was a good question. 'And are you aware that a locksmith came over the other day to change your locks?' I had no idea. 'Oh and by the way, your tenant has put some kind of security camera outside your front door.' Concern turned to panic. 'And there's been rather a lot of ... erm, activity, you know ... to-ing and fro-ing. That tenant of yours certainly has an appetite for the ladies.' My neighbour must have been mistaken. I had rented my apartment to Alan and Ada, a respectable young Chinese couple. They agreed to rent my place for three months, which coincided perfectly with my trip to the US.

It soon became clear that Alan and Ada weren't quite the charming married couple they had made themselves out to be. When I returned, Alan greeted me at the door but refused to let me in. Over his shoulder, I spotted Ada berating a pair of scantily clad Asian girls. A couple of ropey-looking men sat patiently in my hallway, which appeared to be doubling as a waiting room.

Like a growing number of part-time landlords, I had been well and truly screwed over by a worrying new part of the underworld. 'Pop-up' brothels are a growing menace and not just around tatty inner London. The problem is spreading from urban areas to some of Britain's most unlikely rural enclaves. The bishop of Derby, the Rt Revd Alastair Redfern, has been speaking out against the exploitation of vulnerable young women, mostly from eastern Europe, who are being sex-trafficked to remote parts of the Peak District, where holiday homes are plentiful and cheap. Something similar is happening in parts of Cornwall and the Lake District.

The trafficking of young girls into the UK has become so widespread that on 21 May, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade published the results of an inquiry into Organised Sexual Exploitation in England and Wales. Speakers included Gavin Shaker MP, Jess Phillips MP and the leader of the Women's Equality Party. The 'Behind Closed Doors' report details the growing harm and sheer

scale of the problem. There are currently at least 212 active UK police operations into modern slavery involving sexual exploitation. And the steady influx isn't just from eastern Europe. Girls are being trafficked from as far away as China, Vietnam and Nigeria. The report claims the government is determined to end modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030, but with the growing popularity of short-term rental sites such as Airbnb they will have their work cut out. Pop-up brothel managers such as Alan and Ada evade capture by moving on before anyone realises what they're up to.

In an attempt to cut demand, the group has called for the UK to follow other European countries by criminalising people who pay for sex. Half of those who buy sex said

Charming 'Alan' threatened to kneecap me if I reported his scantily clad Asian girls

they would definitely, probably or possibly change their behaviour if it became a criminal offence. Meanwhile, gangsters continue to run amok, filling cheap rental homes with vulnerable girls they have lured over to the UK with the promise of a better life.

The problem becomes particularly acute during major sporting events, when there is often a spike in the number of illicit sex dens set up to cater for inebriated fans. During the 2006 World Cup in Germany, many cities saw a surge in business at so-called 'mega-brothels'. And throughout the 2012 Olympics, boroughs close to the action such as Newham and Tower Hamlets saw an increase in temporary knocking-shops.

Criminal gangs are often behind these elusive set-ups, so there is often an undercurrent of violence. I experienced this firsthand when confronting Alan. He threatened to kneecap me if I dared report him. I later discovered he belonged to an ultra-violent Triad gang working out of Soho. Shortly after our run-in, Alan and Ada and their coterie of girls vanished, leaving behind a trail of carnage. When I finally gained access to my flat, a pair of eastern European crack dealers accosted me at the front door. They behaved as though I were the intruder, insisting that Alan, the real owner, had sub-let them my spare bedroom.

The flat itself had been pimped out beyond all recognition. Flimsy partition walls divided the sitting room into three separate units, allowing more than one girl to 'work' there at a time. Grubby handprints covered the wall above my bed and there were used condoms everywhere. There was an unspeakable stain on my expensive mattress that resembled a yellowing map of communist China. The wardrobes overflowed with dodgy sexual apparatus and there were boxes of calling cards everywhere, filled with garish photos of 'busty Asian babes'. My home had become a hotbed of vice and squalor. More worrying still, I had been the unwitting recipient of immoral earnings.

Pest controllers took two days to gut and fumigate my desecrated living space. For weeks afterwards, though, my flat remained a target for lonely wastrels and frustrated businessmen. Night after night they came, hanging around outside my apartment block, ringing the doorbell into the early hours, desperate to know if Crystal or Candy were available.

Six months later, I was on my roof terrace enjoying the sunshine when a young girl in the building opposite poked her head out of the window and started chatting to me. She looked about 17 and had a distinctive Russian twang. 'Would you like to come over?' she asked coyly. 'I have vodka.' I assumed she must have been lonely and declined her offer. A few minutes later, I heard her calling up at me from the street below. 'Psst, mister, please come. I really need to speak to someone.' She seemed genuinely upset so I hurried down to see if there was anything I could do to help. From my window, she had looked healthy and attractive. Up close her skin was pitted and bruised, her haggard face plastered with poorly applied makeup. She had rotten teeth, thinning hair. Her eyes were hollow and blank. 'Please, you need to help me. I am being treated badly by my boss. I think he wants to kill me.'

I called the police, suspecting that a new pop-up brothel had arrived on my street. The weary officer explained that unless they caught punters in flagrante it was impossible to make an arrest. I insisted they at least visit the property to check on the girl. They did, but by the time they arrived, she and her violent pimp had already vanished.



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BAROMETER

Mortal combat

Health secretary Jeremy Hunt promised more protection for medical staff accused of criminal malpractice after a doctor was struck off over a boy's death from sepsis. How many people die as a result of inadequate healthcare?

— In 2016, the ONS listed **141,101** out of 597,206 UK deaths as 'avoidable mortality', which was **24 per cent** of the total.

— The leading causes were **neoplasms** (cancer and non-cancerous growths), **cardiovascular** disease, **injuries**, **respiratory** diseases and **drug** use.

— Among children, **1,674** out of 4,995 deaths were judged avoidable.

— The highest rate was in Merthyr Tydfil (**384.4** per 100,000 population) and the lowest in Monmouthshire (**232.4**).

Nation stats

Who has the best all-time match-winning record at the football World Cup?

	WON	DRAWN	LOST
Brazil	70	17	17
Germany	66	20	20
Italy	45	21	17
Argentina	42	14	21
Spain	29	12	18
England	26	20	16
France	28	12	19
Netherlands	27	12	11

Which team has most reason to fear the new VAR (Video Assistant Referee)?

	YELLOW CARDS	RED CARDS
Argentina	111	8
Germany	110	5
Brazil	97	10
Italy	90	7
Netherlands	90	3

And which World Cup was best-attended?

1994	USA	68,991
2014	Brazil	52,918
2006	Germany	52,491
1970	Mexico	50,124
1974	West Germany	49,098

Feast daze

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are to visit Fiji and Tonga as part of their first foreign trip as a married couple. The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh made the same trip in 1953, six months after the Queen's coronation. Tonga will have some challenge in keeping up to the standards set on that occasion, when a feast for the couple was laid out on four tables, each 100 yards long and laden with yams, lobsters and 2,000 suckling pigs. They could, however, improve on the range of drinks — in 1953 the only one on offer was coconut milk.

All hail Æthelflæd!

The Anglo-Saxon queen who sent the Danes packing

HARRY MOUNT

This week, Prince Edward was paying tribute to a much-loved Queen. Not 'Mummy' — but Queen Æthelflæd, Alfred the Great's eldest child, the Lady of the Mercians and one of our greatest, if largely forgotten, Anglo-Saxon leaders. If it wasn't for Æthelflæd kicking the Danes out of Mercia during her reign from 911-918, we'd all be speaking Danish. You could call her the first Brexiteer.

Æthelflæd died in 918, 1,100 years ago this week, in Tamworth, Staffordshire, heart of her Mercian kingdom (roughly equivalent to Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire). In the West Midlands some people call her the Founding Mother of England. A huge statue of 'Our Aethel' sporting a Usain Bolt pose, with her spear aloft, dominates the Offa Drive/Saxon Drive roundabout outside Tamworth Railway Station. Tamworth Brewery has brewed a commemorative, dark, velvety stout, also called 'Our Aethel'.

And on Tuesday Prince Edward was in Tamworth at St Editha's Church — Editha was Æthelflæd's niece — at a National Service of Commemoration, unveiling a stained-glass window of Æthelflæd, his kinsman. Five bishops, two archdeacons and a host of eminent historians were also there to record Æthelflæd's achievements. Professor Dame Jinty Nelson said her 'real achievement was peace' in England. A young beautiful young redhead playing the part of Æthelflæd was backed up by a retinue of hefty, heavily bearded Anglo-Saxon warriors in chain-mail, brandishing spears and shields. Prince Edward smiled at them as they passed him under St Editha's Anglo-Saxon tower. But his protection officer looked a bit green in the gills when he saw one helmeted Anglo-Saxon brush by the prince, swinging a huge, primitive axe.

Born in around 870, Aethelflad was a Wessex girl who did much to unite two huge English kingdoms by marrying Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians. But she did much more than that. Like her father, Alfred, she was a keen Latin scholar at a time when the Danes had smashed up libraries across the country. As Alfred said: 'There were so few [Latin scholars] that I cannot even recollect a single one south of the Thames when I succeeded to the kingdom.'

She certainly would have understood the nickname bestowed on her in the medieval

Annals of Ulster: '*Famosissima regina Saxonum*' — 'Most Famous Queen of the Saxons'. Through the mists of time, it is possible to work out that she really was a remarkable figure, taking up her father's mantle in bashing the Danes, who had dominated the England of her childhood. When Æthelred died in 911, Æthelflæd ruled Mercia alone — an astonishing example of early female power, and a tribute to the enlightened values of the Midlands then. Alfred's Wessex had never been so keen on equal rights.

She commissioned enlarged defences for Warwick, Stafford, Runcorn, Bridgnorth and Tamworth. In 917, she captured Derby from the Danes. A year later, she took Leicester without a fight. The Vikings of York offered her their loyalty only days before her death.

When she died, her soul would have been prayed for at St Editha's in Tamworth, before her body was taken to be buried in Gloucester, next to her husband at the shrine of St Oswald.

Gloucester held its own commemoration this week, too, with 10,000 people watching a local actress, Samantha Swinford, playing a dead Æthelflæd, carried on a bier from Gloucester Docks to an Anglo-Saxon encampment at St Oswald's Priory.

Not long after Æthelflæd's death, the medieval chroniclers of England were queuing up to sing her praises. In the 12th century, Henry of Huntingdon wrote her a poem:

Heroic Elflede! Great in martial fame,
A man in valour, woman though in name.

She was so devoted to royal standards that she even gave up sex after bearing her only child, Ælfwynn. In the 1120s, William of Malmesbury wrote: 'After having difficulties with the birth, she abhorred her husband's embraces ever after, declaring that it was beneath the dignity of a king's daughter to involve herself in pleasures which would be followed in time by such ill-effects.'

It wasn't the first time that a woman stopped finding her husband attractive after having children — and it certainly wouldn't be the last.

But Æthelflæd was the first Anglo-Saxon queen to send the Danes packing. And for that we should all give thanks to Myrcna hlædige — the Lady of the Mercians.

Harry Mount is author of How England Made the English (Penguin).

The stupidity of good intentions



I have been scouring the internet trying to find a right-wing festival to take the family to this summer. I don't necessarily mean a kind of Nuremberg affair; just some sort of gathering where we won't be hectored about the refugees and the NHS by simpering millennials with falafel between their ears. A place where you can be sure that the next act on won't be bloody Corbyn, backed by a mass of lobotomised sheep chanting his name to that dirge by the White Stripes.

Mind you, I wish I'd been at the Eden Sessions, a hugely right-on shindig held at the UK's most stridently eco-friendly venue, the Eden Project in Cornwall. It's all about sustainable living and not damaging the environment — if only someone had told the headline act, the dunderheaded Gary Barlow. The climax to his performance featured a cannon shooting hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of tiny pieces of non-biodegradable plastic confetti over the crowd. As an act of conspicuous eco-sabotage it would have been bettered only if he had dragged a live whale on stage and tried to see how many Sainsbury's carrier bags he could ram down its throat.

Festivals are about as environmentally hostile as it is possible to get — just look at Glastonbury once the middle-aged revelers have departed. A million gypsies, celebrating the annual advent of their income tax returns with bare-knuckle fist fights, inter-familial sexual intercourse and copious quantities of cheap alcohol, would keep the place sprucer. Festivals tend to be leftist because, one supposes, they are a kind of expression of mindless communitarianism, from Woodstock ever onwards (but conveniently forgetting Altamont, which seemed to me a truer expression of the human disposition). Festivals mean well, but the front driveway to Hell is tarmacadamed, probably by gypsies, with good intentions.

The chimera of good intentions infects much of the liberal left. Or at least it is partly good intentions, allied to an insuperable desire to show oneself as being morally superior to scumbags like me. But also a certain rank stupidity, a failure to appreciate what the outcomes are likely to be for each course of action they urge us to take. The most obvious example comes with those African

refugees bobbing about somewhere in the Mediterranean, en route to Spain, having been denied entry to Italy by its new populist government and also to one of Europe's most densely populated countries, Malta.

You will remember the shrieking from the left a few years back when the first wave of migrants set sail from the North African coast. 'These are *people*, we must *do* something,' the liberals demanded, insisting that the rest of us were callous bastards. The thing they wanted was more patrols in the Med, to scoop the refugees out of the water once their boats had, inevitably, capsized.

It seemed plain to me and to many others that if we did this, many more people would be encouraged to come, and many, many

The NGOs should fish the survivors out of the sea and take them straight back to where they came from

more would die attempting to achieve landfall. And that is exactly what happened: the death rate increased almost exponentially — in the first six months of 2017 some 2,000 migrants died. But those of us who predicted this were castigated by the 'But these are *people*' brigade — in fact this was their only response to suggestions that stepping up the patrols would cost more lives. I remember the columnist David Aaronovitch saying that if we did not 'do something' to help these people then the government would be directly accountable for the deaths which occurred.

Given that many more people have died because we did indeed do something, are those subsequent deaths not on Mr Aaro-

novitch's hands? And on the hands of the rest of the dense, squawking liberals? Even more so, are they not the responsibility of the various NGOs and charities which now openly connive in the trafficking of these people, thus encouraging still more to come? If the NGOs really wished to do something useful, they would fish the survivors out of the sea and take them straight back to where they came from.

Another outcome the lefties did not see was the effect these mass migrations would have on the nations of Europe. One by one, populist governments deeply opposed to immigration have been elected and the European Union is now a much more fissiparous and fragile entity. They have been elected because another of the outcomes was that large numbers of these migrants have not necessarily enhanced the societies in which they have settled. There is increased crime, particularly crime of a sexual nature, numerous jihadis running around stabbing people or blowing stuff up, a rise in anti-Semitism — as well as the wholly predictable pressure on infrastructure, jobs and so on.

These are just some of the reasons why Italy's new populist government — which I think is going to provide us all with a lot of entertainment over the next few years — refused to let in the latest batch. In a fit of grandstanding masquerading as compassion, Spain, with its 16 per cent unemployment and vast debt, has agreed to take them. So, you migrants: head for Spain, en masse, and see how long that magnanimity lasts.

The migrant policy has now been disowned even by the people who first propounded it — the Germans, and in particular Frau Merkel. There is a good case for saying that the correct destination for those supposed refugees was across the Black Sea and up the Danube, where they could be deposited in Regensburg or maybe Ulm: you wanted them, you have them. Except that resistance to inward migration is every bit as furious in Bavaria as it is in Austria, Czechia, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. You can't beat good intentions for causing misery, deaths and political upheaval.



'This is the new runway for drunk BA pilots.'

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/RODLIDDLE

The argument continues online.

The secret segregation of state schools



Is it all right for the Muslim parents of children at British state schools to prevent their sons and daughters from being friends with non-Muslim kids? And is it sensible? These questions have been knocking around my head like a pair of trapped moths, unable to find a way out.

Quite by coincidence and on separate occasions, in the past month I've met two (non-Muslim) women whose children have had trouble at Muslim-dominated state schools. The kids made friends easily in their first term, said the mothers, but as the months went by it became harder to stay pals. Their schoolmates never invited them home, nor would they come round for playdates or parties. The friendships faded away and the kids were left confused. One of the two mothers I met had decided to move house: new catchment area, new start. She felt guilty, she told me, because she'd been keen her son have friends of all faiths. But he was one of only two non-Muslim boys in his class, and he was lonely.

A dip into the toxic pools of mothers online shows this to be a more common problem than you might imagine. Even though I'm sure most Muslim families are indiscriminating, it still comes up as a frequent topic in chatrooms. A tentative mum will ask a question on Mumsnet, say, or Netmums: what should I do if my child can't make friends with the Muslim kids at school? Inevitably she'll get a savaging: 'Why are you even mentioning this? Islamophobe.' (This is the tone of voice in which internet mothers discuss every subject, from breastfeeding to sippy-cups.)

It's not Islamophobic to raise the question. I think it might be important. Despite the endless run of features on parenting, children and schools, I haven't once seen it mentioned in print, which strikes me as unwise. Buried issues fester. And it's a slippery little problem. There's no obvious answer. Yes, mothers of all sorts select their child's peers: there are Jewish schools, Christian schools, private schools — but to discriminate within

the classroom seems different. The child notices. The women I spoke to had struggled to explain the situation to their offspring: 'It's not you darling; it's just the religion.' Is that right? Nor is there parity. Imagine if Christian parents refused to invite the Muslim children home from school; imagine if they banned playdates or sleepovers for any non-Christian kids. Perhaps it happens — parents are terrible, anxious snobs — but it would plainly be wrong.

What's interesting to me is how different the situation seems from different perspectives. If you're the parent of a child who can't make friends the issue seems clear

Imagine if Christian parents refused to invite Muslim children home for playdates and sleepovers

and unfair. Any sort of segregation within a school is unsustainable. But then look at it from the other mothers' perspective. (This is when the moths begin to flap.) Imagine yourself to be a devout Muslim mother living in Britain. Imagine looking around at the sex, drugs; the boozing and gangs. It might well be that your child's best hope in this world (and the next) is to keep their faith, and the best way of ensuring that is to never let them go; to control who a child plays with and talks to after school.

If a Muslim mother were to turn to her own internet forums and the elders of her own community, she might very well find definite advice on this subject. Sound Vision Foundation is a popular website specifically designed to help Muslims living in the secular West. It seems to be the very opposite of an extremist outfit, offering practical tips for liberal Muslim parents in Britain and the USA. It has a motto in rainbow colours: 'Helping tomorrow's Muslims today.' But Sound Vision is quite clear about the importance of restricting your child's friendships with non-Muslims. Most of the 22 tips for parents on 'keeping Muslim teens Muslim' involve limiting their access to secular influ-

ences: make family life fun; keep them at home; make sure they interact with Muslim kids; get them married early. It says: 'The societies of the West are permeated by sex: on TV, billboards, on the streets, buses, in movies etc. Getting them married early will ease the pressure and they don't have to stop their studies to do this.'

It's hard to ensure the survival of a religious community in a secular country. It's entirely fair to want to. Look at the news. Step outside. Last weekend, as my toddler and I played in the park, there were teenage boys on bikes with face-masks on, looping about like jackals waiting, quite openly, for the opportunity to grab some poor sod's phone. The next day, one of them tried to take my husband's laptop from a café table. These are school-age boys. They'll be in class on Monday. Who could blame a Muslim mother for wanting to keep her children in the fold?

But in the end, perhaps it's not the non-Muslim kids but their Muslim peers who will suffer most if kept too close to home. If you don't let them make friends, if you bring them up too separately from the culture around them, they won't know where to belong.

I read a fascinating book recently, by the Norwegian journalist Asne Seierstad, about two sisters who ran away from Oslo to Syria in 2015. To her great credit, the girls' mother, Sara, was very frank with Seierstad. She's a decent woman and a caring mother, keen to prevent other people's daughters from suffering the same fate. It's because she was a good mother that, as a Somali-born Muslim, she tried to keep her children from integrating too fully into Norwegian society. Her children attended secular state schools in Oslo but Sara kept them close. No non-Muslim friends. No multicultural playdates.

In the end it was a mistake, Sara told Seierstad. Segregation presented her children with a false choice: reject the West or reject Islam, when in fact they could easily have had both.

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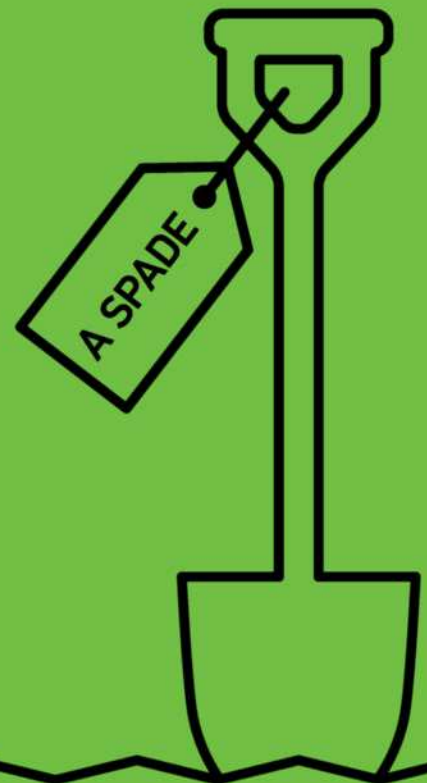
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What happened to communism?

Marxism didn't die. It is alive and well and living among us

PETER HITCHENS

I remember the autumn day in 1990 when they came to cart away the large hammer and sickle outside my Moscow block of flats. It was about the size of a cow and made out of a gritty grey metal alloy which had, like almost everything in the USSR, never looked new or clean. Once, these objects had been all over the city. Now they were vanishing. Nobody else seemed especially interested in its departure, probably because there were — more excitingly — eggs on sale down the street. A few weeks later, I would watch the Soviet Army's last Revolution Day parade trundle through Red Square. A few months after that I would see the litter bins of Moscow fill with burning Communist party membership cards, and the tearing down of many of the great idols of Marxism-Leninism from their plinths.

It was a time full of images, which produced many lovely symbolic photographs and films of the end of an entire historical period. But we were beguiled by these pictures into thinking something that was not true. Russian communism, as we thought we knew it, had already died long before then. The Soviet Union was, in John le Carré's perfect metaphor in *The Russia House*, a knight dying inside its armour for many years before it finally toppled from its saddle. But Russian communism was not communism as a whole. That lived on, dissolving itself into a great pink political blancmange of Europhilia, political correctness, multiculturalism and the sexual revolution.

As a 1960s Bolshevik, I am better placed than most people to know about this. I have other advantages too. After I defected, I had two very interesting first-hand experiences of communism. The first was when I was a Fleet Street industrial correspondent in the Callaghan and early Thatcher years.

The second was when I reported on the progressive collapse of the Soviet empire, from Gdansk to Tbilisi. On one extraordinary occasion the two intersected, when I went to Gdansk in 1980 to visit Lech Walesa, the lonely courageous leader of Polish Solidarity, using the strike weapon against his country's communist leadership. I was there because the British trade union movement, long penetrated by communists, had been

deeply, shiftily reluctant to support him, and he was very angry.

British official communism did not then seem important at first sight. Yet it was quite generously subsidised by the Kremlin, with carrier bags stuffed with tenners left for collection by KGB men on Barons Court tube station, and stored in the roof of a bungalow in Golders Green (I am not making this up). It was also a microcosm of the new morality, a fact beautifully described by David Aaronovitch in his memoir of communist life, *Party Animals*. One ancient comrade told the young Aaronovitch that his years in the party had been 'a feast of sex. You've no idea! We were hippies before it was even thought of. I never screwed around so much in my life.'

I'll come back in a moment to that bohemian aspect of the left. But at the time the more important part was quietly installed in the trade union machine, Britain's parallel to the vast grey and red marching legions of continental militancy in France and Italy. It existed inside the Labour party and the unions and also in many important parts of the civil service, the law, the academy and who now knows where else. In Britain, the Kremlin had always preferred to work by inserting itself into existing structures.

It used a similar approach to the British state. In the 1940s, shortly before the end of the war, the communist party leader, Harry Pollitt, told a gathering of left-wing undergraduates at Cambridge to get the sort of degrees that would allow them to rise far in the British establishment. But he urged them not waste their time as public com-

munist, selling the *Daily Worker* on King's Parade. No doubt he made a similar speech at Oxford, but it is not recorded. Who knows how many followed his advice, and what happened to them? The whole idea was that they would act in secret. Did they? It is amusing to wonder if the general mess we have since made of the country might plausibly be explained by the existence of a secret network of communist sympathisers working their red socks off to mess up everything they touched. It is hard to think of any other way of explaining the mad abolition of grammar schools. But we must never forget the awesome power of stupidity.

But we do know for certain that the communist infiltration of British trade unions —

*New Labour was a triumph
of the reborn left, made to seem
like a takeover by the right*

and through them, the Labour party — was thorough and directed by a full-time paid organiser. I watched it happening. In some cases it was fairly open. Mostly it was thinly camouflaged by front organisations. But it kept up a constant leftward pressure on home and foreign policy.

And this was why the Trades Union Congress was alarmed rather than pleased by free trade unionism in communist Poland, and why the Labour party swung repeatedly in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament when the USSR still had a vast army in East Germany, and that policy would have been national folly. Paradoxically, New Labour came to love the bomb once it didn't matter any more. And this empty conversion to apparent responsibility is one of the reasons why so many people think that communism and its influence have evaporated. But the Blairite revolution was in fact a very clever political knot, which made everything look more or less like the opposite of what it was. It reminds me of the similar knot in Le Carré's *Tinker Tailor*, in which a traitor was made to look like a brilliant agent, and his KGB handler was made to look like a precious source. All the clever people were the most thoroughly fooled.



*'Peter Stringfellow has left
you all his clubs.'*

New Labour was a triumph of the reborn left, made to seem like a takeover by the right. Its victims happily served and defended it, and still do. How was it done? Clever Marxists had begun to see Soviet communism as an albatross in the 1920s. They knew it would never work in advanced western countries.

Out of this understanding came Eurocommunism, through which the continent's communists sidled back into the democratic and anti-Stalinist left, just as Soviet power vanished from the earth. It was and remains amazing just how little this new trend cares about once huge issues such as nationalisation and state control. It is, as David Aaronovitch's old comrade pointed out all those years ago, much more interested in sex, in more ways than one. It will cheerfully see the railways privatised, as long as childhood is nationalised, lifelong marriage is made obsolete, Christianity and patriotism are disempowered and defeated, borders are flung wide, and education becomes a mechanism for enforcing egalitarianism.

People in the West seldom knew just how interested the old Eastern bloc communist regimes also were in these cultural and moral objectives. The communists loathed lasting Christian marriage and mistrusted all private life. They vigorously promoted abortion and easy divorce. I will always recall, one dark Moscow afternoon, finding

a statue to the frightful Pavlik Morozov, whom Soviet children were taught to worship because he had betrayed his parents to the party. If you knew what it represented, it was a bit like stumbling across a graven image of Moloch.

The fall of the Berlin Wall worked in two ways. For it freed Europe's left-wing revolutionaries from several great burdens. No longer were they agents of a menacing foreign power, or apologists for the Gulag, the Red Army and the Kremlin. They were back

Somehow these new social radicals managed to portray themselves as a sexier version of the Tories

to the bright, dangerous enthusiasms of the Young Marx, utopian social radicals anxious to begin the world over again, Jacobins much more than they were Leninists. Yet somehow they managed to portray themselves to naive, politically illiterate media folk as a sexier, better-looking version of the Tories.

Well, they were not Tories. I know of at least six members of the Blair cabinet who to this day would prefer not to talk much, if at all, about their days in the ranks of hardline Marxist organisations. People who now go into frenzies about the leftist past of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell have

always ignored this aspect of New Labour and refuse to see any importance in it.

They should know better. It is not just me saying it, but the Blairites themselves. One New Labour apparatchik, Andrew Neather, has blurted out that his party had 'a driving political purpose: that mass immigration was going to make the UK truly multicultural... to rub the right's nose in diversity and render their arguments out of date'. And another, Peter Hyman, quite recently averred that the Blairite project was 'infinitely more revolutionary than anything proposed by Jeremy Corbyn'.

But that's nothing. Tony Blair himself recently revealed on BBC Radio 4 that he had been a Trotskyist at Oxford. What would once have been a six-cylinder front-page revelation passed almost unremarked. Like the dim MI6 operatives in *Tinker Tailor*, we've been elaborately fooled into believing the opposite of the truth, that Marxism has disappeared and offers no threat to our happiness and liberty, even as we moan about the strange and humourless restrictions on free speech and thought that grow in our midst like knotweed. How did that happen? Think of me as George Smiley, trying to tell you what's really going on.

Peter Hitchens is a columnist for the Mail on Sunday.

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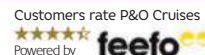
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Becoming German

My new passport has helped me understand Brexiteers

WILLIAM COOK

In the end, after all the waiting, the document didn't look like much — a sheet of A4 paper adorned with a German eagle, and one of those tongue-twisting Germanic compound nouns beneath it: Staatsangehörigkeitsausweis. At last, my Certificate of German Citizenship had arrived. How did I feel? Elated, tearful, overjoyed. It was at this moment that I finally understood how so many Brexiteers must have felt when Britain decided to leave the EU.

When Britain voted Leave I was distraught, but I wasn't at all surprised. For anyone with eyes and ears, it was clear that a great many Britons were passionate about leaving, and that a lot of Remainers were merely lukewarm. Yet now I've become a German citizen, I have a far better sense of the patriotism that drove that vote, and the determination to honour it. For the odd thing is, I've always felt patriotic about my German heritage in a way I've never felt about my British roots. Now, when my Brexiteer friends say it's not just about the money, I know exactly what they mean.

My father was born in Dresden during the second world war, and survived the destruction of that city as a child. His German parents separated during the war, and in 1945 he ended up in Hamburg with his mother, while his father, a German soldier, languished in a British POW camp. In Hamburg my grandma met a British soldier, a journalist called Gerry Cook. When Gerry returned to London she went with him, and took my father with her. My father took Gerry's surname, forsaking his German surname, von Biel. I never knew my German grandfather (he died when I was a child) and my German grandma never liked to talk about her life before the war. I adored my adopted grandpa, Gerry, and loved listening to his stories of journalistic derring-do. My English family have given me everything. My German family gave me next to nothing, just a few tall tales and dusty heirlooms. Yet for some reason I can't quite explain, I feel German to the core.

I stumbled into journalism just as the Berlin Wall came down. I travelled around Eastern Germany, where my father's fam-

ily had fled from in 1945, and tracked down my German relatives, now scattered across the globe. My German grandfather, I discovered, had been cast out of his Junker family after being imprisoned for insurance fraud. I also tracked down the Jewish man whose life he saved, by hiding him in his Berlin apartment and helping him escape to Switzerland. As a result of several articles I wrote about that great escape, my German grandfather was posthumously recognised as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem, Israel's

*I wanted to be German,
not merely European.
Why was that?*

World Holocaust Memorial Centre. However the other things I learnt about him were a lot less admirable. It taught me that human nature is never black and white.

The same could be said of Germany, the land of Goethe and Beethoven — and the Holocaust. I've become a citizen of the Bundesrepublik, a nation created in 1949, but my father was born into a very different Germany, and any German with any sensitivity or sense of history can never forget the country's horrific past. Born out of the ashes of a disgraced and defeated Fatherland, the Bundesrepublik has been an incredible success story. However all of us who belong to it still live in the shadow of the Third Reich.

During the past 30 years, I've travelled to Germany more times than I can count,

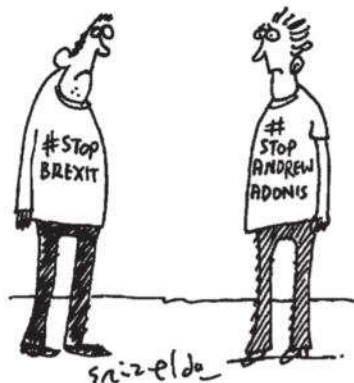
and I've seen the best and worst of that complicated nation. It's made me realise that patriotism is a complex emotion, not the blind devotion I used to think it was, when I watched Britons singing 'Land of Hope and Glory' at the *Last Night of the Proms* and wondered when they were going to get a life. Now I know it's more like the love you feel for the members of your family — fully aware of all their faults, but loving them all the same.

Naturally, these patriotic feelings aren't unique to Britain. I'd say they're fairly fundamental to most people's sense of who they are. During my travels around Germany I've met lots of patriotic Germans. During the World Cup or the Olympics they love cheering on their fellow countrymen. They fly their flag more often than we fly the Union Jack. They don't see Europe as a threat to their national sovereignty. Rather, like so many Europeans, from Latvia to Luxembourg, they tend to regard the EU as its guarantor.

This isn't the way most Britons see it, and now I've got my German citizenship I get that. I'd always wanted dual citizenship, but before Brexit there didn't seem much point. My British EU passport gave me virtually the same rights in Germany as a German one. Brexit changed all that, of course, and the Leave vote prompted my quest to acquire the citizenship my father had been born with. But what began as something purely practical soon became much more emotional. I wanted a German passport, not an EU passport. I wanted to be German, not merely European. Why was that? It's hard to say, but I've heard similar stories from several British friends of mine who've acquired Irish passports lately, even though they were born in Britain, and have always lived in Britain, and will probably always live here, like me.

In his influential book, *The Road to Somewhere*, David Goodhart defined the difference between those people with a strong sense of homeland and those people who feel at home anywhere. I reckon he's on to something, but I think his final judgment is way off. I believe we're all Somewheres. It's just that some of us, quite a lot of us, have more than one Somewhere. Some of my British friends feel purely British, some feel British and Irish, some feel British and European. The EU is bad at lots of things, but it's been pretty good at accommodating those ambiguous feelings of mixed nationhood, whether in Northern Ireland or the Basque country or South Tyrol or Alsace.

Now I've got my German citizenship, I feel more relaxed about Brexit. Whether or not it's best for Britain, it's probably best for the EU. I guess you could say that makes me both a Europhile and a Brexiteer. I'm not a citizen of nowhere: I'm a citizen of Britain, and Germany. If I had to choose, I think I'd choose Germany — but I hope I never have to make that choice.



The best place to be poor

By using soup kitchens and drop-ins, I can live in London on next to nothing

C.A.R. HILLS

I was born in north London, at the Whittington Hospital in Archway, and at the age of 62, after many years of trouble and wandering, I have come to rest in the streets where I was born. And in my usual cunning way I have become one of the roughly 300 or 400 people living in inner London you perhaps think of as 'homeless', making the rounds from drop-in centres to churches, from morning till night, in the hunt for free food.

For this is what my life has come down to as I stand on the threshold of old age, the endless movement from one soup kitchen to the next, which at least gets me to the end of the day by a pleasant route. Or it might be not so pleasant, because of course a lot of conflict erupts at places where a large number of people benefit from organised kindness.

But social life I can find in plenty, to take the place of friends, who have become very distant. Those friends belong to another life. And I have a good substitute in the fellowship of the pop-ins.

Who are these people? Who are the people you see queuing outside the fashionable north London churches? They are typically alone. If they ever had a partner, that person has died or has been divorced or otherwise disposed of. I can outline a standard life story for many of these individuals which roughly parallels mine. We are almost all of a certain age. We came to London in our youth, from college or university, and then perhaps we worked for a few years. But we soon tired of that and opted for a life on the dole, which was easy enough in the Thatcher and Major years.

At a certain point we made the transition from ordinary benefits to the sick. Mental health problems were easily come by, as was social housing. A Freedom Pass completed our lifetime package. Now we have almost no expenses, may never have been taken off Disability Living Allowance and also been awarded Personal Independence Payments, and enjoy a healthy bank balance. We could afford to eat at Wetherspoon's, and sometimes indeed we do. It is social hunger rather than a simple desire for food that drives us into the brightly lit church halls with their

rows of fresh-faced volunteers standing in line to serve us. Of course not everyone who attends the soup kitchens is like this. Aren't they meant to be for the homeless? Or for elderly working-class people who have worked all their lives? Of course there are some of the latter, and the old women who grew up in wartime Islington are a particularly terrifying presence.

And there are numerous street homeless, of course, the indigenous tramps and the great mass of foreigners. The homeless attend the pop-ins in inverse proportion to how much they beg. Persistent beggars despise the soup kitchens and will listen with weary cynicism to one's tales of how no one need ever go hungry in London. On Friday and Saturday nights, those who have flats will emerge from them to enjoy massive takings and would not have time to waste on an unexciting meal. But those homeless who will not beg and cannot claim benefits are dependent on the drop-ins, and are often particularly friendly, thoughtful and well-turned-out people.

I would say the proportion of street homeless, actual rough sleepers, at any soup kitchen is between 5 and 10 per cent,

although it may be more in central London or the roughest areas. You can usually judge the number, on entering, by the number of men wearing black woolly hats. The more hats, the more homeless. The custom is to keep these on to eat, and then our close-packed tables resemble an assembly of 17th-century Scottish covenanters at their pious conventicle.

Our type of life can only be lived in London. Provincial cities have a few opportunities but it would not be possible to get a meal at any time of day and on any day of the week. Nor do foreign cities provide the great range of outlets that are present in the British capital. And in London, it is best to live in the boroughs of Islington and

It is social hunger rather than a simple desire for food that drives us into the brightly lit church halls

Camden, with Hackney coming a slightly distant third. South of the river there is less on offer and things become even more sparse in outer east and west London. But those remote and unworldly halls can be exceptionally pleasant places, where you can disturb a table of chattering widows, or meet with an intelligent male adventurer who has lived in various parts of Africa, America and Europe.

It is within comfortable travelling distance of King's Cross that our existence is found at its most abundant. This is the best place to be poor in the whole world, and the whole world, by virtue of the internet, knows it. The pop-ins are among the more important factors drawing immigrants to Britain, and the impetus to provide them is driven not so much by charity as by the effort to make England, and especially London, a cheap place to live in. It is therefore an essentially political movement to increase the diversity of our society, and fills me with the gravest doubts while I take full advantage of it.

The national groups at the soup kitchens do not mix. The eastern Europeans, for instance, talking loudly at their separate tables, demanding immediate service and

FROM THE ARCHIVE

The future of Scandinavia

From 'The Baltic question', 15 June 1918: The future of Scandinavia and the Baltic must depend on the outcome of the war. If indeed Germany were to emerge victorious, then all the evils on which the pessimists delight to ponder would come to pass... The Baltic would be a German lake, and its commerce would be a German monopoly. Swedes and Danes and Norwegians would gradually be converted by Prussian schoolmasters and Prussian police into docile Germans, and their distinctive civilisations and literatures would disappear. Such is the prospect if the Allies were to fail in their task. But, fortunately for Scandinavia and for the rest of the world, the Allies will not fail.

sometimes breaking into a hearty fight, will admit no one to their company. However, that makes it easier to avoid them.

We melancholy folk are usually civilised with each other. Discussion of the respective merits of each centre, and their precise location, lead on to enquiries about the history of our superfluous lives. But we quickly grow cross with one another if the conversation becomes too personal. By a tacit agreement, we never invite fellow pop-inners to our homes. We interact at the soup kitchens and in the streets and on the buses that lead to them, and we do not even go to the pub together, so that we advance and retreat endlessly to and from friendship.

I keep myself to a maximum of three pop-ins a day. I know one person, a tortured anorexic, who attends about nine. But he has to get up at half-past five in the morning and does not reach wherever he lives until ten at night. His life is the most arduous job.

By contrast, I designate certain days as pop-in free. And once I went on a Saturday evening from the soup kitchens to the 5th View Restaurant at the Piccadilly Waterstones. As I fought my way through the crowded foyer towards the lift, and then stood jam-packed with the others as we went up, I wondered whether I had made the right decision. But when I was seated at my table with its beautiful night-time view

over London, with a fine book to peruse, and was waiting for my happy-hour cocktails and bruschetta, then I knew a spiritual freedom that the pop-ins can never provide.

For my life is not all jam. I have been threatened by hard-bitten white Londoners, Rastas wearing enormous tea-cosies and handsome Poles whose every second word is 'kurwa'. And the volunteers, after moving in their vast herds up and down the stairs at the Christmas crisis centres, have been reluctant to answer my queries, or have told

*I keep myself to three pop-ins a day.
I know one tortured anorexic
who attends about nine*

me off if I tried to take too many doughnuts. There is an undeniable erosion of self-respect in pop-innery.

Do I ever feel guilty? Well, I think you have to look at the motives of those who organise my free ride. They may be tax dodgers, or trying to win social and professional kudos, or trying to meet a partner or escape one. They want to give and I want to take. And I do stack the odd chair at the end of a session. I donate my more useless books. Really, I feel contempt rather than guilt when contemplating the fact that society is providing me with a lifestyle such as quite

a handsome salary would not buy. Bring on your soap bars and your wet wipes and your free socks in winter, you fools, that's what I say.

Yet I don't think I can live like this for good. If there are ever really serious food queues to contend with, as there may be under the coming Corbyn government, I will be too old to stand so long.

I shall have to retire to one of those heartless foreign countries, with their endless demands to pay. But, oh, I am well prepared! I have more toothbrushes than I could use in many lifetimes and my wardrobe is packed with magnificent clothes, and the classics of world literature are piled high on my chest of drawers — all, in part, courtesy of charity. I just have to find some way of getting my loot to Thailand.

And will I feel no nostalgia for the pop-ins? Am I that ungracious? Perish the thought. I know happiness, or at least contentment, when I experience it. And whenever in the unknown future I see a twinkling lady coming to serve me a pumpkin pie, and sink down gratefully in an armchair to deal with it, I shall think with great pleasure about the charming days I spent in London, doing the rounds, when I began to grow old.

*Read the author's blog at
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Girl is teaching me the art of walking on eggshells



‘Dad, am I driving like a normal driver yet? Are you relaxing like a normal relaxed passenger or are you still worrying all the time we’re going to crash?’ I love going for driving practice with Girl. It takes me right back to that precious late adolescence I’d almost forgotten: the period where the thing that matters to you more than anything in the world is the imminent prospect of freedom behind the steering wheel of your very own car.

Think of it! Any time you like you can just get into the driver’s seat, start the engine and go anywhere you want. Scotland. Cornwall. Across the Channel on a ferry. To mates’ parties, beaches, the pub, to uni... I quite understand why Girl is so keen. But I also now realise why, subconsciously, I fought quite hard to put her off.

‘It’s no skin off my nose giving you the odd lift to wherever you need to be,’ I’d say, casually. Or: ‘I’ve just had a look at the cost of insuring provisional drivers and it’s even worse than I thought!’ Or, desperately now: ‘You know, driving is so much hassle these days I wouldn’t bother till you’re older.’

But the thing about teenage females is that they know exactly what they want and exactly how to get it. We dads are putty in their hands — and always have been, right from that first moment, when they gazed up from their Moses basket and smiled and gurgled at us (in the way that boy children don’t do nearly so well, because they’re far less evil, manipulative and shameless).

So first I was organised and chivvied into forking out for driving lessons; then into buying a car which was meant to be shared between herself and her brother, but which she has commandeered; then into sorting out the insurance, so we could enjoy ‘quality father-and-daughter time’ dicing with death on the roads of Northamptonshire.

Actually it has hardly been scary at all. The worst bit was when we repeatedly stalled while trying to negotiate a busy roundabout at rush hour and the queue of traffic built and built behind us, till eventually we had to swap over — luckily the

driver immediately behind was a woman of about my age so she knew the deal and we exchanged fond parental smiles — and I got shouted at a lot by Girl because obviously everything was totally my fault and it wasn’t funny, not one bit.

You’ll put up with anything, though, where your daughter is concerned. As we set off the other day, I sang cheerily to her: ‘And if a ten ton truck/Kills the both of us/To die by your side/Well the pleasure and privilege is mine.’ Because that’s how I felt. It’s how all fathers feel about their girls, I suspect, which

The thing about teenage females is that they know exactly what they want and exactly how to get it

is why young women are so dangerous and ruinous: our special princesses go out into the world buoyed up with expectations of other men that reality can rarely fulfil.

Girls use their dads to practise their wiles on and their rages — to see just how far they can go before you snap. I wish I were capable of being stricter. (When one of Girl’s best friends tried it on with her dad, he threw all her clothes out of the window. Respect!) But I don’t think I’ve ever quite forgiven myself for my failure to buy her a pony.

Or, indeed, for the time when I shattered her ankle, necessitating a stint in hospital having a pin put in, followed by weeks off school. As usual, it was fond love that made me do it. My fantasy was that we could

spend lots of quality father-daughter time fox-hunting together. So one day, I pushed her beyond her capabilities, over a tiger trap jump, to give her a taste of the thrills to come. She took the pain very stoically: we even managed to get her jodhpur boots off without cutting them. But that was pretty much the last time we ever went riding together.

This was a particularly harsh blow for me, because those riding sessions had been one of our weekly bonding moments. You need these as your daughter gets older, especially during that phase girls go through where they decide that you’re not, after all, the most amazingly wonderful daddy in the whole world but just another lumpen, smelly male with terrible dress sense and — ew — a pot belly and receding hair, and a totally inappropriate sense of humour.

Hence my gratitude for these driving sessions. I know I’m being exploited. I know I’m trading short-term gain for long-term pain, giving her the skills which will enable her to spend much more time away from me. But that’s the deal with teenage daughters — you’ll take whatever crumbs you can get.

Obviously you have to tread carefully — as you might with a particularly fragile nuclear device, which could go off at the slightest misstep. For example: no direct questions — that’s the adamant rule. Especially no questions about anything to do with boys. Or emotional matters generally. Your job is to sit there and wait for the information to be volunteered. And while it is permissible for you to drop general hints of acquiescence, under no circumstances must you react too strongly or venture anything that sounds like an opinion.

Ideally, you need to think of yourself as a devoted old dog gazing up at your young mistress with adoring eyes, wagging your tail gratefully whenever she deigns to notice you, accepting totally when she doesn’t.

But they love us really. And they’re much more likely than our sons are to get us access to our grandchildren, and to visit us in the old people’s home. So really we can’t complain. Nor would we dare.



Exacerbating incivility

Sir: I agree wholeheartedly with David Goodhart that if our politics is to ever recover from its current vicious state then all of us need to do our bit to 'stand up for civility' ('The age of incivility', 9 June). Goodhart explains well that what has 'gone wrong' with our politics is exacerbated by, but not entirely due to, social media. If the mainstream media were also to stop and ask whether it has contributed to the problem, that could be a positive step.

The Spectator, for example, has at least two regular columnists in Rod Liddle and James Delingpole who seem to find it difficult to express a political opinion without putting their hatred for people they disagree with on display. In any political debate, if there are valid, serious points to be made, surely they can be made without malice? In their mission to uphold free speech, media can make a choice to uphold free speech underpinned by intellectual or moral integrity — or not. If the commercial realities of the digital era have made it harder for long-standing, quality publications to do their bit to stand up for civility, then perhaps it is time to acknowledge that.

Helen Jackson
Saffron Walden, Essex

The point of kindness

Sir: Cosmo Landesman ('Too kind', 9 June) writes powerfully about kindness having recently been (mis)appropriated by self-help gurus. But it is certainly not new. Two thousand years ago there was a carpenter's son who developed quite a following in these parts. In fact, his suggestions were so radical in undermining both Jewish and Roman status quo, that they conspired to put him to death. The nub of his teaching? 'To love your neighbour as yourself.' The thing is, it only heals the world if your acts of kindness are actually intended to benefit others, and not yourself.

Stephen Dudley
Great Malvern, Worcestershire

What Trump should do

Sir: Daniel McCarthy makes a good attempt at the difficult job of defending Trump's tariffs ('Are Trump's tariffs a good idea?', 9 June). He focuses on the way Japan and Germany in particular, and Europe in general, benefit from letting the USA hegemon shoulder the burden of defence 'while working assiduously to tear apart the hegemon's industry'.

However he ignores the much more obvious conclusion that America should

start withdrawing its military support for Europe and Asia. That would do less damage to the citizens of the world (including Americans), and would be the wake-up call that Europe badly needs.

Johnny Cameron
Pewsey, Wiltshire

It's still about the writing

Sir: In response to Lionel Shriver's article 'When diversity means uniformity' (9 June), I would like to challenge the assertion that diversity means either a dilution of quality or a uniformity of output. We at Penguin Random House firmly believe that giving a platform to more diverse voices will instead lead to a greater richness of creativity and writing. Our goal for our new employees and authors to reflect UK society by 2025 is an ambition, not a quota. We publish — and will continue to — on talent first and foremost.

However, some authors face more barriers than others in getting published. Through our efforts to make our books more representative, we are casting the net wider to catch the voices which may have been missed. This isn't just about doing the

right thing. After all, we are a commercial business, not a charity. For us, publishing more diversely is not just a moral imperative but a commercial opportunity, enabling us to reach new and different readers. Our founder Allen Lane launched the paperback in the 1930s in order to make great writing accessible to everyone and, in doing so, democratised literature and revolutionised publishing forever. We remain true to that vision today.

Books are a portal to enter new worlds; to open your eyes to new perspectives. In a world becoming more and more polarised and where we increasingly exist in echo chambers, it has never been more important to hear — and publish — different voices.

Tom Weldon
CEO, Penguin Random House UK
London SW1

Hurrah for fairs

Sir: Bruce Anderson asks if there are any travelling fairs left (Drink, 9 June). I grew up among the leafy lanes of Pinner and am now vicar of the church on Blackheath Common and I can assure him that fairs visit both. At Pinner, the fair came only for a day, by charter of King John for Whit Wednesday, which always offered us children a reason to be excited about the Whit Monday bank holiday. It was kept running through the second world war. My father, in a reserved occupation, was among those who found things to sell and make to keep the inalienable right to an annual fair on that day.

Nicholas Cranfield
London SE3

Cricket and politics

Sir: Tim Wigmore's thought-provoking article ('The people's cricket', 2 June) made me wonder whether T20 cricket will be beneficial to Test cricket in the long run — i.e. whether it will improve the traditional form of the game. Wigmore argues that the IPL (Indian Premier League) is 'a democracy in which everyone is welcome. T20 has created a global free market for talent'. This, alas, is no longer true. Pakistanis have now been excluded from the tournament purely on political grounds. In the IPL, politics is very much a part of the sport.

Mueen Afzal
Lahore

WRITE TO US

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

The new guy hasn't quite got the hang of it yet...



ROD MULVEY

What on earth have lightsabers got to do with brewing beer?

It may seem a little excessive, but we check every last cask with a *lightsaber*. But it's not from a galaxy far, far away. It's an ultraviolet light used by our brewing team to inspect our casks for absolute cleanliness. Only when it has passed the lightsaber test is a cask considered worthy of becoming home to 72 pints of freshly brewed Landlord. With a beer as finely balanced in flavour as Taylor's, coaxing from pure Pennine spring water and the finest hops and barley, we can't help being just a little picky.

All for that taste of Taylor's



For Pester of TSB, like Patterson of BT, the only way is exit



Should he stay or should he go — or will he already have gone by the time you read this? These are frequently asked questions about chief executives whose businesses hit troubled waters. It's true that the higher you rise, the higher the risk if you don't deliver, but it's not always true that bosses should walk the plank whenever something major goes wrong: sometimes it makes more sense to stick around, take the flak and solve the problem. However, in the cases of Gavin Patterson of BT (ousted a week ago) and Paul Pester of TSB (still in post as we go to press), it would be fair to say the only way is exit.

You just have to look at BT's share price graph, sinking steadily since late 2015, to see why investors were waiting for the steely-eyed incoming chairman Jan du Plessis to axe Patterson, whose glamorous personal PR has disguised the telecoms giant's continuing failure to roll out superfast broadband at an adequate rate, generally please customers, meet regulatory expectations or deliver shareholder value. When Patterson announced a cull of 13,000 BT staff a month ago, many pundits suggested he should have been top of the list; du Plessis briefly tested the wind of opinion before making that happen, exactly as a good chairman should.

As for Paul Pester at TSB, his response to his bank's systems meltdown in April now looks so inadequate in relation to the customer distress caused that, after two botched attempts to explain himself to the Treasury select committee, he would be ill-advised to cling on. I say that even though it seems to have been largely the fault of TSB's Spanish parent, Sabadell, rather than Pester himself, that the transfer of accounts from old systems to Sabadell's own platform was so poorly prepared, with no plan to cope with the huge volume of online fraud attempts that followed the breakdown.

Sabadell ought to be sending in its best operations manager to replace Pester. But the evidence of this episode suggests that might actually make matters worse. Perhaps they should call up Santander — the Span-

ish bank with the most UK experience, plus a reputation for robust systems and management in depth — and beg to borrow someone senior and competent. In the old days, the Bank of England would have quietly made that happen, without the need for select committee show trials.

Knights watch

It's good to know the honours committee are following this column. I said in April that retiring Royal Mail chief Moya Greene deserved a damehood, and she got one in the Queen's birthday list. Likewise I suggested a knighthood for 'industrial hero' Jim Ratcliffe, founder of the Ineos conglomerate, and now he has one, as does veteran bookseller Tim Waterstone, who I have also praised. On the other hand, the time when big-shot bankers could expect knighthoods as a matter of course is rightly long gone, so I'm surprised to see ex-HSBC chairman Douglas Flint on the list: a stopgap for the top job, this Glaswegian numbers man never got to grips with the reputational issues — from mis-selling to money-laundering — that afflicted HSBC on his watch. But he's also a grandee of the international accountancy profession, and I guess establishment pecking orders still sometimes hold sway.

Ahoy there

Sailing off Majorca at the weekend, we spot a big, ugly vessel that might be a Barcelona car ferry but for the helicopter strapped to its top deck and the jet skis buzzing round its stern. On closer inspection — not too close, there's a security boat circling — this turns out to be *Katara*, a \$300 million superyacht owned by the ruling Al Thani family of gas-rich Qatar. Built in Germany, with a crew of 60, few of whom are likely to be native Qataris, she's a conspicuous example of global trickledown and there's really no need to be offended by the sinister way she dwarfs everything else in the bay. Quite the reverse, in fact. What I have often called

'the curse of Qatar' is currently manifesting itself in an economic boycott by Saudi Arabia and other neighbours in response to Qatar's alleged links to Iran and Islamist terror, and a scramble to complete the infrastructure for the controversially awarded 2022 World Cup, not to mention a load of troublesome foreign investments. All very stressful: so it's good, in the holy month of Ramadan, that *Katara* offers our Gulf trading partners commodious relaxation away from prying eyes.

Chasing Aramco

Speaking of friends in the Middle East, the Financial Conduct Authority's decision to endorse a new 'premium listing' on the London Stock Exchange for companies controlled by sovereign states, in the continuing hope of attracting the lucrative flotation of Saudi Aramco, has drawn protests from bodies such as the Institute of Directors and the International Corporate Governance Network. The FCA's Andrew Bailey says the new category will 'encourage more companies to adopt the UK's high governance standards', whereas objectors fear the opposite: a lowering of standards to accommodate companies controlled by unsavoury regimes that are not going to be told how to behave by the LSE. In particular, such companies will be free of normal rules requiring arm's length dealings with their controlling shareholder and related companies.

I said six months ago that the premium listing idea smacked of desperation to maintain London's global position after Brexit. Meanwhile, the Saudis have not only held back from naming London, New York or Hong Kong as their chosen bourse, but have delayed the whole Aramco deal at least until next year. My man in the camel market tells me expats hired to work on the prospectus at the oil giant's HQ in Dhahran (current temperature 45°C) have been twiddling their thumbs for months. The biscuit for which the FCA and LSE are rolling over like spaniels may not be there to be won.

BOOKS

Getting to know the General

Charles de Gaulle salvaged France's pride and created a nationalist myth. But he didn't single-handedly 'save the honour of France', says *Robert Tombs*

A Certain Idea of France: The Life of Charles de Gaulle

by *Julian Jackson*

Allen Lane, £35, pp. 900

When General de Gaulle published the first volume of his war memoirs in 1954, he signed only four presentation copies: for the Pope, the Comte de Paris (France's royalist pretender), the President of the French Republic and Queen Elizabeth II. One of his associates remarked: 'All de Gaulle' was in that gesture.

But what was de Gaulle? Catholic? Conservative? Romantic? Arrogant? All these, surely, and not least ideologically eclectic. His political beliefs were not only enigmatic but were often vague in his own mind. When he took the world stage in June 1940 it was unclear whether he was a royalist, a Christian Democrat or even a proto-fascist.

This uncertainty was a major reason why many were suspicious of him — most damagingly, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It took time for de Gaulle to become 'de Gaulle', as Julian Jackson puts it, and for this reason it is fruitless to try to track down the intellectual origins of 'Gaullism'. Like many labels, it was first coined by his enemies. He did not begin with an ideology, but with passions, indeed obsessions, plus a few fixed ideas, such as the overriding importance of history and geography. His greatest passion was, as he wrote in the first lines of his memoirs, '*une certaine idée de la France*' — the phrase that gives this book its title.

As Jackson notes, de Gaulle is the most written about Frenchman since Napoleon, and the Institut Charles de Gaulle continues to produce on an almost industrial scale. It is hard to see this as disproportionate. There are only a handful of examples in modern times of individuals making such a profound impact on their countries in so many mainly positive ways. Churchill, for example, may have moulded world history, but he did not change Britain. De Gaulle's life is important on this side of the Chan-

nel too: no Frenchman since the Bonapartes has played such a role in British history.

A Certain Idea of France is more than just another, bigger, biography in English. Although, as Jackson notes, there is little new to be discovered about the man, he has written a comprehensive, scholarly biography that ought to remain for years the standard work. Foreign historians can more easily write about controversial figures in a way that avoids both hagiography and polemic, and this he has done. Furthermore, he has the skill and style to maintain a dramatic narrative over nearly 800 pages of text.

De Gaulle had greatness thrust upon him by the disaster of 1940. He was an extraordinary character, no doubt; a man of outstanding intelligence and extensive literary culture. But in normal times he would have served out his career as a professional soldier, mostly behind a desk, for he was

*Warmth, gratitude and
normal human feeling were not
in de Gaulle's repertoire*

too remote, Jackson observes, to have been a great commander. But in 1940, thanks to Churchill and the BBC, he became the voice of Free France — literally the voice, as hardly anyone inside France knew what he looked like. His demeaning and often unnecessary wartime struggles against other Frenchmen and against his British and American allies to ensure his sole command of all French Resistance and assert France's right to be recognised as one of the victorious Allies, with himself as its uncontested ruler, are related even-handedly.

Less familiar to British readers is the rest of his career. After resigning in 1946, when his plans for political reform failed, he remained a brooding political presence until another national disaster, the Algerian war, gave him the opportunity to take power on his own terms. With France

beginning to look like a banana republic, threatened by a military coup and the possibility of civil war, de Gaulle manoeuvred brilliantly behind the scenes, subtly encouraging others to take the dangerous steps that brought him to power in 1958 as the only man who could save the nation. As in 1940, de Gaulle did not have clear intentions, but when he realised what had to be done — to get rid of Algeria — he did it ruthlessly.

Only then could he change France's political system to empower its government and downgrade parliament and the political parties: his Fifth Republic, which François Mitterrand (who later enjoyed it) attacked as a 'permanent coup d'état'. As at other stages of his career, de Gaulle was uncertain of precisely what he wanted, and left the details to others. He was — and this is one of the leitmotifs of the book — a pragmatist, not a theorist. Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the 'republican monarchy' de Gaulle introduced, it is the most consensual system France has had since the Revolution.

Old age is one of the problems of monarchy, and the final drama of de Gaulle's career was the near-revolution of 1968, when, aged 77, he lost his grip. This saw what Jackson terms 'the most extraordinary day' of his life (29 May 1968), when he flew secretly to Baden to meet the commander of the French forces in Germany, General Massu.

Often presented as a masterly ploy to restore his authority, it was, in Jackson's convincing account, a confused and impulsive action, possibly motivated in part by fear that the mob might storm the Elysée Palace. Nevertheless, Massu (whom de Gaulle had once sacked) somehow restored his confidence. So did Jacques Foccart, one of his most influential and unscrupulous henchmen, who organised the public demonstrations of support that shored up the government.

De Gaulle never recovered from the humiliation of *mai soixante-huit*, and



Greatness thrust upon him: General de Gaulle in 1940

he resigned the following year. He then set out with ferocious energy to write more memoirs, to encapsulate his legacy to the nation. But he suddenly dropped dead on 9 November 1970 of the same cause that had killed his father and brother. He had meticulously planned his funeral: monumental simplicity, and no politicians.

British readers will doubtless be interested in de Gaulle's attitude to us — not least his cavalier public veto on 14 January 1963 of Harold Macmillan's application to join the Common Market: 'we are going to have some fun,' he told his entourage. He intended European integration, in his own words, to be 'the means by which France

can become again what she has ceased to be since Waterloo' — an ambition that Britain would hardly facilitate. His Anglophobia (he thought of Britain as *l'Angleterre*) was not only the product of wartime conflicts with Churchill, on which he constantly ruminated. It was a consistent part of his world view, dating from childhood memories of colonial rivalry, and it became if anything more virulent with age. One of many bizarre manifestations was his extraordinary shout of '*Vive le Québec libre*' in Canada in 1967 — not an improvised response to an excited crowd, but calculated in advance. He saw it as a protest against British imperialism: he would 'rather die'

than 'go to Canada and toast the Queen of England'.

His view of the world was a strange mixture of the archaic and the far-sighted. He seemed, it has been said, a man of the day before yesterday or of the day after tomorrow. His 1963 veto is a perfect example: keeping Britain out of the EC then seemed to be a blinkered stand against the inevitable. But de Gaulle believed that politics was ruled by history and geography, and that Britain was too global to 'shut itself up in Europe'. Prejudice, or foresight, or both?

A biography must be about personality, and de Gaulle's personality emerges starkly from these pages. Undeniably, he was cold, obsessed, misanthropic, ruthless and cynical: he put all human actions down to fear or vanity. Significantly, his deepest emotional relationship was with his handicapped daughter Anne, perhaps the only person with whom he did not need to be on his guard. There is a funny side to his reserve — for example, when Macmillan tried to take him skinny-dipping in the Mediterranean, he refused to take off his uniform — but most of it is not funny at all. Warmth, gratitude and normal human feeling were not in the repertoire of 'de Gaulle' (as he often referred to himself). Chillingly, Jackson records that his reaction to the killing by the police of peaceful Algerian demonstrators in 1961 was to criticise the media who reported it.

For Jackson, the ultimate justification of de Gaulle's career — and the final sentence of his book — is: 'He saved the honour of France.' He salvaged its pride, certainly. I prefer to think that its honour was saved by thousands of French men, women and children who faced torture and death in a selfless and anonymous struggle against tyranny. De Gaulle showed scant interest in their actions, suspected their motives and expressed precious little appreciation of their courage. He created a nationalist myth. But they were the reality.

Of human bondage

Ian Thomson

Barracoon: The Story of the Last Slave

by Zora Neale Hurston
HQ, £8.99, pp. 151

Zora Neale Hurston, the African-American novelist-ethnographer, was a luminary of the New Negro Movement, later renamed by American scholars the Harlem Renaissance. 'Harlemania' took off in jazz-age New York, as white thrill-seekers danced to Duke Ellington hothouse stomps and enthused over so-called primitive art.

Hurston made a 'black splash' of her own in 1920s Harlem. Among her admirers was the dance critic and photographer Carl Van Vechten, whose deliciously Firbankian 1926 account of life uptown, *Nigger Heaven*, gloried in blackamoor jungle dances and other *Uncle Tom* minstrelsy. ('Period piece' would be the most charitable description.) Hurston was careful not to mock the 'Negro-tonians', as she called Van Vechten and his Fifth Avenue sophisticates, as she needed their patronage for field trips into the swamplands of Florida and the Deep South. In 1928, she graduated in cultural anthropology from New York's Barnard College, where she was the only black student.

Armed with a pistol, in the early 1930s Hurston explored the unfrequented backwaters of Dixie in search of conjure law and spirit practice, or hoodoo. The older folks' tales of life on the cane plantations, told at dusk on front porches, continued a West African tradition of the griot or praise-singer. Hurston was intrigued. The Mississippi Delta, where she interviewed root doctors, shamans, storytellers and preach-

Long after the slave trade was outlawed, Africans were imported into the Confederate heartlands

ers, provided her with a rich subsoil of neo-African animism. The result was *Mules and Men*, a scholarly but devilishly funny collection of black folk tales, and a superb first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, originally titled, perhaps in deference to the Negro-tonians, *Big Nigger*.

For her first substantial work, *Barracoon* (Spanish for 'barrack'), Hurston chose to tell the story of the last living survivor of the Atlantic slave trade, Cudjo Lewis. Written in a folksy vernacular ('Cudjo doan want to be no slave'), the manuscript had failed to find a publisher in Depression-struck America, but appears now in book form for the first time. It has been well worth the wait.

Based on a series of interviews conduct-



Zora Neale Hurston was buried in an unmarked grave, having worked as a maid, lonely and largely forgotten

ed by Hurston with Cudjo, the book tells how he was smuggled out of Dahomey in 1860 as 'black cargo', and sold to American slavers. He remained in slavery in Hurston's native Alabama for five years until Union soldiers emancipated him after the civil war. Though illegal, the buying and selling of slaves in the antebellum South was widespread. Long after Congress had outlawed the slave trade in 1807, Africans continued to be imported into the Confederate heartlands.

Over a three-month period, Hurston called on Cudjo at his home in the Alabama seaport of Mobile, where he was alternately welcoming and dismissive of her. ('Go leave me 'lone. Cudjo tired'.) By way of offerings she brought peaches, hams and quantities of sorely needed insect powder. Stuck in Mobile, however, Cudjo appears to have been homesick for his people back in West Africa. 'My people in Afficky, you unnerstand me,' he tells Hurston, gazing out mournfully across Mobile Bay.

Caught up in the King of Dahomey's transatlantic trafficking business, Cudjo had been taken in chains to a holding pen along the Bight of Benin, awaiting shipment. In Alabama he suffered the kind of deprivations all too familiar in the Jim

GETTY IMAGES

Crow South. Kanye West's recent contention that slavery was entered into more or less willingly ('For 400 years? That sounds like a choice') is contradicted by Cudjo, who should know.

Usefully, *Barracoon* illuminates the African side of the slave trade — until recently a rather murky area for historians. The barracoons that lined the African coasts of the Atlantic were bleak warehouse-dungeons; from their doors of no return men, women and children born in Africa were shipped out to the sugar fields of the gallant South. Oh, Mama!

From start to finish, *Barracoon* reads like high adventure. The book looks forward to Hurston's finest novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, written during a field trip to Haiti in 1936 but set in rural black America. On her death in Florida in 1960, Hurston was buried in an unmarked grave, having worked as a maid, lonely and largely forgotten until, in 1975, Alice Walker published her essay 'In Search of Zora Neale Hurston'. Only then

did Hurston's literary stock rise again; *Barracoon* has been at number two on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

In the eye of the storm

Horatio Clare

Into the Raging Sea: Thirty-three Mariners, One Megastorm and the Sinking of the El Faro

by Rachel Slade
4th Estate, £16.99, pp. 391

'We are globalisation,' a senior executive at the shipping company Maersk told me. 'We enable it, and we have questions about it too, but we ask them in isolation.' He then granted me leave to travel on Maersk vessels wheresoever I wished in order to write a book about shipping and seafarers, promising that Maersk's lawyers would not vet the manuscript before publication.

Maersk have little to fear from writers. The giant corporation is effectively public-relations proof (if they stopped their ships' engines today there would be a worldwide supply crisis the day after tomorrow). Moreover, Maersk is among the industry's lead-

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Banksy (b.1974)

Stop and Search

Screenprint in colours, 2011, signed in blue crayon, inscribed with a heart,
an artist's proof aside from the edition of 500, 765 x 575mm.

Estimate: £25,000-35,000

Accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by Pest Control.

ers, confident that whatever I found would be better, or no worse, than average standards at sea.

The American company at the heart of Rachel Slade's excellent and gripping *Into the Raging Sea*, Tote Maritime, seems to have been a top-to-bottom disgrace in 2015, when its 790-ft container ship *El Faro* went down with all 33 hands off the Bahamas, having driven into the eye of a hurricane named Joaquin.

Slade does an incisive and compelling job explaining what happened to the *El Faro*, cutting between the doomed voyage, the backgrounds of the crew, the story of American shipping, the incompetent and venal owners and the would-be rescuers and investigators.

Using transcripts from the bridge (ships record their navigators' conversations, storing them in 'black boxes'), Slade's narrative begins in that slightly sickening and compulsive mode which makes the words of those on the brink of disaster such transfixing reading.

Captain Michael Davidson's ship is dying under him, flooded, listing and without power. Conditions outside are so severe that a person could barely breathe and certainly could not stand, so chaotically violent and intermingled are the wind and sea. Davidson tries to call his company's manager in charge of safety, designated the QI — Qualified Individual:

Operator: Thank you for waiting.

Caller: Oh God!

Operator: Just briefly, what is the problem you're having?

Caller: I have a maritime emergency and I would like to speak to a QI. We had a hull breach, a scuttle blew open during the storm. We have water down in three-hold with a heavy list. We have lost the main propulsion unit, the engineers cannot get it going. Can I speak to a QI please?

Operator: Yes, thank you so much, one moment.

Nothing can save them at this point. *El Faro* was 40 years old, poorly designed and redesigned, with air intakes fatally near the waterline. It had no electronic chart (the crew plotted their courses with pencil and paper); open lifeboats (which, extraordinarily, the company had been permitted to retain, arguing that replacements were too expensive); watertight doors that leaked; and an engine which seized when its lubrication system could not cope with listing. Her only strength was speed, which her captain used to drive into the hurricane, believing he was dodging around it.

The book exposes the imprecise science of hurricane prediction and Davidson's disastrous reliance on a user-friendly forecasting system provided by StormGeo, a Norwegian company, which uses obsolete weather data. The last lethal ingredients were the crew and captain's states of mind,

and here the book becomes an engrossing study of how capitalism fails when it has cut all margins to the marrow.

The senior officers are insecure in their jobs. The captain, more worried about his standing with the company than the approaching storm, risks his ship rather than arrive late in Puerto Rico. His officers, who can see catastrophe coming, never quite stand up to him, taking refuge in incredulity and deference to rank. They see little future for the vessel or for themselves with Tote, which is sacking personnel indiscriminately, replacing mariners who should have provided oversight with unqualified executives. Tote's preparation for the hurricane season was an email reminding captains that it was hurricane season.

Slade is rightfully angry. Shipowners, she points out, were fundamental to the founding and success of America, and still enjoy disproportionate protection under its laws. The Jones Act of 1920 requires that ships plying America's coasts be built, owned and operated by Americans, creating a monopoly which costs domestic consumers dear. The Act should guarantee these ships high safety standards, but the American Bureau of Shipping, which inspects them, is paid for by the shipowners themselves. As one inspector put it to me: 'No conflict of interest there, then! I can stop a ship from sailing, but I rarely do.' 'In what circumstances would you stop one?' I asked. 'A crack in the main deck!' he laughed.

The lesson of *Into the Raging Sea* is that when the components of capitalism and global trade are not properly checked, regulated and restrained, and workers not cared for or respected, then lust for profit drives us all into the deep.



'The shower isn't working!'

A very bourgeois revolution

Houman Barekat

Rock and Roll is Life: The True Story of the Helium Kids by One Who Was There: A Novel

by D.J. Taylor

Constable, £18.99, pp. 460

The narrator-protagonist of D.J. Taylor's new novel, a mild-mannered Oxford graduate named Nick Du Pont, has resisted the lure of a proper career to become a publicist for a flower-pop group called the Helium Kids.

The story begins in 1964, with Nick and the band in the United States. It's the year of the Civil Rights Act, and the Helium Kids' entire tour is set in venues along the Mason-Dixon Line, prompting Nick to reflect on the 'terrible, pulled-both-ways wonder of 1960s America'. He returns to the UK to find that here, too, the old world is giving way to the new: 'There are houses going up all over the west side of Norwich. The girls stop being called Kate and Margaret and Mary and start being called Samantha and Jennifer and Suzanne.'

Rock and Roll is Life features a love interest in the form of an American heiress; the untimely death of a drug-addled keyboardist; the band's enigmatic frontman going AWOL in Tangier; and a touching subplot involving Nick's errant father. When a girl band comprising a pair of conjoined twins releases an album entitled *Baby You're a Part of Me*, one wonders if Taylor is having too much fun.

Such capers aside, the book's defining feature is its narrator's wry scepticism towards the legend of the 1960s and 1970s counterculture as an egalitarian watershed. Though the Helium Kids themselves are mostly working-class, everyone around them is conspicuously well-heeled, and we are reminded at every turn that this was very much a bourgeois revolution. The times may be a-changing, but the social order will remain stubbornly intact.

Nick condenses his experience of the 1960s down to 'the feeling that, for better or worse, you were living in a piece of performance art'. This sense of artifice is explored via his metier, as he verses himself in the cynical tricks of the PR trade. Taylor's skewering of the analogue-era hype machine is pointedly acerbic, but the parodic rock almanac entries, discographies and album reviews that punctuate the novel read like an affectionate homage to a sub-genre of music journalism that has lost much of its cultural cachet in the internet age. Taylor skilfully combines nostalgic reverence and ironic distance in this genial romp, puncturing the mythology of the era while never quite repudiating its charms.



*A cuerda seca tile made of stone paste, showing the figure of an archer. Safavid dynasty, early 17th century (From *The History of Central Asia*)*

Swallowed by the Russian Bear

John Hare

The History of Central Asia, Volume 4: The Age of Decline and Revival

by Christoph Baumer, translated from the German by Christopher W. Reid
I.B. Tauris, £30, pp. 352

In the 13th century, having overrun and terrorised Europe as far as Budapest, and in the process possibly bringing with them the flea which caused the Black Death, the heirs to Genghis Khan and the Golden Horde had also conquered territory to the east as far as the Korean peninsula.

The assiduous Swiss scholar and explorer Christoph Baumer chronicles the ensuing sagas of the remaining individual khanates in great detail. But by the 16th century it is clear that although a few pockets still flourished, producing impressive buildings and works of art, these erstwhile mighty nomadic clans had sunk to a point where they had disappeared from the consciousness of

the outside world. Even their devastating expertise as equestrian bowmen had diminished under the overwhelming technology of firearms and cannon.

This decline changes in the late 16th century, when Russia's territorial ambitions expanded, motivated partly by its Romanov tsars' quest to acquire a safe warm-water port — a desire still relevant in Syria and the Horn of Africa today — but primarily by sheer greed. Trappers and hunters began a concentrated move eastwards into Siberia, lured by 'soft gold', the skins of the sable, ermine, black fox and marten. Once these wild animals were wiped out, the trappers moved into new territory and then turned south-east towards Central Asia. Cossack soldiers, attracted by the prospect of rich agricultural holdings, followed the hunters.

The Manchurians (from China) became greatly disturbed, and demanded that the Cossacks' fortresses be destroyed. Conflict ensued and Central Asia became, for the first time, a scene of armed conflict between two non-Central Asian great powers. Great Britain too, which after the defeat of the French by Nelson at Aboukir and Trafalgar had become the world's paramount maritime power, was worried about

the Russian search for a warm-water port. But the expansion by Russia into Central Asia caused far greater concern when their push extended south towards British India.

This was the start of the Great Game, and it is here that Baumer really gets into his stride. His canvas is huge, even embracing Afghanistan and Britain's and Russia's travails and defeats in that age-old deathtrap for foreigners. As ever with this series, there are magnificent photographs, maps and prints, and while the machinations of the Great Game are not covered in the same detail as by Peter Hopkirk — who could better his account? — Baumer's exciting narrative is meticulously backed by hard facts.

After 1917, most of Central Asia disappeared behind the Iron Curtain. I wish the author had given more space to Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, the 'mad baron' who, as a White Russian, conquered Mongolia with a cavalry army and ruled that country from 1919 for almost two years before the Reds shot him and took over Outer Mongolia in the 1920s. This psychotic, violently anti-Semitic scion of an ancient Teutonic aristocratic family, killed people at whim, but was worshipped as a god by the Mongols after he defeated a Chinese warlord intent on acquiring huge chunks of their country. Yet during Sternberg's reign of terror he introduced tarred roads and electricity to Mongolia. It can be argued that, had it not been for him, Outer Mongolia would have come under the sphere of influence of China.

'We are the filling in a sandwich,' I was told by a Mongolian foreign minister. 'Russia and China are the bread on the outside. Both are bad for us, but if we have to choose, we will always choose Russia.'

In the late 1930s, Stalin destroyed over 800 of Mongolia's monasteries and, Baumer states, '94,000 monks were displaced to the laity'. Unfortunately, a huge percentage of those 94,000 monks were dispatched to their maker. On Stalin's direct orders they were lined up and shot on a quota system. Hardly a family in Mongolia was untouched by this horrendous slaughter — yet still the foreign minister preferred Russia.

At the same time, further south in Xinjiang, China, Ma Zhongying, a brilliant young Muslim Chinese general, fought to avenge Han Chinese slights against Islam and to keep out the Russians. Making incredible journeys on his grey stallion across the waterless Gobi, he nearly seized power (and did seize the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin).

Later, in the early 1940s, Kazakhs migrated across the Gobi in an attempt to reach Lhasa with their flocks and escape the conflict between the Communists and the Kuomintang. Some of the old men who undertook this journey explained to me how they had taught their horses and cam-



*The courtyard of the Kalyan Mosque in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, completed in 1514. A mulberry tree stands in the middle.
(From *The History of Central Asia*)*

els to eat flesh in areas where there was no vegetation whatsoever.

This book brings us up to the present day — Donald Trump even gets a mention in the index — and the emergence of the newly independent ‘stans’ and their growing influence and economic power acquired through mineral wealth. It brings to a triumphant conclusion Baumer’s majestic *History of Central Asia*. I cannot see how this four-volume series can ever be bettered.

Fast and furious

Niall Griffiths

American Histories

by John Edgar Wideman
Canongate, £15.99, pp. 226

This new collection of John Edgar Wideman’s short stories comes across the pond as one of four handsomely packaged volumes from Canongate. Little known in this country, he towers large in his native States; a MacArthur Genius fellow, a PEN/Faulkner Award winner twice, winner of the Prix Femina Etranger last year, endorsed by Richard Ford and Caryl Phillips.... Old now, he has a lengthy list of publications behind him, and, on this latest evidence, carries a flame of rage against American injustice and prejudice that yet burns magma-hot.

The collection opens with ‘A Prefatory Note’ addressed to an imaginary president (‘perhaps you are a colored woman, which would be an edifying surprise’) and is a couple of pages of composed fury; we are now going to examine the untended wounds of slavery and racism, and it will be disturbing and shocking. ‘History tells as many lies as truths,’ we are told, and then we are taken into the opener, ‘JB & FD’, which imagines a dialogue between John Brown and Frederick Douglass in which they discuss the Harper’s Ferry massacre — ‘it is no simple

business to slaughter men with broadswords’ — and, thus, the swamps of blood on which America is built.

In fact, this is a three-way conversation; we are privy, too, to the thoughts of Wideman himself as, from his home in France, he plans the piece: the free indirect style here becomes a torch of awareness seeking a mind to wield it. It is immensely powerful: history is what you live. It is part of your autobiography, and Wideman himself often appears in these pages, his personal traumas given mythical, epochal status: a younger brother serving a life sentence for murder; a nephew executed in his own home; a son who killed a sleeping tent-mate; these are the events around which ‘Maps and Ledgers’ spins. Internalised brutality and formless rage refracted through a questing, eclectic and restless intellect.

The writing has an immediacy and an intimacy that, at times, recalls James Kelman, even Kafka; ‘Shape the World Is In’ occurs in one head in the team of a New York tenement, the ambient sounds and smells insisting on the legitimacy of the individual, the personal sensual primacy. We’re coaxed into a territory that is almost Beckettian — ‘this world where I’m stuck forever, however long that might be. Me and everything else and nothing. Same space, same shape, same thing I am’. ‘Wail’ is a three-page uppercut of a story about the dead of 9/11 and, by extension, all dead and all bereaved, and as such is a distillation of the existential dread that is, apparently, Wideman’s creative fuel; in an interview with the *NYT* he said that whatever it is that separates black America from the world ‘ain’t nothing to do with our blood, it ain’t nothing to do with our history, it is essentially a recognition, the most profound and basic human recognition that you are alone. I am alone’.

Yet there is acknowledgement that writing is, in part, an attempt to ameliorate this cosmic isolation; ‘Examination’ contains a condensed review of Atticus Lish’s *Preparations for the Next Life*, given by the nar-

rator to a nurse during some mysterious medical examination: ‘a reader is immersed,’ he says, ‘in violent, claustrophobic details of lives headed nowhere, as the two lovers prepare for a next life. One that will never arrive.’ Layers of modern America unfolding, finding its chroniclers, being written into being. Or writing itself into beings.

Similarly, ‘Yellow Sea’ gives us a narrator watching the Truffaut film of the same name, musing on the director’s ‘desire for movies that express the agony and joy of making cinema’ and then inviting us to consider the Lee Daniels film *Precious*, with its topics of incestuous rape and Aids and self-loathing, as well as news footage of a young black girl self-immolating in a nearby street.

The narrator is adrift, unmoored in this sea of stories, of anguish and pain and loss; the necessary construction of psychic armour

Wideman rages against the Harper’s Ferry massacre — and thus the swamps of blood on which America is built

can be achieved through the internal drama he forms around these events, the fact and the fiction, the seen and the perceived. As also happens in ‘Nat Turner’s Confession’, such boundaries are blurred; this is entirely suitable for the meta-fictional concerns of this collection in which literary tropes never, not once, override the crucial expression of suffering. As such, the closing piece, ‘Expectations’, is perfectly placed; an outraged howl at being defined and pre-judged on mere pigmentation, at having to centre that condition constantly in one’s life.

This is not an easily accessible book; reading it is not a consoling experience. Nor should it be, of course, and what it is is challenging, animating, enlivening and electrifying; it does what literature should do. It’s a bruising experience that leaves you feeling vulnerable and excited and alive. I will read more from this writer.

The heart of Colombia's darkness

Boyd Tonkin

The Shape of the Ruins

Juan Gabriel Vásquez,
translated by Anne McLean
MacLehose Press, £20, pp. 505

What makes Colombia remind me of Ireland? It's not only the soft rain that falls from grey skies on the emerald uplands around Bogotá. In both countries, ingrained habits of courtesy and charm can smooth over the jagged rifts left by a history of strife.

Raised in Bogotá, and living there again after a decade in Barcelona, Juan Gabriel Vásquez writes novels in which elegant mazes of legend and rumour lead, step by graceful step, into the guilty secrets of 'this country sick with hatred'. Perhaps only an accident of genius enthroned Gabriel García Márquez, with his hyperbolic Caribbean imagination, as the carnival king of his nation's fiction. With Vásquez, in contrast, characters throw up a veiling mist of polite refinement and witty euphemism, of hearsay, anecdote and speculation. It often cloaks what his latest narrator calls 'the cesspool of Colombian history'.

As in his previous novels, such as *The Informers* and *The Sound of Things Falling*, *The Shape of the Ruins* cunningly lures us into the labyrinth where skulk the 'monsters of violence' that have tormented Colombia. With a narrator named Vásquez, who shares the author's own trajectory, the story plays with the masks of 'autofiction'. A note warns readers, though, that it plunders past and present realities 'with the liberties characteristic of the literary imagination'.

Still, the pair of political assassinations that this 'Vásquez' investigates happened as he tells them. As his premature twin daughters fight for life, the narrator's sense of vulnerability in 'this country where people kill others all the time' drives him back towards the heart of national darkness. In April 1948, the killing of the reformist politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán — often viewed as the Colombian JFK — plunged Bogotá into bloody riots and let slip the dogs of civil war (Vásquez nods often to *Julius Caesar*).

Drawn into the feverish orbit of Carlos Carballo, a conspiracy-mad friend, the narrator flirts with the 'camaraderie of paranoia' that obsessively pursues the buried truth about Gaitán's death. 'Conspiracy theories are like creepers,' warns the kindly Dr Benavides, whose physician father left him fragments of the slain hero's bones; 'they grab onto whatever they can to climb up and keep growing.'

In search of those 'truths as fragile as a premature baby' that official versions deny, Vásquez hunts for the secret history

behind another murder: that of the Liberal statesman Rafael Uribe Uribe in 1914. We follow the snaking trail of a (real) lawyer-turned-journalist, Marco Tulio Anzola. In court and in print, Anzola challenged the state's claim that a couple of low-grade hoodlums had alone despatched Uribe. He sought to find 'the great wolves in the pack' behind these hired thugs.

Between them, these two slayings helped seed a climate of rancour and suspicion. It destabilised society until, in the 1980s, the drug lord Pablo Escobar and his rivals 'flooded the country with blood for a decade'. Vásquez feels the attraction for any conflict-shattered community of 'the conspiratorial vision'. This 'scenario of shadows' gives each private loss its role in a 'theatre in which everything happens for a reason'. He hints, too, that writers who love tangled plots may get enmeshed in yarns spun by conspiracists who claim access to 'the underside of the world'.

Beautifully voiced by his serial translator Anne McLean, Vásquez writes with the elliptical feints and ruses of a storyteller who admires Joseph Conrad in his most delphic moods. The result is sly, subtle, captivating and — as with Conrad himself — intermittently long-winded. This Colombian past reveals its 'shadowy terrain' through swirling Andean fogs. The facts remain forever in dispute. The grief, as Vásquez shows, cascades plainly down from one stricken generation to another.

A spy in la-la land

Mika Ross-Southall

Happy Little Bluebirds

by Louise Levene
Bloomsbury, £14.99, pp. 281

In 1940, the British Security Coordination sent an agent with an assistant to a Hollywood film studio to help promote the British war effort in America. This is the inspiration behind Louise Levene's enjoyable new novel *Happy Little Bluebirds*. Here,



'Do you think he's noticed we're abroad?'

though, the assistant — Evelyn Murdoch, who was working at the Postal Censorship department in Woking — discovers that she was drafted in by mistake: HQ didn't read her file properly and assumed she was a man ('Red faces all round,' a British Intelligence worker tells Evelyn when she arrives in the United States), which is one of the only moments in the narrative that feels stretched.

The agent who Evelyn is meant to assist has gone to Bermuda for an unspecified length of time. No one knows what Evelyn should do in California while she waits for him, other than blend in. But she comes from an uptight Methodist household: her father 'disapproved of scent' and her husband Silas, a dentist, recently killed in the war, 'had the same Wesleyan horror of adornment'. Wearing a 'mannish, pavement-grey suit' and periodically consulting a Bible for advice, she is nothing like the 'light-minded', flashy glamour she sees all around her in 'this strange, Oz-like world'. Even the food is exaggerated — 'big yellow eggs, ringlets of smoked bacon and a golden pile of fried potatoes'; and women's noses are 'so thickly powdered that they looked more like papier mâché than flesh'.

Evelyn is given a makeover, swanky clothes and a Bel Air pool house to stay in. We follow her slinking between farcical parties and 'the easy chitchat of men and women who knew what enjoying oneself should look and sound like'. Before long, she's seduced by this 'bigger, brighter' version of reality; it's as though she's living in a film. At one point, she asks herself: 'Could this all still pan out as a romantic comedy?'

The war seems remote, yet Levene deftly makes it simmer in the background. Evelyn thinks she's under surveillance by Germans; her Japanese gardener rakes gravel into interlocking swastikas and her sister-in-law writes to her from England about the bombings in London ('bricks, furniture, lampshades, biscuit tins. I saw a bedroom slipper with a foot still in it. I thought it was all offices round there'). These intimate letters contain some of the most evocative passages in the book.

Levene gives us a brilliant array of sardonic, often horrifying portraits, too. During a meeting with the studio's executives, producers and writers, for example, Evelyn notices that one man 'remained silent... but made the occasional note with a gold fountain pen ('look busy')'; and at the birthday party of a child actress (who is 12, but the studio claims she is eight), a group of little girls are dressed in 'pastel-coloured frocks that barely covered the pastel-coloured panties beneath... bridesmaids at the wedding of the painted doll'.

Not much happens in *Happy Little Bluebirds*, but this is perhaps fitting for the superficial, make-believe land that Levene showcases so well.



Why will the myth of the yeti just not go away?

Abominably elusive

Mark Mason

Yeti: An Abominable History

by Graham Hoyland
William Collins, £20, pp. 310

In 1969 the body of an ape-like creature, preserved in ice inside an insulated box, came to light in Minnesota. Its provenance was unclear, but the rumour went round that it was a Bigfoot, the North American equivalent of the Himalayan yeti. After two days peering through the box's glass cover, the Belgian zoologist Bernard Heuvelmans convinced himself that the rumour was correct. His description of the Minnesota Iceman was published in the *Bulletin of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences*. It included the detail that 'when erect, the penis would certainly not have been particularly striking in its dimensions'.

As if this wasn't bad enough for the poor animal, it later transpired that its penis, along with the rest of its body, was made of latex. The whole thing was a hoax, constructed by a fairground huckster so that he could charge people 35 cents a look. As such, the Minnesota Iceman is perfectly at home in this book. The mountaineer Graham Hoyland has collected together all the claims and counter-claims surrounding the yeti and its equivalents around the world. His conclusion? There is 'a total lack of solid evidence'.

Not that Hoyland wanted it this way. On one of his own expeditions to the Himalayas he saw footprints that locals believed had been made by a yeti. His desire to agree with them reminded him of *The Third Eye*, a book he read at school, in which the

Tibetan T. Lobsang Rampa recounted his own meeting with a yeti. Hoyland was gripped. Unfortunately the story was a complete fabrication. T. Lobsang Rampa was actually a plumber's son from Devon called Cyril Hoskins.

Hoyland gives every claim a fair hearing. He includes sherpas' accounts, many of which describe female yetis possessing 'pendulous breasts which they slung over their shoulders when they ran'. He quotes David Attenborough — 'it is not impossible that the yeti might exist' — and the US primatologist Jane Goodall, who attaches great weight to the countless Native Americans who claim to have seen a Bigfoot. We learn about the

Daily Mail's 1954 expedition to capture a yeti. The team included the journalist Ralph Izzard, who while covering Edmund Hillary's Everest triumph the previous year, had arrived at base camp wearing a silk cravat, a golfing jacket and plimsolls. There's also the Irish explorer Peter Byrne, who in 1959 stole a finger from a 'yeti' hand kept in a Nepalese temple. He replaced it with a human finger (his colleague 'never asked where he got it from'), then met the Hollywood star James Stewart, who was visiting Calcutta, so that Stewart's wife Gloria could smuggle the yeti finger out of India in her lingerie case. Tests back home revealed that it too was human.

So why will the myth of the yeti just not go away? As ever, good old human error plays a part. In his 1905 telegram reporting local sightings of the 'Wild Man of the Snows', Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Howard-Bury (who had entered Tibet without permission, his skin stained with walnut juice — the Viceroy Lord Curzon was not happy) included three exclamation marks to convey his personal scepticism. But these were omitted to cut costs, with the result that people believed him. As well as cock-up, however, there's also plenty of conspiracy. Sometimes this is for money: in the 1950s the Tibetan authorities charged £400 per yeti-hunting permit, while in 2002 the Chinese province of Hubei was accused of encouraging a belief in the yeti to attract tourists.

But sometimes the conspiracies are purely for mischief. The British mountaineers Frank Smythe and Eric Shipton found footprints in the 1930s, but as Hoyland points out there's a long tradition of climbers leaving practical jokes for their successors, such as whisky bottles filled with cold tea. (What

larks.) An 11-year-old Siberian boy produced mobile phone footage showing him and his friends being terrorised by a yeti. But the figure looked remarkably like a man in a gorilla suit, and the main consequence was that the boys got into trouble with their parents for swearing.

In the end, the nearest Hoyland himself comes to encountering the yeti is a trip up Everest with Brian Blessed: the actor's girth leads the sherpas to christen him 'the Abdominal Snowman'. Really this book is as much about belief as it is about the yeti. It kept reminding me of *Selling Hitler*, Robert Harris's brilliant account of the Hitler diaries saga. Fundamentally, people believe in fakes because they want to believe in them. That's precisely the conclusion Hoyland reaches about Bernard Heuvelmans's faith in the Minnesota Iceman. And it explains the success of the US TV series *Finding Bigfoot*, which after nine series has attracted the nickname *Not Finding Bigfoot*. The broadcasters 'don't want you to actually find it', a producer tells Hoyland. 'They want to keep the viewers for another season.'

A sobering tale

Susie Boyt

The Recovering: Intoxication and its Aftermath

by Leslie Jamison
Granta, £20, pp. 543

The Recovering by Leslie Jamison, novelist, columnist, bestselling essayist and assistant professor at Columbia University, makes for bracing reading. Clever, bold, earnest and sometimes maddening, it is chiefly an account of the author's alcohol addiction and the various stages of her recovery. It is also an examination of the lives and works, in so far as they pertain to drugs and alcohol, of 'addicts of extraordinary talent', such as Jean Rhys, John Berryman, Billie Holiday and David Foster Wallace.

The book is an investigation of how Alcoholics Anonymous operates, its strengths and challenges, the leanings of its founders and a roll call of some of its members who've touched the author's life. It is the story of a three-year romance between the author and her hard-to-fathom love interest 'Dave', a man who takes so long to mix a cocktail that you wonder if you might have a drink while waiting for your drink.

It is an exploration of self-harm and anorexia, the drive to score and whittle away skin and flesh, as a response to the human need to create visible proof of our suffering. It contains an inspiring aside about prayer, a defence of clichés — for what is more hackneyed and unoriginal than a knee-jerk disdain for clichés? — and as compelling

an account of a bakery store dispute over Thanksgiving turkey-shaped biscuits as you're ever likely to read.

It looks briefly at what drink does to the issue of sexual consent. It also asks how gender affects the way addiction is viewed, and how the 'mythic male drunk manages a thrilling abandon' — while his female equivalent is more likely to be seen as guilty of 'failing at care'. And it looks at race, asking what makes people see one addict as vulnerable and another as dangerous?

Perhaps, more than anything, *The Recovering* is a book that seeks to establish what, for an artist, is the most valid alternative to suffering in style. Can inner resources, calm and sobriety really compete with despair and disarray when it comes to creating memorable narratives and characters, when it comes to living days of maximum life? Is it important that stories about getting better are as enthralling as stories of wreckage? It is important to Jamison.

She writes wonderfully well about the bad old days, beginning with the very early drinking when she felt 'giddy from a sense of trespass'. You feel for her and wince and shake your head, and you laugh. 'My first boyfriend: he liked to get high. He liked to get the cat high.... He came to a family meal fully wired on speed. "SO talkative!" said

my grandma, deeply smitten.' One evening, at the end of a party, a tiny drunk poet hops out of the cupboard in Jamison's hall, just like that.

She spends her own insomniac nights driving 40 miles east to the biggest truck stop in the world, with a 50-ft buffet and showers and a chapel and a dentist, where she sits with black coffee, scribbling 'character-driven dialogue'. She loves to picture Raymond Carver amid

hi-jinks and love triangles, petty theft and seductions, ash falling unnoticed from the tip of his cigarette, as he sat engrossed at his typewriter, riding the comet's tail of a bender into its ruthless wisdom.

Is that not living?

Jamison writes honestly and with good cheer about how being adept at anecdotalising your despair may threaten the humility and sincerity necessary for the sort of recovery set forward by Alcoholics Anonymous. As a reader, you are sort of on your honour not to prefer the sections of the book that deal with disaster to those that treat repair. She knows it's not easy.

There is little about Jamison's childhood in this book, unusual in a memoir, but we learn that she was brought up to worship 'excellence, enchantment, superlative everything'. She seems happier,

drunk or sober, in an environment which is a bit amazing, the landscape set-directed, saturated, memorable, extraordinary... Walt Whitman's poetry kept coming to mind as I read, as one answer to a desire for brimming, sharply-defined, sublime experience, which brings with it no harm.

I struggled with Jamison's literary criticism on occasion, for although painstaking it can be narrow in its focus here. I didn't love being told, by way of introduction, that Berryman's unforgettable and wildly innovative poems *The Dream Songs* conjure 'a landscape full of booze and tortured knowledge'; nor that the stately and magnificent *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a novel in which Jean Rhys's 'core wounds, alienation and abandonment' are found 'in the imagined life of someone else'. No novelist wants to be read like that. Describing Henry James as an author 'who seemed mainly interested in what his characters thought about feelings' seems verging on the irresponsible. Jamison also hits the nail on the thumb referring to Judy Garland's 'heroin habit' — one of the few problems the gallant Garland didn't have.

Still, *The Recovering* is an impressive work: difficult, strong and strange, both comprehensive and impressionistic, with much to say about how we live, how we yearn and how we might do both differently.

The Sunday Times No.1 Bestseller

'Don't hold an opinion about this book if you have not read it'

EVENING STANDARD

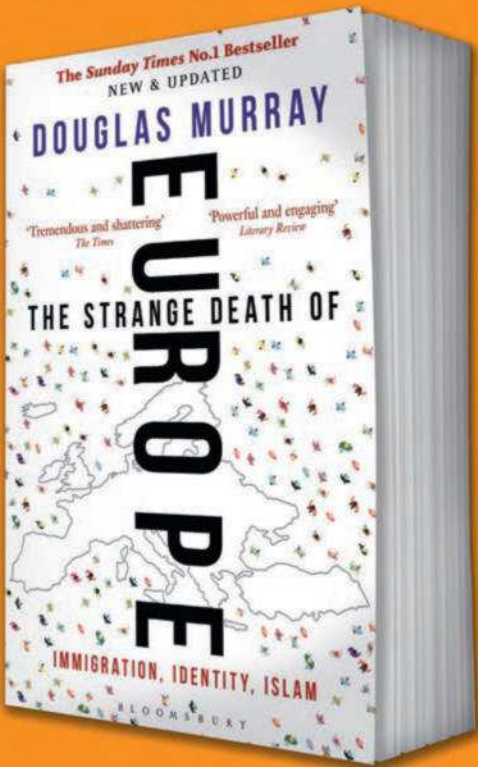
'Breathtakingly gripping'
STANDPOINT

'Hard to refute'
DAILY TELEGRAPH

'Disagree passionately if you will, but you won't regret reading it'
LITERARY REVIEW

'Deeply humane'
ENTERTAINMENT FOCUS

'Tremendous and shattering'
THE TIMES





*Johnson has a plate of food sent to him behind a screen at his publisher's office.
Painting by Henry Wallis*

Lessons from the Great Cham Frances Wilson

The World in Thirty-Eight Chapters, or Dr Johnson's Guide to Life

by Henry Hitchings

Macmillan, £16.99, pp. 354

The most irritating of recent publishing trends must be the literary self-help guide, and Henry Hitchings's contribution to the genre will join a shelf now groaning with accounts of how Proust can change your life, how Adam Smith can change your life, what W.H. Auden can do for you, what Montaigne can tell us about how to live, what Tolstoy can teach us in troubled times, and a whole heap of nonsense about what Jane Austen has to say on the subjects of friendships, dating and getting married. The formula is simple: the workings of a vast and complex mind (the mind of Dr Johnson, said Boswell, resembled 'the Coliseum at Rome') are boiled down and served up, in bite-sized chunks, for a public assumed to no longer understand the purpose of literature, or how to read.

That said, Dr Johnson lends himself well to the business of moral instruction because moral instruction was his business. He was, as Samuel Beckett put it, a 'wit and wisdom machine', whose 'death', wrote Thomas Hobhouse in his elegy on the Great Cham, 'shall teach the world to live'. Johnson's teachings were once collected in books of

aphorisms and Table Talk, and can now be found on fridge magnets: my own Hotpoint reminds me that 'The man who is tired of London is tired of life'; 'A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner upon his table, than when his wife talks Greek'; and wine 'makes a man mistake thoughts for words'. Johnsonian erudition even extends to cucumbers, which 'should be well sliced, and dressed with pepper and vinegar, and then thrown out'.

What makes Johnson's righteousness bearable is the fact that nothing he read himself — and he devoured more or less every word ever written — was able to guide him through the problems of his own life. Half-blind and wracked with self-

*Johnson ate his dinner in total silence,
with his eyes riveted to the plate and
sweat pouring from his brow*

disgust, Johnson was consumed by horrors: of annihilation, of madness, of destitution — what Beckett described as 'the whole mental monster-ridden swamp'.

Hitchings is aware of the pitfalls in suggesting that 'Sam', as he calls him, might prove a contemporary role model. Were Johnson around today, Hitchings suggests, his 'Instagram feed would be wack.... Although his Twitter might deliver a bit more sizzle, he'd be an infrequent tweeter, what with his lethargy and dejection.' Added to which social embarrassments, he apparently laughed like a rhinoceros, collected orange peel in his coat pocket,

suffered from Tourette's and had appalling table manners. Johnson ate his dinner, as Boswell recorded, in total silence, with his eyes riveted to the plate, the veins of his forehead pulsating and sweat pouring from his brow. Plus he suffered from a form of OCD which required him, when entering or leaving a room full of people, to swing his feet and stretch his arms 'as if', an observer noted, 'trying to form a triangle or some geometrical figure'. And yet, insists Hitchings, Johnson still has 'a lot to say to us', even if simply to demonstrate how not to act or think — a fresh interpretation of the role of an instructional leader.

Sir Joshua Reynolds described Johnson as 'brushing' away from the minds of others 'a great deal of rubbish', and if we similarly brush away Hitchings's self-help framework and the references to Sam's imagined responses to Facebook ('he would have seen it as a space for vanity and self-deception'), and the new meaning of the word 'network', we will find here a celebration and elucidation of Dr Johnson

by a scholar who is Johnsonian to his bone marrow.

Each of these 38 chapters contains a leisurely, free-wheeling essay conforming to Johnson's definition of the essay form as 'a loose sally of the mind'. In sentences which go on, as Johnson said of Oliver Goldsmith's conversation, without knowing where they are going to get off, Hitchings sallies through Johnson's thoughts on clubs, charity, love, loss, life's brevity and literature's bluestockings.

On one page, for example, Hitchings wanders from our need to talk about the weather (a habit Johnson described as the 'haste to tell each other what each must already know'), to the way in which certain men now talk about their cars, to Johnson's definition of 'rapport', to what Freud meant by 'rapport', to thoughts about Jonathan Swift who, Johnson believed, 'wasted his life in discontent', and into a comparison 'between Sam's ideas and those of Confucius'.

Hitchings similarly sallies around Sam's relationships with the poet-murderer Richard Savage and the long-suffering hostess Hester Thrale, his understanding of 'genius', and the art of biography. 'The biographer's subject,' Hitchings says, 'is not just some symptom of the past; the texture of his or her existence must be palpable', and the texture of Johnson's wracked existence is felt here on every page.

What would Sam himself have made of this mixed bag? One of his aphorisms comes to mind: 'We see little, and form an opinion; we see more, and change it'.

A riot of in-jokes

James Bradley

Their Brilliant Careers: The Fantastic Lives of Sixteen Extraordinary Australian Writers

by Ryan O'Neill

Lightning Books, £14.99, pp. 274

Almost 120 years ago, the Australian writer Henry Lawson offered some counsel to those who came after him, writing that his

advice to any young Australian writer whose talents have been recognised would be to go steerage, stow away, swim and seek London, Yankeeland or Timbucktoo rather than stay in Australia till his genius turn to gall or beer. Or failing this — and still in the interests of human nature and literature — to study elementary anatomy, especially as applies to the cranium, and then shoot himself carefully with the aid of a looking-glass.

Lawson's words don't provide the epigraph to Ryan O'Neill's blackly hilarious and structurally audacious debut novel, *Their Brilliant Careers*, although his bleak assessment of the prospects for anyone foolish enough to try to eke out a literary career in Australia certainly informs it at almost every level.

The Winner of Australia's Prime Minister's award for fiction, *Their Brilliant Careers* is composed of 16 capsule biographies of Australian writers, together with a foreword and an extended afterword by the book's author. The only catch is that the writers are all invented, while the Ryan O'Neill responsible for the book is not Ryan O'Neill, celebrated short story writer, but Ryan O'Neill, unsuccessful and embittered literary historian who wrote the overlooked history of the Australian short story, *Ordinary People Doing Everyday Things in Commonplace Settings*, and the seminal *Sacred Kangaroos: Fifty Overrated Australian Novels*, as well as one sadly neglected collection of short fiction, *The Weight of a Human Heart* (this last one is real, and was published in the UK in 2012).

The writers covered are nothing if not various. At one end of the spectrum there is the odious body-builder, fascist and suspected murderer, Rand Washington, author of the *Cor Saga*, a series of explicitly racist pulp novels set on a planet on which a 'savage, untrustworthy, genetically inferior tribe of evil blacks' have wrested power from their white masters. At the other, there are avowedly experimental writers, such as Arthur ruhrA, famous for writing a 734-page satire of Parisian literary life that does not use the letter 'c' at any point in its pages. And scattered between them are a rogue's gallery of luckless liars and drunks and suicides, all ruined by the demands of the literary life.

For anybody with even a passing knowl-

edge of Australian literature and literary culture the book is a riot of allusions and in-jokes. There is Sydney Steele, drowning after hurling himself from the Manly ferry in late 1945, thereby recapitulating the death of the journalist Joe Lynch, which served as the inspiration for Kenneth Slessor's magnificent poem 'Five Bells'. There is a book of short stories which borrows its title, *Ultima Thule*, from the third and most harrowing of Henry Handel Richardson's extraordinary trilogy, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*; or Addison Tiller, 'the Chekhov of Coolabah', an amalgam of Henry Lawson and Steele Rudd, famous for his bush ballads, who never left Sydney. Even the book's

To achieve international success, Australian novelists must strip their work of any hint of Australianness

title is a play on the title of Miles Franklin's most famous novel, *My Brilliant Career* (an association that is deepened by the hovering presence of that book's less-celebrated sequel, *My Career Goes Bung*).

While these allusions grant the novel an added layer of pleasure, they are far from its point. Instead, it interrogates a series of questions about authorship, interweaving the stories of writers such as the systematic plagiarist, Frederick Stafford, author of such works as *Odysseus* and *The Sun Comes Up Too*, and the Gordon Lish-like editor, Robert Bush, who so extensively revises many works they are almost unrecognisable. And, as the lives documented overlap and intertwine (and the bodies begin to mount up), another story begins to emerge

The Summer Temp

Big as Canada –
where he'd worked the railroads –
Jesus hair and beard,
gum-soled shoes and jumbo cords,
hands the size of stranglers
in black and white films, perfect
for dealing with caretakers
and roofing. He kept on
how everything was bigger over there:
cranes, hinges, bathrooms.
We smirked at his buckskin toolbag,
his chisels as chisels should be.
One day I'll get out of Stoke,
I told him, do something different.
I had dreams once, kiddo.

— Philip Hancock

— one involving not just O'Neill and his late wife, Rachel Deverall, but also a mysterious book containing the key to all literatures and O'Neill's new collaborator and sometime alibi, Anne Zoellner.

In this the book gestures explicitly towards Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, with O'Neill's fictional namesake playing the part of a cut-price Kinbote. Yet it also registers a larger interest in the machinery of literary celebrity, and more particularly its capriciousness. As Lawson understood, there may be second and even third acts in Australian literary lives (especially Rand Washington's), but there are seldom happy endings.

If the book has a flaw, it's that its satire is almost exclusively backward-looking. Certainly the version of Australian literature O'Neill conjures feels very much of a historical moment, in which the notion of Australian literature was intimately entwined with the idea of Australia itself, and the concerns and anxieties it attended to were those of its European population (it seems significant the book's imaginary writers are almost uniformly white, and the presence of Aboriginal culture is largely felt as an absence).

There is an irony here in the fact that O'Neill himself is so obviously and eloquently a creature of the digital age, as at home on Twitter as he is between the covers of a book. More importantly, though, the novel's decision to turn its considerable firepower on the targets of the past means it fails to grapple with the fact the technological transformation of the cultural landscape has not made things easier for Australian writers, or done much to alter Lawson's bleak assessment of the status quo. It might be easier for a young writer to place an article in *The New Yorker*, but international success as a novelist almost invariably requires Australian writers to strip their work of any suggestion of Australianness. While Australian society more generally has rushed to embrace the globalised monoculture of Netflix and Amazon, cheerfully collaborating in its own colonisation, Australian writers remain awkward outsiders in the global cultural marketplace, unloved at home, unwanted abroad, neither similar enough to pass easily nor different enough to be exotic.

That O'Neill has not just chosen not to do this but to amplify and interrogate Australian life and culture is to be celebrated. Yet it would be a mistake to see in *Their Brilliant Careers* anything as simplistic as a defence or celebration of Australian literature. Instead, what it offers is something strange and often wonderful, a wildly inventive and formally dazzling reworking of both the tropes and traditions of Australian literature, and by extension Australian culture more generally.

High art

Adam Begley explains how the world was turned upside down by the revelation of aerial perspectives

To look at ourselves from afar,' Julian Barnes wrote in *Levels of Life*, 'to make the subjective suddenly objective: this gives us a psychic shock.' The context of Barnes's remark is the 100-year span in which aerial photography evolved from its 19th-century birth in the wicker cradle of a gas balloon to the miraculous moment in 1968 when an astronaut aboard Apollo 8 took the photograph known as 'Earthrise': the darling blue ball of planet Earth rising up over the arid, inhospitable surface of the moon. And all around our little blue globe, darkness. 'Earthrise' administered a psychic shock by providing ocular proof of our true position in the universe: insignificant, precarious, lost in the expanding emptiness of space.

All those requiring further proof should make their way to the Towner Art Gallery in Eastbourne, where an exhibition called *At Altitude* explores with incongruous calm both the aftershocks of 'Earthrise' and the rumblings that preceded it.

In the fourth and smallest room of the show, inside a Perspex cube on a plinth, a thick little volume is open to one of the earliest aerial drawings, made from a balloon basket. The author and artist is Thomas Baldwin and the book is *Airopaidia: Containing the Narrative of a Balloon Excursion from Chester, the eighth of September, 1785*. An exhaustive account of a single ascent, Baldwin's 400-page tome is an amazement (though more so online, at archive.org, where it can be admired page by page, than as a teaser at the Towner). Writing about himself in the third person (the subjective suddenly objective), Baldwin luxuriates in the aesthetic stimulation of the aerial perspective: 'The Imagination itself was more than gratified; it was overwhelmed.' His enthusiasm — 'He tried his Voice, and

shouted for Joy' — doesn't prevent him from making accurate and chilling observations: 'His Voice was unknown to himself, shrill and feeble. There was no Echo.'

Keeping Baldwin company is an installation, complete with old-fashioned projector and loop of celluloid, of Tacita Dean's short film, *A Bag of Air* (1995). The artist ascends in a hot-air balloon to fill a large clear plastic bag with air from the ether, a happy absurdity partially explained by a dreamy voice-over offering alchemic instructions for the preparation of an elixir 'capable of treating all disharmonies in the body and the soul'. At the start of the film we see the black

Apollo 8's 'Earthrise' delivered a psychic shock, providing ocular proof of our true position in the universe

shadow of the balloon — another bag of air — as it moves across the ground below; at the end the inflated plastic bag is held up against the clear blue sky. The contrast between these two arresting images suggests that Dean, whose recent work is currently on view at the Royal Academy in London, has distilled the essence of terrestrial and celestial, body and soul.

The intermittent roar of the propane burner on Dean's balloon can be heard next door, an appropriate soundtrack for a dozen artworks all keyed to aerial perspective. Simon Faithfull's *30Km* (2003), a 32-minute video projected downward from the ceiling on to a circular patch in the centre of the floor, begins as a selfie, the artist's arms framing his face as he reaches upward, attaching the camera to a weather balloon, and ends as an abstract wheel of colour as the twirling balloon rises up through the thinning atmosphere. Along the way we get a bird's-eye view of the south coast of

England and an angel's-eye view of amorphous heavens. The Towner has helpfully constructed a viewing platform, accessed by stairs, so that the gallery-goer may see *30Km*, and indeed the rest of the works in the room, from a lofty perspective: some six feet above floor level.

Tucked in a corner on the floor by the stairs is a small black video monitor, with a pair of headphones hanging on the wall nearby. On the screen is Charles and Ray Eames's famous nine-minute film, *Powers of Ten* (1977), which widens then narrows perspective exponentially. We start by hovering a metre above a couple picnicking in a lakeside park in Chicago and zoom out until we're a hundred million light years from Earth — 'the limit of our vision', intones the narrator. The black screen is flecked with a few white pinpricks, and the narrator's gung-ho American voice is tinged with awe: 'This lonely scene, the galaxies like dust, is what most of space looks like. This emptiness is normal; the richness of our own neighbourhood is the exception.' The Eames film pushes the 'Earthrise' perspective to its logical conclusion: we see that our solar system is an insignificant speck in a galaxy that is itself a tiny mote floating in what Milton calls 'the emptier waste' of deep space. After zooming in at an accelerated pace, the film swaps telescope for microscope, taking a journey into the cells of the body to discover at the subatomic level 'a vast inner space', an emptiness within to match the emptiness without.

The mind reels. But here we are, still in Eastbourne, earthbound despite the artwork on display. What have we learned from our brief transit? That up and down, like in and out, are meaningless terms once you've escaped the grip of gravity — what counts is near and far. We associate altitude with sol-



The earliest aerial drawing, made from a balloon basket, by Thomas Baldwin, 1785, left, and Apollo 8's 'Earthrise', right, 50 years old

itude and freedom. Liberated by flight, we look down and see our lives mapped out on the surface of the planet, we see 'the richness of our own neighbourhood'. A marvelous early photo taken from a balloon by Percival Spencer shows a crowd at Wolverhampton gathered around the boundary of what looks like a cricket pitch for some sort of ceremony — the mystery of the image is part of its appeal: what are those wacky humans up to?

The great French portrait photographer Nadar claimed credit for taking the first aerial photograph, from a leaky balloon some

80 yards above a village on the outskirts of Paris, early one cold autumn morning in 1858. This success did not lead Nadar down a new career path. The possibility of making

Up and down, like in and out, are meaningless once you've escaped gravity — what matters is near or far

art out of the view from the heavens seems not to have occurred to him. He did take out a patent on a 'new system of aerostatic photography', but the impulse was purely mercenary. He was thinking about the feasibility

of conducting land surveys, and also about military reconnaissance.

In the gallery next to *At Altitude*, a stark reminder of the other benefits of combining flight and photography: Omar Fast's *5000 Feet is the Best* (2011), a grim 30-minute film about drone warfare. Officers at a command centre near Las Vegas, Nevada, fly Predator drones over faraway countries, survey the landscape with minute and pitiless precision, and rain death from above.

At Altitude is at the Towner Art Gallery until 30 September.

Theatre

The Friel-bad factor

Lloyd Evans

Translations

Olivier Theatre, in rep until 11 August

Tartuffe

Theatre Royal Haymarket, until 28 August

The National has made its largest stage available to one of the nation's smallest talents. If Brian Friel had been born in Dorset rather than in Co. Tyrone he'd have enjoyed an unremarkable career writing episodes of *The Archers* with the odd stint on *Emmerdale*. He's a champion witterer whose plays lack suspense, pace, depth or spectacle. His characters are constantly and infuriatingly nice to each other. Occasionally they rise to mild irascibility, or a spot of vituperative teasing, but that's about it. When he needs a crisis he turns to external sources, to destiny or to happenstance, and his plays often end with dreadful sufferings being visited on russet-faced, cheeky-chappy Irish folk by crool, crool fate.

Translations at the Olivier is set in Co. Donegal in the 1830s where the peasantry

Brian Friel is a tour-guide playwright who sees every human being in terms of their nationality

can barely scratch a living from the rocky soil. Yet they're steeped in the classics having learned their Latin and Greek thoroughly at the local 'hedge school' — an informal system of education that was tolerated but not condoned by the authorities. According to Friel, the standards of teaching were world-class. The scruffy bumpkins speaking in Nornoirish accents are able to quote Homer and Aeschylus from memory. They hold earnest discussions about the etymologies of 'acquiescent' and 'theodolite'. For fun, the schoolmaster improvises a Latin ode, in emulation of Ovid, on the theme of the evening star. A young crofter, uncertain which seeds to plant, consults an ancient milk-dewed tramp who keeps a copy of Virgil's *Georgics* (a treatise on agriculture) secreted in his tattered pockets.

The peace of this high-minded academy is broken by two British army officers who arrive with orders to anglicise the local place names and to create a map of Ireland that everyone in the empire can understand. The proud Irish resist this act of vandalism and the evil British threaten them with reprisals. And therein lies the secret of Friel's popularity. He's a tour-guide playwright who sees every human being in terms of their nationality and every nationality in terms of its most facile attributes. The Irish are wise, humane, lit-

erate and charming. The Brits are deceitful fascists who ooze condescension while plotting the destruction of livestock and farmhouses. Friel's reductive tendencies apply to the sexes as well. His men are credible and well-rounded creatures but his females belong to a different breed — limited, eccentric, unpredictable. On *Planet Friel*, a woman is generally to be found combing her hair, flirting with a bachelor or having hysterics. The purpose of the play is to indulge in a spot of Brit-bashing while making a valid historical point. The standardisation of Celtic place names was the start of a process that led to the extirpation of Irish as a living tongue. A bad thing, in many ways, but Ireland's culture, and its writers in particular, benefitted enormously from access to the rest of the world. Without English, James Joyce and his brethren of wordsmiths would have remained unknown scribblers clinging to a rainswept bog on the north-west fringes of Europe. As would Brian Friel.

Christopher Hampton's slick, handsome version of *Tartuffe* is presented in both English and French. The actors rattle through the text at lightning speed and one's eyeballs have to keep whizzing from the stage to the train announcement boards bearing the translation. The show reveals that there are two Molières. First, the witty creator of ingenious yarns about greed, self-delusion and lust. Second, the posturing moralist who keeps underlining the quirks of human nature revealed by his plays. Unlike Chaucer, he won't let the story speak for itself. And his insights are often banal. Someone in *Tartuffe* points out that a two-faced character is like a loudmouthed soldier whose tales of bravery conceal his cowardice. OK, so Molière hasn't heard of Falstaff. Nor is he aware of the *Miles Gloriosus* ('Boastful Centurion') of the Roman age. A genius whose profundities turn out to be platitudes may not be a genius after all.

The production, directed by Gerald Garutti, sets the action in Los Angeles where *Tartuffe* is a fake mystic who harasses women on the side. That makes sense. But why are these rich, glamorous Californians so sexually inhibited? And what's the source of their reverence for God, for matrimony, and for displays of public virtue? The pay-off comes at the end when a presidential emissary shows up. Cue a passage of Trump-bashing satire. But because Trump is such an obvious target he's also a tricky one. The bar is sky-high. To be any good, a Trump gag has to be seriously good. These are only so-so.

On press night the show struck a chord and the crowd loved it. A note to the producers. We play-goers are grown-ups. We've read history. Why not set Molière in Molière's age? We could understand it. Really, we could.

Musicals

Darkness visible

Richard Bratby

Oklahoma!

Grange Park Opera, in rep until 7 July

John Wilson Orchestra

Snape Maltings

Oh, what a beautiful morning! In Jo Davies's production of *Oklahoma!* the audience spends the overture staring at the side of a barn. Then, as birdsong rises from the orchestra, corrugated-iron doors slide open on a dustbowl farm of the 1930s. Aunt Eller (Claire Moore) is fixing a tractor, and a wind pump spins slowly against an orange dawn sky. It's mildly surreal: the light falls as if in one of those New Deal-era western landscape paintings, with a jagged, David Smith-like sculpture of pitchforks and shovels serving as a tree. And then, with throwaway ease, Dex Lee as Curly launches into that greatest of all Broadway opening numbers.

Davies catches Rodgers and Hammerstein's surge of hope on the upswing, and rides it in a single sweep from beginning to end. Bruno Poet's lighting and Andrew Wright's boisterous, rough-cut choreography are part of a single conception, one that manages to explore some remarkably sinister places without upsetting the show's basic optimism. The cast is drawn primarily from

Against the general cheerful sense of sap rising, this production has an unsettling undertow of anxiety

musical theatre, and whatever the loss in purely vocal thrills (there's light amplification, though everyone here can hold a tune, and as Laurey, Katie Hall's top notes tingle) they make hay with the spoken dialogue.

So the comedy of the screwball love triangle — Annie (Natasha Cotttriall), Will (Louis Gaunt) and Ali Hakim (Steven Serlin) — bubbles up naturally from the characterisation. Cotttriall, in particular, is a delightfully likeable Annie with something serious to say, far from the usual calf-eyed ditz. Lee's sunny charisma as Curly is a necessary foil for Hall's Laurey — a young woman at snapping point, whose pigtailed self-possession shatters more than once into outright fury. Like I said, this is an *Oklahoma!* that isn't afraid to go dark. Curly taunts Jud Fry (Phillip Rhodes) for living in a hole, but one of the many inspired elements of Francis O'Connor's designs is to keep the whole thing inside that barn. The open prairie is visible in the distance, but everyone here is living in the hole of social convention.

Rhodes, meanwhile, has an eerie ability to draw silence in around him. He's vulnerable as much as menacing, and his Jud could

JEREMY ANNEAR



SOFTONE, 2018

oil on canvas 75 x 60 cms 29½ x 23½ ins

Exhibition 20 June – 13 July

Jeremy Annear is unquestionably a Modernist. It's the way he has seen his art, and the way that others have described him through and through. Often, critical analysis has presented this Modernism as a sort of inheritance, for Annear has long been regarded as a dominant force of the generation of abstract painters following the St Ives heydays of the 1950s. Decades on, his own paintings – in all their unique handwriting and authorship – do indeed admit their lineage, at times tempting you into seeing echoes, of language or palette, of Braque, say, or Nicholson.

Sandy Mallet

Author and art historian

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28 Cork Street, London W1S 3NG Tel: +44 (0)20 7437 5545 info@messums.com www.messums.com

be the bullied kid brother of *Carousel*'s Billy Bigelow. It was Agnes de Mille who first spotted that *Oklahoma!*'s narrative engine is sexual frustration, and against the general cheerful sense of sap rising this production has an unsettling undertow of anxiety. I've not seen Laurey's dream-ballet go quite so full-on Freudian, and when Laurey and Curly finally kiss — and boy, do they kiss — a thunderstorm is not far behind.

As to the question (really, still?) of whether *Oklahoma!* belongs in an opera house, I can't think of a better answer than the playing of the BBC Concert Orchestra under Richard Balcombe. No straight theatre would ever field a 50-piece orchestra, yet the timbre of a symphonic string section was vital to Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway revolution. Michael Tanner once expressed surprise at the enthusiasm with which orchestras play this music. I defer to his judgment on most operatic matters, but I suspect he hasn't played in one of these shows and felt for himself how Robert Russell Bennett's orchestrations sing off the page. Orchestras adore music that makes them sound good, and the BBC players delivered it with a smile, if not quite a snap.

But then, there's only one conductor in

*JWO might be the one orchestra
that can still make West Side Story
feel dangerous*

the UK who can guarantee that, and he was at the Aldeburgh Festival for an all-Bernstein gala. Last year I called the John Wilson Orchestra the greatest show on earth, and from the raucous, taxi-horn opening blast of 'New York, New York' to the encore ('Some Other Time' — any other conductor would have yawned and reached for 'Make Our Garden Grow') nothing I heard at Aldeburgh made me revise that opinion. Wilson understands that it's all about the orchestrations. Clarinets wriggled, squealing, through 'Wrong Note Rag', and as Kim Criswell gave a vocal shimmy in 'I Am Easily Assimilated', a string chord fanned out behind her, each line delicately shaded. The JWO never, ever, sounds like classical stiffness condescending to swing. The brass and reeds are street fighters: this might be the one orchestra that can still make *West Side Story* feel dangerous.

Wilson picks his singers with the same flair. Nadim Naaman floated the melody of 'Spring Will Come Again', later recycled as part of the *Chichester Psalms*. And in booking Kim Criswell and Louise Alder (who seems, happily, to be everywhere this summer) Wilson appeared, cheekily, to be setting up an 18th-century-style battle of the divas. But how to choose between Alder, gleefully peeling out diamond-cut coloratura in 'Glitter and Be Gay', or Criswell, unleashing her bulletproof pizzazz on 'I Can Cook Too' while Wilson's heroes sizzled behind her? 'I'm cookin' with gas,' she growled. You said it, lady.



A grim and impoverished place: Royal Opera's new Lohengrin

Opera Slippery slope Michael Tanner

Der fliegende Holländer
Longborough Festival Opera

Lohengrin
Royal Opera House, until 1 July

Longborough Festival Opera, refuge for British Wagnerians fleeing unidiomatic musical performances and idiotically irrelevant and insulting productions, has rounded off its Wagner canon with its first *Der fliegende Holländer*. Next year a new production of the *Ring* begins, so presumably the small stage is considered inappropriate for the three Wagner dramas with indispensably large choruses. Not that *Holländer* can do without a chorus in Act Three, and very impressive it is in this production by Thomas Guthrie, but we only saw the townsfolk, and I think the Dutchman's crew was pre-recorded, though perfectly synchronised. The conducting was, as always, in the sure and inspired hands of Anthony Negus, and the orchestra, after some blips in the Overture, was superb.

Even so, Act One took time to settle down. The dopey Steersman was delightfully

sung by William Wallace, and Simon Thorpe as the Dutchman produced a decent account of his monologue, Wagner's first wholly characteristic utterance. But the odd scene fell flat, those that were comically intended but not usually comically effective, such as the Dutchman's legato lines as he senses the hope of redemption, while Daland, here in gravelly voice, gloats over the prospective wealth he is being offered. Everything perked up when we moved to Act Two — no scenery, by the way, just threatening clouds — and Senta's ballad, sung with superb incisiveness and intensity by Kirstin Sharpin. The climactic duet between her and the Dutchman — she determined to sacrifice herself for him 'whoever he may be', he incredulous but half-believing that he has found 'the Angel' he has so long sought — was marvellous, magnetic for us as for them.

As I've suggested, the prolonged songfest of the townspeople and their battle with the Dutchman's crew was exciting, and the dénouement — Wagner seems in a hurry to get it over with — urgent. Erik's pleading aria, well sung by an indisposed Jonathan Stoughton, was integrated into the action, and the last minutes were thrilling, though it remained, as it usually does, obscure about what happens to Senta and how.

The next evening the Royal Opera staged its first new *Lohengrin* for 41 years, and one can only hope that the next Swan

comes along sooner than that. David Alden, the director of this new one, has made sure that we are, and remain, dispirited throughout what Wagner foolishly called 'a romantic opera'. It's not romantic this time round: at curtain up we see several large buildings on the slant, as if things are slipping away — and certainly most of the usual pleasures of *Lohengrin* rapidly do.

We're in a totalitarian regime of the 1940s or 1950s, no colours, except for the red cloak with which King Heinrich fidgets insecurely most of the time, drawing attention away from what is relevant. This is a grim and impoverished place, with Telramund in shabby clothes, and Ortrud before an office desk in a stern black business suit — Wagner wrote to Liszt at the time: 'Her nature is politics. A male politician disgusts us, a female politician appals us.' They say, sing, things that, if we follow the surtitles or know the text well, will strike you as rubbish, as indeed will all of the action. Swan? Boat? Not a sign of them, only parting walls with Lohengrin clad in a pop idol's white suit. While it's clearly a police state, with many people brandishing rifles, Telramund does strangely have a sword to fight Lohengrin with, while Lohengrin has nothing at all, he just waves his arms with magic intent.

Andris Nelsons seems to me a less good Wagner conductor than he was when I first

heard him conduct *Lohengrin* in Birmingham. Mannerisms have crept in. The Prelude began almost inaudibly and swelled to a vulgar climax. Too often expression seemed plastered on from the outside, imposed rather than elicited. The wonderful melody that unfolds in the orchestra after the scene between Elsa and Ortrud in Act Two was pulled around so much as to be unrecognisable. Of course Wagner's orchestration in this opera is so astounding that it must be a temptation to dissect it.

Klaus Florian Vogt is the hero, or would be if this production allowed for one. No good arguing about Vogt, he will always divide opinion. When he sings softly, as in his first few phrases, he sounds as if he should go home to Aldeburgh. When he sings out he is impressive, but the alternation between the two is disconcerting. Jennifer Davis as Elsa made a big impression, quite rightly, after she emerged from a trapdoor in the floor to begin her defence. Charming to look at, radiant to hear, she is a star. The villains were less impressive, Christine Goerke a rather tame Ortrud to hear, though not to see, and Thomas J. Mayer as Telramund too much of a wimp. For all his prescribed fidgeting, Georg Zeppenfeld impressed as King Heinrich. The chorus was tremendous, if only their contributions had been in a worthier cause.

Television

Unintelligent design

James Walton

On Wednesday, BBC Four made an unexpectedly strong case that the human body is a bit rubbish. Our ill-designed spines, for example, guarantee that many of us will suffer from chronic back pain. Our joints wear out long before we do. Our skin even gets damaged by sunlight.

So what can be done about it? Obviously the answer is not much — but that didn't prevent *Can Science Make Me Perfect? With Alice Roberts* from pretending to give it a go.

The premise was that Roberts would draw on other, less incompetently constructed life forms to create an improved version of herself — the way she'd be if evolution hadn't cocked things up so badly. As befits someone whose name appears in programme titles, Roberts clearly relished her God-like role. Before long, she'd decided to give herself a chimpanzee's shorter, stiffer spine and an emu's shock-absorbing legs. Warming to her task (or possibly just getting carried away), she then opted for large revolving ears, eyes big enough to see in the dark and, to make childbirth easier, a kangaroo's pouch.

Once again, Roberts proved an appeal-

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ing presenter as well as a knowledgeable one and we certainly learned a lot about both human and non-human anatomy. For the more gloomy viewer, there were also plenty of reminders of how quickly nature loses interest in our welfare once we're past child-rearing age.

But of course a TV show needs a sturdy spine of its own — and here that relied on the usual television tricks. At the beginning, Roberts was summoned to the Science Museum to feign surprise when she was given her human-makeover mission — and to feign even more when she was asked for a physical model of her perfected self to exhibit there in three months' time. ('A physical model? Three months?' Roberts duly replied, doing her plucky best to sound completely blindsided.)

Luckily, though, she happened to know a bloke who could turn her thoughts into a 3-D computer representation; and another

*Emu legs and kangaroo pouches,
I think it's safe to predict, won't be
available on the NHS any time soon*

who could then build the required physical model that neither she nor we were allowed to see before the big reveal (although we did get the odd teasing glimpse in the manner of the Mystery Guest round in *A Question of Sport*).

Eventually, the new Alice was flourishingly unveiled — and seemed to prove two things. First, despite the programme's title, it wasn't science that had 'perfected' her, but her own imagination. (Emu legs and kangaroo pouches, I think it's safe to predict, won't be available on the NHS any time soon.) Second, while the new, improved Alice might have been able to hear better, give birth more easily and so on, she was also pretty unlikely to get a date.

Flowers, which ran all week on Channel 4, was thrillingly good to watch — but is, I now realise, extremely tricky to summarise. The show is routinely described as a 'dark comedy'. But that doesn't come close to capturing its exhilarating, unself-conscious originality. Or the constantly astonishing handbrake turns of tone in its combination of the Gothic, straight drama (often piercingly sad), almost straight sitcom (often very funny), art-house cinema, dream sequences and meditation on mental illness — all of which it does without ever losing coherence.

The *Flowers* of the title are a family living in a tumbledown cottage in the woods. Dad Maurice (Julian Barratt) is a children's author — hence, perhaps, that fairytale house — who in this second series emerges from the severe depression that nearly did for him in the first. Mum Deborah (Olivia Colman) has just written a book on what it was like to be married to him at the time, which her publishers have insisted on call-

ing *Living with the Devil*. Daughter Amy (Sophia Di Martino) is an avant-garde composer with mental troubles of her own and an ex-junkie vicar for a girlfriend. Son Donald (Daniel Rigby) has now abandoned his inventing career to become a plumber known (by himself, at least) as Mr Pipe Man.

But that's only for starters — because *Flowers* also features a large cast of supporting characters, most of whom are also unhappy in a variety of heightened but still convincing ways.

In the circumstances, the show's writer and director Will Sharpe could have been forgiven for simply revelling in the weirdness. Instead, he treats all concerned with a level of sympathy that borders on the tender and, however unhinged the action becomes (Sample line: 'Amy's disappeared with Shun's pervert girlfriend's bastard baby from Sweden'), a real sense of people doing their best — bad though that best can sometimes be.

And just in case there's any doubting the depth of Sharpe's talent, he also plays Maurice's Japanese illustrator, who regards the family much as we do: with a mixture of alarm, pity, slightly baffled admiration — and, in the end, even something approaching love.

Cinema

Sisters are doing it for themselves

Deborah Ross

Ocean's 8
U, Nationwide

Ocean's 8 is the all-female spin-off of the all-male *Ocean's* trilogy and it's a sop, with a third act that drags like nothing on earth. But its success — it earned an estimated \$41.5 million during its opening weekend, which is better than any of the male versions — shows the market isn't that bothered by content, which is equality of a kind. Women can now make dull formulaic franchise films too! Hurrah! We've arrived! And we can do this rubbish for ourselves now!

The film is a straight-up-and-down remake, where the gender swap may, in fact, be the best idea, possibly because it's the only idea. (The *Ghostbusters* remake did it first anyhow.) It does not subvert the heist-caper genre in any way but instead follows the formula slavishly. The film opens with Debbie Ocean (Sandra Bullock), sister of con man Danny Ocean, being released from prison after a five-year stretch with, I couldn't help but note, perfect hair and make-up. (I don't know what prison it was exactly, but it wasn't Holloway; I once visited someone there and she looked terrible.) Debbie has promised the parole officers that her criminal past is behind her and she just wants 'a simple life' and 'to live in the coun-

try and breathe fresh air'. But the moment she's out, she's back in the game, shoplifting in department stores, impersonating her way into a posh hotel room, and Assembling a Team for a Heist. (First rule of any heist film: Assemble a Team for a Heist.)

Her team includes her best friend (Cate Blanchett), a down-at-heel dress designer (Helena Bonham Carter, who plays Irish, for some unfathomable reason), a hacker (Rihanna, who barely says a thing), an ex-con-turned-suburban mom (Sarah Paulson), a jeweller (Mindy Kaling), a pick-pocket (Awkwafina) and, latterly, a vain actress (Anne Hathaway). (Hathaway's character coming on board is meant to be a surprise plot twist, but we always knew she was going to swap sides because we can all count to eight, right?) It's a killer cast and, to be fair, there is some appeal in just watching them all, even if they're horribly underused, as no character has a distinct personality. And the heist? It's the \$150 million Cartier necklace they're aiming to steal from the Met Gala Ball.

Directed by Gary Ross (*Pleasantville*, *Seabiscuit*, *The Hunger Games*), it is divided into your typical three acts: 1) plan the

*Women can now make dull formulaic
franchise films too! Hurrah!
We've arrived!*

heist; 2) perform the heist; 3) aftermath of the heist. The third act, which needs a better twist than supposing we can't count up to eight, certainly drags the most, but it's all just so flat, including the performances. Bullock simply remains steely throughout while Hathaway is the only one to show any animation. Thankfully, it's not noisy. There are no car chases or shoot-outs, but nothing has been put in their place, so it's never dramatic or exciting. There is the occasional decent joke, as when Debbie says: 'Somewhere out there an eight-year-old girl is dreaming of being a criminal. Let's do it for her.' But otherwise the script is entirely colourless.

This isn't knowing or witty or sly or self-aware and it doesn't have fun with stereotypes. At least *Ghostbusters*, as dull as that was, had a sexy dim secretary who was a man. This simply buys the formula, without ever questioning it. Plus there's a subplot, concerning Debbie's ex (played by Richard Armitage), that seems entirely unnecessary. None of the other women are fussing over boyfriends, which is welcome, so why Debbie? And it does fetishise everything women are assumed to be interested in. The clothes! The hair! The jewels! The brand names! Glimpses of Anna Wintour and the Kardashians!

Still, it does prove we can make this sort of rubbish for ourselves now, which is good, unless we should be doing something else entirely.

Radio Women's work Kate Chisholm

I don't know which day Rod Liddle travelled down from the northeast and found nothing but women's voices cluttering up Radio 4, as he wrote about in last week's magazine. But his description is not one I recognise. If anything we still hear too much from male commentators, male presenters, male writers, male comedians. In recent years, for instance, the gender-balance of contributors to the *Today* programme has improved from the 18 per cent of female guests just a decade ago, but there's still a long way to go before we need to apologise for wanting to hear more from women.

Very often they speak truth to power (because not in power themselves) as did Vera Brittain in her searing account of the impact of the first world war, *Testament of Youth*. She lost all the young people close to her, including her brother and fiancé, killed in terrible conditions (her brother had already been wounded in Flanders and went back only to be shot dead by a sniper in Italy): 'Everything that had hitherto made up my life had vanished.' She herself gave up the chance of an Oxford education

to become a nurse, helping the wounded on their return from the battlefields.

In *Edward Brittain and the Forgotten Front* (produced by Sarah Shebbeare), Allan Little travelled to Asiago in northern Italy to the spot where it is thought Brittain lost his life while British troops were fighting alongside Italians against the forces of Austria-Hungary. With him was Edward's niece, Shirley Williams, the veteran politician and outspoken advocate for women. Her mother Vera's life was shaped by what happened on that mountainside, says Williams; and when she died she asked that her ashes should be scattered in the small cemetery where Edward was buried. She was, says Williams, 'more than an Englishwoman', her heart always with her brother in Italy.

Vera and her friends were very young, and very idealistic, growing up in comfortable middle-class England, tennis parties in the summer, musical evenings in the winter listening to records by Caruso. When war was eventually proclaimed they were not frightened by what it presaged. On 3 August 1914 Vera wrote in her diary, 'Today has been far too exciting... one of the most thrilling I have lived through.' She was looking forward to 'Armageddon in Europe'.

She even persuaded her parents that Edward, their only son, should enlist. That's what makes *Testament of Youth* so poignant,

as Brittain exposes how their naivety was brutally crushed. The book became, says Williams, 'the voice of that depleted generation'.

Even sadder is the discovery that Edward possibly invited his death at the hands of the sniper, acting recklessly because he knew he was facing court-martial, accused of having homosexual relations. It was Vera who pursued the facts after suspecting that something was being withheld from the family. She then spent the rest of her life campaigning for peace.

Roy Williams's afternoon-drama series for Radio 4, *The Interrogation* (directed by Mary Peate), featuring DCI Max Matthews (Kenneth Cranham) and DS Sean Armitage (Alex Lanipekun), returned last week and is still available on catch-up. The format is so straightforward, just three distinct scenes, with just one or two characters apart from Max and Sean, but Williams is such a craftsman that each episode becomes compelling, the voices of his characters so believable they're hard to get out of your mind. Each drama begins with a monologue, usually from the perpetrator, but sometimes the victim, setting the scene, putting us in the picture.

In episode three, *Heather*, we get inside her head in the first three minutes as she reveals, simply and briskly, the key facts: her

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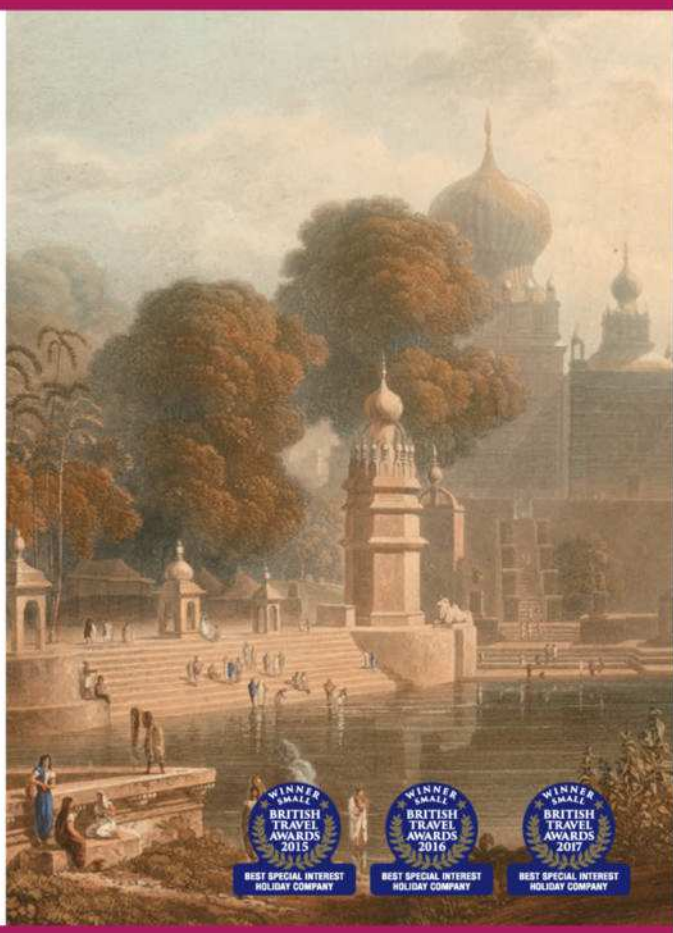
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little girl, her troubled relationship with the father, her time in prison. Then the drama switches to the interrogation itself, with Max and Sean criss-crossing questions to confuse and baffle and ultimately breakdown the suspect, working together as a team, each talking in telling phrases, not a word wasted.

'Why don't you tell us what this is about?' says Sean. 'Because I sense you want to. Something else is going on.'

'You're a bit out of your patch, Heather,' adds Max.

Naming is always important to them both, identifying, giving their interviewees the sense they are being listened to and heard, whether the guilty or the victim. In Heather's case she's angry about being black in a white person's world, about the callous reporting of a school tragedy in a 'poor' area, about being rehoused in a damp bedsit miles away from where she grew up.

'All you've given me is some gibberish about the election, and Donald Trump...,' an exasperated Max chips in.

But Heather's anger haunts, playing on the mind. What she says has echoes of Grenfell Tower. There's a subtext here. This may be a police procedural but it carries with it a weighty punch. Williams makes it sound so natural, as if putting that quickfire repartee on to the page is easy. He's helped by the spot-on timing of Cranham and Lanipekun

(this is the fourth series they've worked on together) and Jo Martin who plays Heather. But it's all in the writing — and not a moaning Minnie within earshot.

Exhibitions

Napoleon dynamite

Andrew Roberts

Napoleon: Strategist

Musée de l'Armée, Paris, until 22 July

The Musée de l'Armée at Les Invalides in Paris has a new exhibition that I believe to be the best and most extensive on the Emperor in three decades. Anyone interested in Napoleon Bonaparte, early 19th-century military history and strategy, the Grande Armée's campaigns from 1796 to 1815, monumental battle paintings, First Empire beaux-arts, uniforms, weaponry or cartography, has only until 22 July to visit the truly breathtaking *Napoleon: Strategist*.

On entering, you walk past the large busts of six of the seven great captains of history that Napoleon said he admired and wished to emulate: Alexander, Hannibal, Julius Caesar, Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne, Marshal de Saxe and Frederick the Great. For some

reason the seventh, the 1st Duke of Marlborough, is missing, though not for reasons of French chauvinism as this is a very even-handed exhibition, despite being held in the Valhalla of the French army, only yards away from the Emperor's tomb. (There is even Louis Philippe Crépin's enormous and magnificent 1805 painting 'Battle of Trafalgar'.)

The exhibition seeks to explain how, after seizing power in 1799, Napoleon melded his three roles of head of state, commander-in-chief and senior battlefield commander, and

It might well be 30 years before such a cornucopia of Napoleana is reassembled in one place

organised his armies both in peacetime and on campaign. There are huge contemporary maps, the highly advanced card-filing system pioneered by his chief of staff Marshal Alexandre Berthier, the coloured pins that were used to plot the movement of individual demi-brigades (regiments), and video reconstructions of campaigns such as that at Austerlitz in 1805, which together explain cogently the way Napoleon approached strategy-making.

Many of the exhibits, of course, come from the Musée de l'Armée's permanent collection — I counted four of Napoleon's bicorn hats, as well as the general's uniform

I don't get Johann Sebastian Bach. I mean, I get that he was good — no Mozart, sure, but definitely up there in anyone's top five 18th-century composers. But that's not enough. Bach must be revered as the One: the supreme and universal musical genius. When John Eliot Gardiner (back with Bach this weekend at the Barbican) celebrated the millennium by performing Bach's complete cantatas, it wasn't a cycle or a series but a 'pilgrimage', if you please. Playing Bach, we're told, requires profound selflessness — though if you've ever witnessed a solo violinist hijacking an orchestral concert to saw through all 15 tortured minutes of the D minor Chaconne, you might call it something else entirely. No: as *The Bluffer's Guide to Music* puts it, there's only one acceptable response — to adopt a posture of open-mouthed reverence and intone the words 'Ah... Bach.'

Well, you can say it, but what if you don't feel it? I'm not alone: the pianist Stephen Hough admitted a few years ago, to gasps of horrified disbelief, that he didn't feel a deep connection with Bach's music. Is that really so appalling? Bach worship is a relatively modern phenomenon: Beethoven rated Handel far higher, and for Haydn and

THE HECKLER

Johann Sebastian Bach



Detail of Cantata 'Es ist das Heil', BWV9

Mozart, old JSB wasn't even the greatest composer in his own family (the music of Bach's son Carl Philipp Emmanuel has suffered particularly unfairly from the cult of Dad). Meanwhile the man himself seems to have been an amiable curmudgeon, ploughing on with his job in his own old-fashioned way.

The music by Bach that speaks to me tends to date from the first half of his career, particularly his time in Cöthen in the early 1720s, where he enjoyed relative artistic freedom. The result is a great exuberant sunburst of creativity: the suites for solo cello, the Brandenburg Concertos, and the boisterous splendours of the orchestral suites. And then, in

1723, he accepted a church job in Leipzig. Game over: he churned out religious music on an industrial scale, and there's treasure there, for sure. But that's a lot of glum chorales, overwrought arias and Lutheran dogma to dig through first. Thou hast conquered, pale Galilean.

Bach's church music speaks of medieval certainties, and I can see why today, as we retreat from Enlightenment values, it might fill a spiritual gap. Bach, wrote the *Bluffer's Guide* back in 1971 (they wouldn't get away with it now), 'is adored by all intellectual virgins'. He wrote no operas, and died before the string quartet and symphony came of age: he's not interested in creating rounded human characters, or starting a conversation. It's the sound of an age that values earnestness over wit, and overbearing certainty above mischief and ambiguity. We get the music we deserve, and plenty of listeners would be glad to spend eternity with Bach's pious note-spinning. I'd rather share my desert island with Papageno, Susanna, Don Giovanni and Countess Almaviva. My loss, no doubt. At his best, Bach is magnificent. But please, stop telling us he's the universal composer, because there's no such thing.

— Richard Bratby



'The Battle of the Pyramids', 1798–9, by François-Louis-Joseph Watteau

he wore in his first Italian campaign, the sword he wore at Austerlitz, his telescope, his pen, the desk he used as a subaltern in Auxonne, and so on — but there is also much rarely seen material from private collections, as well as superb artefacts from museums in Switzerland, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Britain, and no fewer than 24 galleries and museums around France, such as Versailles, Malmaison, Sèvres, the Fondation Napoléon, the Archives Nationales, and the Louvre. It might well be 30 years before another such cornucopia of Napoleana is reassembled in one place.

As well as the full-length paintings of Napoleon as First Consul by Antoine-Jean Gros, and in his colonel of Guard chasseur uniform by Robert Lefevre, there are wall-sized battle paintings of all his major engagements. The evolution of his political thought is represented by first editions of the books he is known to have read, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract*, and of his strategic thought by the works of the military reformers of the mid to late 18th century. But it is not all theory; a vast model of the battle of Lodi emphasises his tactic of send-

ing cavalry south across a ford to try to outflank the Austrians on the other bank of the River Adda in 1796.

One room explores the influence that Napoleonic strategy had — once expounded by writers such as Carl von Clausewitz, Henri Jomini and Basil Liddell Hart — on many of the great generals of history. It argues that commanders as diverse as Patton, Zhukov,

Patton, Zhukov, Rommel, MacArthur, Joffre and Moltke were all influenced by the Napoleonic way

Rommel, Manstein, Schwarzkopf, MacArthur, Joffre and Moltke were profoundly influenced by the Napoleonic way of war. Less convincingly, it also attempts to map the influence he had politically over statesmen such as Lenin and Chairman Mao.

Many visitors will agree with the underlying argument of the exhibition — that Napoleon was undoubtedly the equal of any of the other seven captains of history — but even those who don't will admire the truly extraordinary collection of artefacts that has been brought together. Marshals Masséna

and Bessières' beautifully crafted red velvet batons embossed with gold eagles; the Emperor's red leather map portfolio; cuirassier and Imperial Guard infantry uniforms; Napoleon's grey cloak; Murad Bey's sabre captured at the Battle of the Pyramids; Marshal Blücher's sabre; an eagle of the 25th Regiment; a five-foot-high model of the Vendôme Column; dozens of swords, muskets and bayonets; massive Prussian, Austrian and Russian flags captured in battle; the pistol Napoleon carried at Ratisbon; the Paul Delaroche portrait of him the night he attempted suicide at the palace of Fontainebleau just before his abdication in April 1814: nothing of significance has been missed.

As a means of explaining Napoleon's organisational sophistication, this exhibition is superb, and despite all the horror of the campaigns that killed hundreds of thousands, it also displays to gorgeous effect the artistic beauty so prized by the First Empire. One never needs an excuse to go to Paris, but if one did, this is the best there is.

Andrew Roberts's Napoleon the Great is published by Penguin.

The Landmark Trust

By Will Heaven

About halfway across Lundy, if you're trudging from the landing bay towards the north lighthouse, there's a tiny holiday cottage all on its own. It's a mile and three quarters from the island's village and very basic inside. There are two bunks in the single bedroom; a dodgy oven in the kitchen that only works if you jam a wooden stick between the wall and the 'on' button; and, in the sitting room, the kind of gas lights that died out in the 1930s, because there's no electricity — and so no wifi or TV — in the whole place.

In other words, it's bliss — at least for the right sort of person. Tibbets, as the cottage is called, is perched on the highest point of the island with views over the Bristol Channel on two sides. A Royal Navy lookout until 1926, it's now owned by the Landmark Trust, a charity set up 50 years ago by the philanthropist Sir John Smith and his wife, Christian, to try to prevent the loss of historic buildings that were too small or insignificant to attract the attention of the bigger National Trust.

Which is why you can stay there — and at lots of other historic properties, from a fisherman's cottage in the Highlands, to a castle on the south coast of Devon — for surprisingly little. These buildings don't have much in common. As Smith explained after



Going it alone: The Tibbets cottage on Lundy

founding the charity, 'a body was required to tackle cases too desperate, troublesome or unfashionable for anyone else'. Crucially, he didn't want them to become museums, to be 'peeked at over a rope', but to be living places which people could use as their own for a few days at a time.

So Britain owes Smith a lot. Later this year, the Trust will open its 200th building to the public, a restored medieval hall on the edge of the Brecon Beacons, with timbers that the restorers were excited to discover date back to the mid-15th century. It's the result of a £4 million fundraising drive.

Part of the attraction of such places is

that they are still unfashionable. None of them have TV or internet because the guests — 'Landmarkers', as they proudly call themselves — say they don't want them. The furniture is mostly old-fashioned dark wood, and there are lino floors in the kitchens and bathrooms that wouldn't look out of place in a down-at-heel boarding school. But they are clean, well-maintained, and those who stay in them tend to come back again and again, as the visitor books show.

As far as the mainland goes, the jewel in the Trust's portfolio is the secluded hamlet of Coombe, on the north Cornwall coast near Bude. Oddly, it's a stone's throw from a vast GCHQ satellite station that looks like a James Bond film set. But down in the wooded valley, where all the properties are owned by the Trust, it's as if you've stepped back in time. A stream trickles past thatched cottages (and a pretty orchard) towards the sea at Duckpool beach, half a mile away.

There's history here — two of the cottages were once inhabited by an eccentric and celebrated Victorian vicar, Robert Hawker, who excommunicated his cat for mousing on Sundays — but more than that, there's escape. A note in the visitor book gives a flavour of it: 'The clocks changed last weekend but we didn't find out till Wednesday.'

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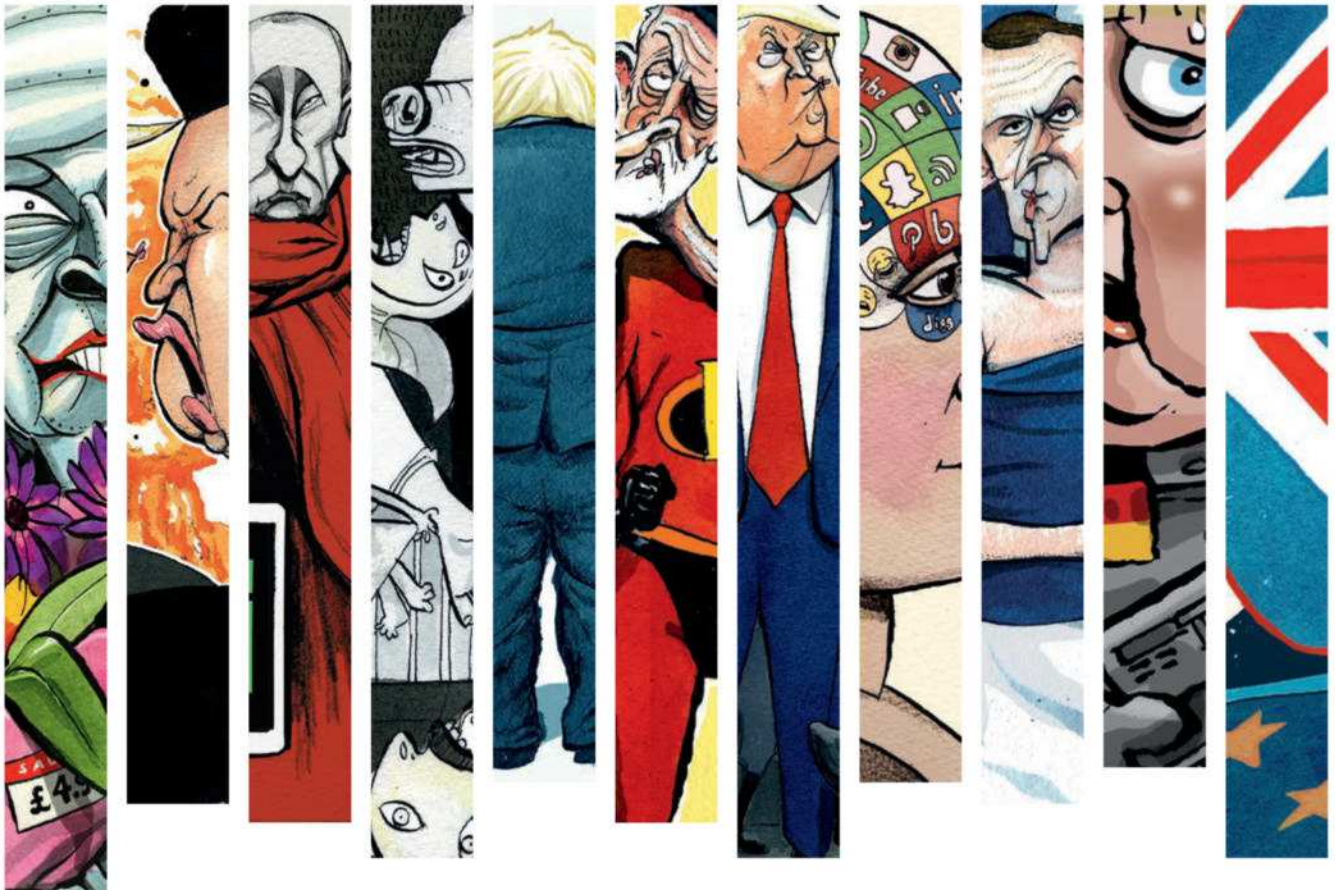
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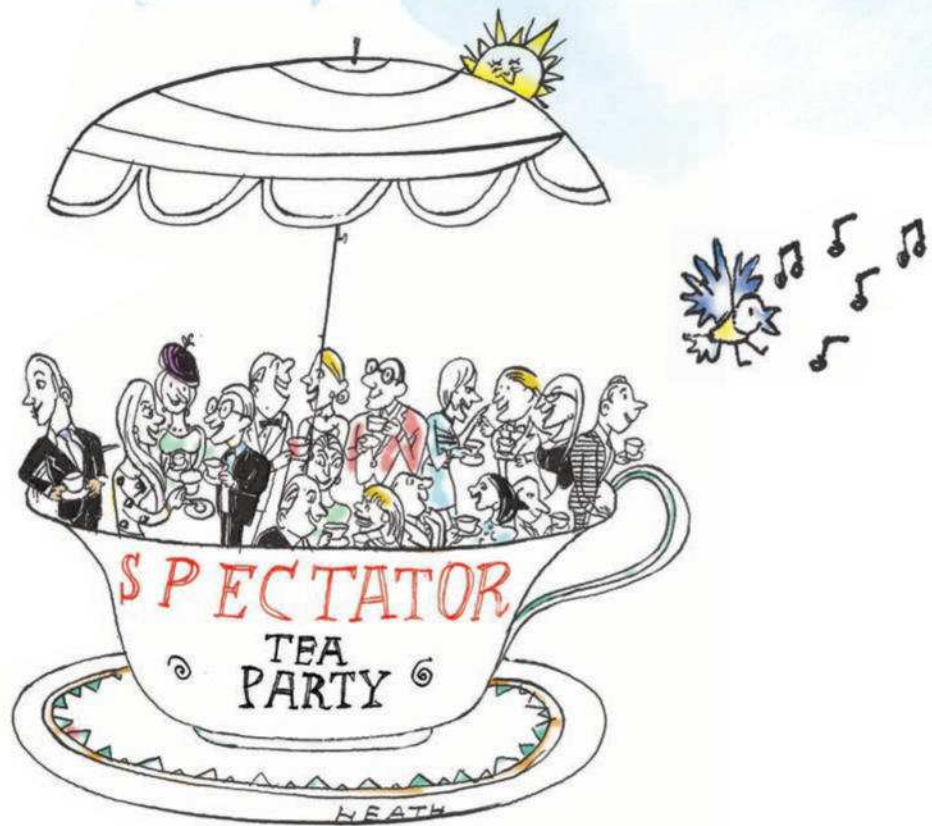
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The view from White City House is of repulsive Westfield – Little Dubai – and its empty promise of bliss delivered by handbags
— Tanya Gold, p62

LIFE

High life

Taki



New York

The summertime exodus is upon us. The Hamptons are overflowing with mouth-frothing groupies looking for celebrities, and the Long Island Expressway is ringing with the hissy fits of enraged drivers stuck in traffic for hours on end. One reason I gave up a beautiful estate in Southampton L.I. was the inability to get there before a lady who had initially said yes changed her mind because of the fatigue and boredom of sitting in a car watching other stationary cars.

The Hamptons have become an artistic pit stop for the summer. The nouveaux riches need art as badly as #MeToo needs sexual predators; it justifies their grandstanding. A feverish peak is reached some time in July – when the mosquito invasion is at its height – with woods and gardens taken over by artist installations, and performances range from the freakish to the horrible. Here's an example or two of the rare and great art that was exhibited last year alone: a man feigning terror while trapped in a tank of water; a disrobed woman submerged in a trough of molasses; two females relieving themselves on a – yes, you guessed it – man. Thank god Edward Hopper is no longer with us. He would have died of envy, as would that other great, Norman Rockwell.

Yes sir, the Hamptons are worth visiting not only for the art, but also for the cast of high fliers of Wall Street, whose names I cannot mention in the elegant pages of *The Spectator*, such is the stench that emanates from some of them. I was up there for Memorial weekend and stayed at my fraternity house – actually, it's a club and a perfect place to see people who are not into the art I just mentioned. For some strange reason we did not talk about bentwood chairs on tubular copper bases or carved-wood ancestral figures from Africa, apparently the latest craze among the artsy-fartsy crowd.

Once upon a time the Hamptons were a magical place, like Scott Fitzgerald's French Riviera, a place where beauty, wealth

and birth ruled the roost. The light was the special kind, and it drew those artists, now extinct, who painted on canvases and can actually draw an apple if needs be. Just like in the south of France, it was too good to last. The ignorant, the base, the vulgar and the newly rich arrived with a vengeance and bought up the potato fields. They put up mansions the Hilton family would find 'de trop'. Many of these new arrivals were stupendously successful in business but otherwise talent-free, their epigrammatic wit limited to two words: 'how much?'.

Mind you, the Hamptons are not as bad as the south of France because the oligarchs and the Saudis have kept away. Nor do they have the same level of crime as the Riviera, because the local police, who are mostly Polish, are not overly concerned with the human rights of drunks behind the wheel or slobs who spit on the sidewalk. This is the good news. The bad is that every nouveau riche in the Bagel wants to spend their summers in the Hamptons. The vulgar ones used to go to the Catskills, now they want to live in South Main Street, near Taki, who vacated the place 20 years ago. (Yet another catastrophic mistake on my part. Now I look out at cows and have to mix with Geneva commens.)

Then again, I would have moved to Germany long ago if it weren't for that plebeian functionary Merkel, who has turned the country over to refugees from Libya, Lebanon, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan and all points south. Baden-Baden was a beautiful resort when I was young and played in the tennis tournament in the city every September. You also got lucky there – and I don't mean winning let cords. Last time I was there the peo-

ple were badly dressed – socks and sandals – and the women old and virtuous. Poor little Greek boy, what is to become of me? I should build another *Bushido*, but women refuse to be picked up by me because of my age, and I don't like pros, either in sport or in the sack. I used to, but not any more. And Madame Claude, who had the best girls, is also long gone. A boat is only good for picking up women. Otherwise you just put on weight, drink too much, sit too much, get too much sun. Poor little Taki; as that fat prick Sartre said, hell is other people, who murmur, gasp, paw and grasp, and talk too loudly in public places.

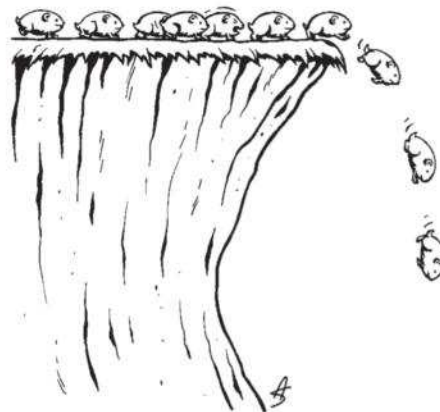
Last week I dined with Michael Mailer and Thomas Pompidou, and two more couples, and the decibel level was so high that we actually ordered in sign language. Our waiter was gay and extremely nice but took a shine to Michael and made goo-goo eyes at him all evening. I wanted to discuss politics with Pompidou but never got the chance. It was just too noisy. Reflective surfaces like mirrors or glass cause sound to reflect just as they do light. And Noo Yawkers are already among the loudest in the world. Dining out has become a health hazard and causes certain hearing loss. Poor little me, where will it all end?

Low life

Jeremy Clarke



Last year the BBC radio drama department received 3,797 scripts from hopeful authors, of which just 33 were recommended to BBC radio drama producers. I came across this sad statistic when I was well into my first attempt to write an hour-long radio drama set in a trench during the first battle of Ypres in 1914. My chances of hearing my poor little play performed on the radio were reduced from slight to negligible when I then read that the BBC will be accepting no more drama scripts until the end of the year; and from negligible to zero when I belatedly looked into *The Way to Write Radio Drama*, by William Ash, and realised how naive I had been to imagine I could



'Do you mind? There's a queue!'

master such a tricky genre straight off the bat.

My play was inspired initially by two pages of first-hand narrative written by a private of the 1st Gloucesters, which General Sir Anthony Heritage Farrar-Hockley GBE, KCB, DSO, MC included in *Death of an Army* (1967), his gripping history of that amazing battle, in which the British did to the Germans what the Germans did to the British 18 months later on the Somme. (Between the wars, 1st Ypres was known in Germany as 'The Slaughter of the Innocents'.) Before plunging in, and for several months, I read one Great War memoir after another. I began with the more well-known accounts, such as *The War the Infantry Knew* by Captain J.C. Dunn, *Old Soldiers Never Die* by Frank Richards, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai* by George Coppard, *Into Battle* by John Glubb, *Six Weeks: The Short and Gallant Life of the British Officer in the First World War* by John Lewis-Stempel, and David Jones's marvellous prose poem 'In Parenthesis'.

Not the least wonderful thing about these accounts is their literacy. Even working-class privates such as Frank Richards or George Coppard describe the horrors in simple, robust, unadorned English prose that one can only envy. After the war Robert Graves wrote a guide to writing English prose in which he stated that, 'The writing of good English is

a moral matter, as the Romans held that the writing of good Latin was' — and these brave infantrymen's accounts appear to confirm this, at first sight, outlandish claim. My immersion in these bloody narratives coincided with the emergence of the '#MeToo' campaign, and the ratcheting up of the 'safe space' campaign in British and US universities. During the battle of the Somme, 30 million shells were fired by

Even working-class privates describe the horrors in simple, robust, unadorned English prose

both sides into an area seven miles square, killing and wounding a million soldiers on both sides, the majority of them civilian volunteers. Talk about a safe space.

Then, at a party, during a conversation about the first world war, a Cambridge classics don asked me if I'd read Donald Hankey's *A Student in Arms*. I had not, I said, and wrote the name on my hand. Hankey was a middle-class theology student when he enlisted as a 'gentleman ranker' in Kitchener's Army. Recovering in England after being wounded in a futile charge at Ypres in which he lost many friends, he sent an essay to *The Specta-*

tor called 'Some Who Were Lost and Found'. The beautifully written piece is a meditation on the courage of the Kitchener Army recruits who in civilian life have nothing to live for, and no sustaining beliefs, but who can look death in the face with as much courage as the officers and gentlemen who command them, and who are soaked in the sustaining prejudices of their class. *The Spectator* editor at the time, John St Loe Strachey, published the unsolicited contribution anonymously, and because of its great success he published everything Hankey submitted until 1916, when Hankey changed his mind about the rightness of the war, and became pessimistic and angered by the conduct of the war. Two consequent essays were rejected by Strachey before Hankey was killed leading a hopeless attack on St Transloy in the later stages of the battle of the Somme. His last words to his platoon as he waved them forward were 'If you are wounded, "Blighty"; if killed, the Resurrection!'

The essays, subsequently collected as *A Student in Arms*, sold in the hundreds of thousands. Donald Hankey's strikes me as a remarkable English voice whose neglect is strange. I don't know, perhaps the voice of a man with a Christian conscience in combi-

The Queen of Assyria

It seems unlikely but you never know.
The tale about Semiramis might be true.
The widow might have given the horse a go.

She might have offered every human beau
Her charms and finding that they would not do...
It seems unlikely but you never know.

She could show willing, but he'd have to show
He'd rather have her than a mare – or two.
The widow might have given the horse a go.

Would she enjoy it, waiting there below
Either impalement or a top-notch screw?
It seems unlikely but you never know.

Could she have coped with his enormous flow
Of seed like sago pouring up her flue?
The widow might have given the horse a go.

If it became too much, could she say Whoa?
My guess is, she went on to pastures new.
It seems unlikely but you never know:
The widow *might* have given the horse a go.

— Alistair Elliot

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nation with a social conscience has become unpalatable or risible. His body was found then lost again during an enemy bombardment before it could be buried. His name is one of the 77,000 inscribed on Lutyens's memorial to the missing of the Somme at Thiépval. The collected essays were published in such large numbers that they are easily obtainable. If my pathetic attempt at a radio drama results only in the by-product of discovering Donald Hankey's wonderful *A Student in Arms*, the time won't have been wasted.

Real life

Melissa Kite



After sanding floorboards for two days I became even more demented than usual.

The hand sander was the exact right size to make it horribly arduous but just about possible to do the entire downstairs floor this way, and so I persisted even when I should have given up and hired a large machine.

By the time I had sanded seven boards I had started to mildly hallucinate. What was the keeper thinking, leaving me with a Black & Decker 'Mouse' while he went on holiday? I suppose he wanted to tie me up with a job that couldn't lead to decapitation or electrocution until he got back.

The Mouse is so called, I presume, because after using it to sand floorboards for two days your right hand becomes a shrivelled little paw, pink and floppy, unable to grip or lift so much as a cup of coffee.

The sound was the worst thing: at first I thought it was saying 'wah wah waaaaah!' like a really cross baby, but after a while it became clear it was imitating a violent drunk wandering through the town centre at night screaming obscenities at people with nice lives.

I knew how it felt. After an hour, I was so in tune with its violent whining I had the distinct impression I might have knocked back a bottle of meths.

My head was spinning, my limbs were throbbing, and the boards I had done looked only a half-shade lighter than they had been before. The floor is utterly black with grime where the builder boyfriend dragged, with an old dog lead, hundreds of camel tubs full of rubble and earth over them to get it all through the house.

It seems like an eternity ago, and it makes me question my tenuous grip on sanity to think that this actually happened. But

apparently, according to the few remaining brain cells in charge of memory recall I have left, he did that because the next-door neighbours refused to let me use my right of way from the back of my house, which is mid-terrace, across their garden and along the side of the end-of-terrace.

It seems so ludicrous I can barely get my head around it now, but we dragged all the building materials through the front door, and the rubble and earth up from the basement and out through the front door, month after month, because they refused to let me use the entry.

They bolted my garden gate on their side, locking me in, and combination locked the outside of the side gate to make sure I couldn't use that.

Their tenant sent a volley of increasingly hysterical text messages, which I screenshotted for the lawyers, saying that she was not letting me through on the instructions of the owner and if she did let me it would have to be secret or the owners would throw her out. 'God, it makes me furious,' said my

She refixed her bolt with long, sharp screws that stabbed me the next time I touched the gate

friend Alex, who is in property, as we sat out in the garden the other day eating lollies and looking at the gate, which is still bolted their side with a low bolt so I can't reach over and open it.

'People buy these end-of-terraces with rights of way across them cheap, then set about trying to get rid of the right of way.'

'It made me angry too for a while,' I said, languidly licking my Solero. 'But now I can't be bothered to be angry.'

When I want to get round with my garden bin, I get a ladder and climb the gate and open it. I fell off last week and told 'the bolter' I had hurt myself, and that made her really furious.

She refixed her bolt with long, sharp screws that stuck out my side so the next time I touched the gate a screw end stabbed my hand. Then she put a letter through my door complaining that I should stop complaining and be more neighbourly.

I couldn't be bothered to reply. I didn't think it merited a sheet of paper. I did a Jean Paul Getty and wrote the salient points in the margins of her letter and put it back through her door. This will no doubt cause her to retaliate. Possibly, she will fit anti-climbing spikes or the paraphernalia you put on gates to stop pigeons crapping.

Maybe hardware stores sell 'Right of way deprivers'. I don't really care. If I have to take the gate off its hinges, or smash it to bits and fit a new one every time I have a delivery or need to take my bins out, then I'll just do that.

It feels like that is as reasonable as anything else that is going on around here.

Bridge

Susanna Gross

I've just come back from Ostend, where I spent four perfect days. No, not sun, sea and sand — eight hours of intensive bridge, followed by non-stop hand analysis over supper. I was there for the European women's pairs, partnering the wonderful Marusa Basa (soon to become Mrs David Gold). After qualifying for the A final, we finished a disappointing 16th. But I'm still on a high from the sheer adrenaline of it — especially as the European open teams championships were taking place at same time and venue (indeed they're still going on), so we could check on England's progress. This slam, played by Andrew Robson, caused a fair amount of discussion, with some commentators daring to suggest that Andrew had taken an inferior line!

Dealer West Neither vulnerable

<p>♠ J 3 ♥ 6 3 2 ♦ J 7 5 2 ♣ J 6 5 2</p> <p>♠ K Q 9 ♥ K 10 9 7 4 ♦ A Q 9 ♣ 7 3</p>	<table style="margin: auto; border: 1px solid black; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> <p>♠ A 6 5 2 ♥ Q 8 ♦ K 6 ♣ A K Q 9 8</p> <p>♠ 10 8 7 4 ♥ A J 5 ♦ 10 8 4 3 ♣ 10 4</p>		N		W		E		S	
	N									
W		E								
	S									

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass	3♣	pass
3NT	pass	6NT	all pass

England was playing Estonia, who also reached 6NT and got the same ♦2 lead. Olavi Oja (West) won with dummy's ♦K, played a spade to the ♠K and a heart to the ♥Q. England's Chris Jagger won and returned a heart. Oja put up the ♥K and cashed his winners outside clubs. (If clubs don't break, this line works when North has ♥Jx, and sets up a squeeze when spades are 3-3 and either defender holds four clubs and the ♥J.) Unlucky — two down.

Robson also won in dummy — and played clubs from the top. Superficially, this looks odd: how can you test clubs before knocking out the ♥A? What if the defender with long clubs holds the ♥A? But Andrew had worked out the odds. Playing a heart to the ♥Q doesn't help. If South wins and returns a heart, you have to choose what to play without knowing if clubs break. If the ♥Q wins, you're in the same boat. When clubs didn't break, Robson played the ♥Q, won by South, who returned a heart. He finessed — slam made. Come on Eng-er-land!

Chess

Viktor the Terrible

Raymond Keene

Viktor Korchnoi is the subject of a poignant new book from the distinguished pen of the Dutch grandmaster and former Soviet emigré Genna Sosonko. The title *Evil Doer* (published by Elk and Ruby) refers to the *damnatio memoriae* meted out by the USSR after Korchnoi's very public defection to Amsterdam from the socialist paradise in 1976. Thereafter, Korchnoi combined the pursuit of a successful chess career, including two challenges for the world title, with the life of a persecuted traitor to the anointed heirs of Marx, Lenin and Stalin.

As a fellow 'betrayal' of the Soviet chess empire, Sosonko is well placed to chronicle the inner emotions, haunting fears and occasional huge triumphs of one of the most prominent personalities ever to defect. Although his book is a factual account, Sosonko has a prose style which puts him in the tradition of other literary giants who have depicted the internal workings of the chess mind and psyche in fiction. I am drawn to comparisons with Stefan Zweig's *Schachnovelle*, Vladimir Nabokov's *The Defence*, or even Elias Canetti's *Auto da Fe*. For me, this is the supreme award-winning chess book of 2018.

This week, a game and a puzzle illustrating the vicissitudes of Korchnoi's relationship with his ultimate chessboard nemesis, Anatoly Karpov, who, in contrast to Korchnoi, was the golden boy of the Soviet chess establishment.

Korchnoi-Karpov: Candidates final, Moscow 1974; Queen's Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 g3 b6 4 Bg2 Bb7 5 c4 Be7 6 Nc3 0-0 7 Qc2 c5 8 d5 exd5 9 Ng5 Nc6 In an earlier game from the match Karpov had tried 9 ... g6, but it is not clear that his move here is any improvement. **10 Nxd5 g6** (see diagram 1) **11 Qd2** The most effective method of transferring the queen towards the dark-squared weaknesses around the black king. **11 ... Nxd5** This is a weak move. Admittedly, White's knight was strong on this square but the bishop proves to be even more effective. Much better was either 11 ... Rb8 or 11 ... Na5. **12 Bxd5 Rb8** Karpov completely overlooks White's main intention.

PUZZLE NO. 510

Black to play. This position is from Korchnoi-Karpov, World Championship game 17, Baguio 1978. Can you spot Karpov's dramatic finish? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 19 June or via email to victoria@spectator.co.uk. There is a prize of £20 for the first correct answer out of a hat. Please include a postal address and allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Last week's solution 1 ... b5+

Last week's winner Jeff Aronson, Oxford

Diagram 1

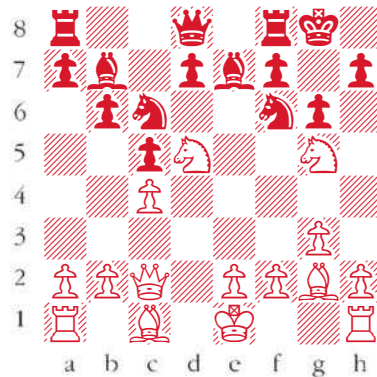
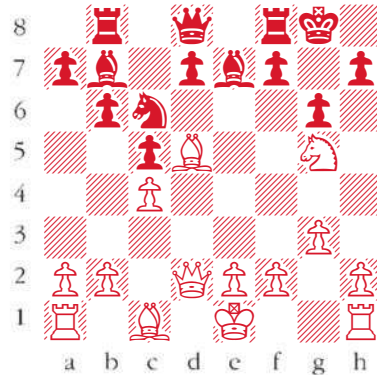
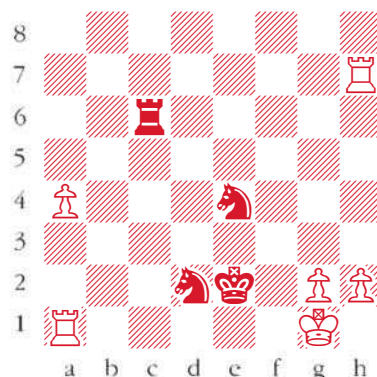


Diagram 2



He could instead have gone in for liquidation with 12 ... Bxg5 13 Qxg5 Qxg5 14 Bxg5 but the endgame would be much better for White. 12 ... Bf6 is also possible but White has a strong attack after 13 h4 (see diagram 2) **13 Nxh7 Re8** Tantamount to resignation but the acceptance of the sacrifice is also hopeless, e.g. 13 ... Kxh7 14 Qh6+ Kg8 15 Qxg6+ Kh8 16 Qh5+ Kg8 17 Be4 f5 18 Bd5+ and Black will be mated. **14 Qh6 Ne5 15 Ng5 Bxg5 16 Bxg5 Qxg5 17 Qxg5 Bxd5** With the threat of ... Nf3+ which White brushes aside by castling. **18 0-0 Bxc4 19 f4 Black resigns**



Competition

A sonnet on it

Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3052 you were invited to supply a sonnet inspired by a well-known contemporary figure's characteristic feature. There was a spot of preposition-related confusion this week — my fault entirely — and sonnets either 'to' or 'on' were acceptable.

Entries ranged far and wide, from Victoria Beckham's pout via Gorbachev's birthmark to the rise — and fall — of Anthony Weiner's penis. But both John O'Byrne and Barrie Godwin used Sonnet 18 to hymn hairstyles — Donald Trump's and Boris Johnson's respectively (Shall I compare thee to a bale of hay?/ Thou art more windblown and intemperate...').

Honourable mentions go to Mike Morrison, Jonathan Pettman, Douglas G. Brown, Max Gutmann and Michael Jameson. The winners earn £20 each. W.J. Webster takes £25.

The sweet disorder of his flaxen mop
Seems artificial now, just done for show:
His telling feature's not that cartoon prop
But something that lies hidden far below.
Though waywardly deployed when he was young
The trouble that it caused was brushed aside;
For then it seemed that with his silver tongue
All consequence could be, with charm, defied.
But as his public prominence has grown,
He finds he's held more closely to account;
He has to reap from careless seeds he's sown,
With only weak defences left to mount.
Friends fear, foes hope, all wait for where he'll put
That much-misguided, twelve-inch thing, his foot.
W.J. Webster

I have been told that Philip Hammond keeps
His small charisma locked up in a box
Where it is safe, immune from fortune's knocks,
But, curled away and private, mostly sleeps.
Some politicians like to beat loud drums
And let their huge charismas flounce and preen,
But Philip Hammond's hides at home unseen
And sometimes giggles at his vulgar chums.
Let Brexiteering bunglers act like prats;
Let Boris burble and let Govey spout.
In time they'll doubtless wear each other out.
Meanwhile, enjoying spreadsheets full of stats,
Hammond and his charisma, firmest friends,
Spend happy evenings mapping fiscal trends.
George Simmers

So frozen and so frightened and disdainful,
No matter what an interview discusses,
You hold your shape. It must be very painful,
And looks like 'Blakey' Blake's in *On The Buses*.
Are you a champion cramp that crimps the lip?
Do you relax when PMQs are finished?
Do inner voices tell you 'Get a grip'?
Because of you, your wearer is diminished.
Did you replace a rosebud or a cherry?
Or else a perky pout, or crescent moon?
Perhaps there was a time when, temporary,
You never dreamed she'd follow Cameroon,
But now preside upon her mouth, judicial,
As static as a prune, but artificial.
Bill Greenwell

This lady's voice is nothing like the one
That Shakespeare lauded, though it's pitched
quite low;

Persuasive when she's wanting something done
The breathy, confidential tone's to show
Her hearers they are privileged to share
The insight she is ready to dispense
Without discussion, it is only fair
That we accept she must be talking sense.
She is so skilful at the party game
That tells us what to think and how to vote;
I wonder if some day she'll be a Dame,
That voice befitting an ennobled throat.
Fulfilment's dear, but promises are cheap,
Diane has many promises to keep.

Alanna Blake

The doe, the demon — innocence and guile,
The sham, the shy — pretence and bashfulness,
The calm, the fraught — serenity and stress,
The stony glare in conflict with the smile;
All's in those eyes, wide open in surprise
Or half-closed in a wry, reptilian way,
Sky-blue at times, at others ashen grey,
Though none is sure what lurks behind the guise.
To many they possess the Devil's taint,
To some the clearness of an open book,
But few can read for certain if that look
Speaks plainly of a sinner or a saint;
The stare of Blair contains his rise and fall,
He is his gaze — the eyes, they have it — all!

Alan Millard

You squat on Paxo's face; I pause awhile
to catch you on those archived *Newsnight* clips
as you enhance his pugilistic style,
each insult framed by thinly sneering lips.
You share those views that brook no compromise,
interrogating skills that won't diminish,
the timing as he interrupts replies —
no need to let his hapless victims finish.
You're still attached to him, as he creates
an atmosphere of conflict and division;
from withering heights, his word intimidates
his guests, and you're the lips stretched in derision.
Of all the qualities that I revere
I cherish that eviscerating sneer.

Sylvia Fairley

Who, from the leaders of the world, could bare
a torso so meticulously toned?
That tanned self-confidence, the savoir faire
of one whose grasp on power's so finely honed —
we get the drift. The iron man, whose steel
is central, from the cortex to the core;
proud hunter, leader — so the people feel
protected from the worst Fate has in store.
Those photos in the wild: hard-muscled, taut,
gleaming and seeming effortless; it's just
your way to advertise that you're the sort
the weaker, feeblers masses need to trust.
From Omsk to Perm, from Kursk to Novgorod;
half-stripped and wholly macho, demi-god.

D.A. Prince

NO. 3055: QUESTION TIME

You are invited to take a well-known figure
on the world stage, living or dead, and cast
them in the role of agony aunt/uncle, submit-
ting a problem of your invention and their
solution. Please email entries of up to 150
words (please provide word count) to lucy@
spectator.co.uk by midday on 27 June.

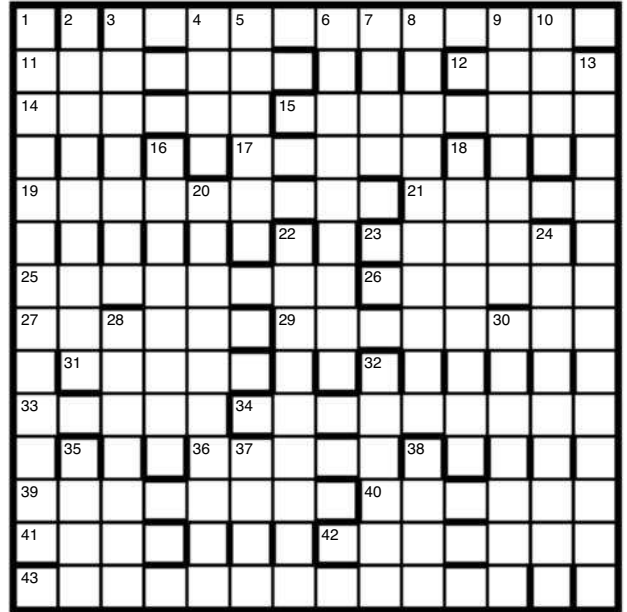
Crossword

**2363:
Case ending
by Mr Magoo**

Four of the unclued entries make
up a ten-word Shakespearean
quotation, including an apostro-
phe. The other three (two of two
words each) represent three pos-
sible victims. Elsewhere, ignore
an accent. 34 is in *Brewer's*.

Across

- 11 He almost banned awfully
poisonous plant (7)
- 12 Cross Spain with a
formative stage (4)
- 14 Editor buys the farm
and moves round (6)
- 17 See a wretch regularly
buried in soil (5)
- 19 Breaking in Irish rugby
games is initially no good
(9)
- 21 Wet month, and its
beginning? (5)
- 23 Runs are runs, and not so
easy to come by (5)
- 25 It's fun to cover an
important body — in this?
(8, two words)
- 26 Means of access to get in
plane, say? (6)
- 27 Holding king in carriage (6)
- 29 Rare objection to act
constraining Scottish
sportsman but not forever
(8)
- 31 Studied turning round
black electrical unit (5)
- 33 Stench surrounding most of
wicked scar (5)
- 34 Possibly wormy bale?
(9, two words)
- 36 Bewildered, in the main
(5, two words)
- 39 Flowers are carried by
goddess (8)
- 40 Extremely vile smell
connected with certain
body parts (6)
- 41 Gossips chatter about
bishop (4)
- 42 Knotted around fifty knots
(7)
- 43 Novak finally returns
good shot — with this?
(12, two words)



Down

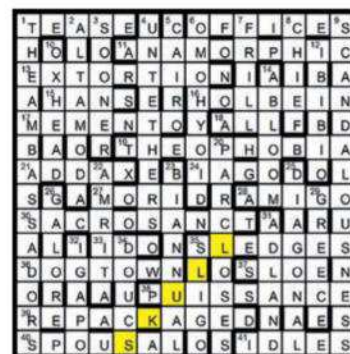
- 2 Ian's denied left-winger
was rebellious (9)
- 3 Log support plus strength
(7)
- 4 Gutted leopard-cat brought
up ounce in Tibet (4)
- 5 How pupils can be
organised to study small
pictures (6)
- 6 Measures devised to
protect one essentially (9)
- 7 Badgers use that habitat,
ultimately (4)
- 8 Fertiliser troubled humans
in blaze (10, hyphenated)
- 9 Raised amendment to
excise volume, having
greater volume (7)
- 10 Mobile home for monk? (4)
- 16 Yield to temptation, not
having married American
devil (8)
- 18 Is painting for three, as
Picasso might say? (8)
- 22 Daft Asian chiefs letting
Society replace joint
schools (9)
- 24 Waking up sick, or use
alarm endlessly (9)
- 28 One bumblebee, lacking
any recurrent character,
disturbed flower (7)
- 32 French lawyer visiting
two states for taste of
America (6)
- 35 Reap this fruit making
return (4)
- 37 Like Prometheus, needing
extra time? (4)

A first prize of £30 for the first
correct solution opened on 2
July. 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 2363,
The Spectator, 22 Old Queen
Street, London SW1H 9HP.
Please allow six weeks for
prize delivery.

Name

Address

Email



SOLUTION TO 2360: DIPLOMATIC

THE AMBASSADORS (1D) by HANS HOLBEIN (15 16)
includes, as a MEMENTO MORI (17 27), an
ANAMORPHIC (11) depiction of a SKULL; this is
represented in the grid, in the same area as in the painting, in
DIAGONAL (25) form.

First prize John Nutkins, London TW8
Runners-up Don Thompson, Bolton;
Paul Jenkinson, Zollikon, Switzerland

No Sacred Cows

A decent proposal

Toby Young

According to a new study published by some feminist academics at the Australian National University, women risk damaging their health if they work more than 34 hours a week. That's not because women are the weaker sex, obviously, but because they do more housework and childcare than men, effectively working just as hard but dividing their labour between the office and home. On the back of this, the report's authors have called for women to be paid the same for working a 34-hour week as men are for a 47-hour week. Until this happens, according to the researchers, women are being forced to choose between their health and gender equality.

On the face of it, this proposal is bonkers. Think of all the small firms — and even some quite large ones — that would go out of business if they had to reduce the number of hours their female employees work without reducing their salaries. And presumably this would be on top of maternity pay. Gender equality is one thing, but under this proposal women would be paid 38.5 per cent more per hour than men.

But then I began to think about it from a purely selfish point of view and realised there might be something to be said for it. Caroline hasn't had a full-time job since becoming a



Here's the beauty part: Caroline would no longer be able to insist that I do half the housework

mum, arguing that the cost of hiring a nanny is prohibitive. To illustrate this, suppose she was able to get a job in PR that paid £40,000 a year and the nanny's salary was £26,500. After tax, Caroline's take home pay would be £30,367.20 and the cost of hiring the nanny, if you factor in our National Insurance contribution, would be £29,059.07. So Caroline would effectively be working a 40-hour week for an annual salary of £1,277.76. If you assume four weeks of holiday a year, that works out at just under 67p an hour.

But if Caroline could earn £40,000 for working a 34-hour week, that begins to look more attractive, not least because we could then get away with part-time help. By September next year, when all four of our children will be at secondary school, we could even dispense with paid-for childcare altogether. And here's the beauty part: Caroline wouldn't be able to insist I do half the household chores, as she does at the moment, because her employer would, in effect, be paying her to do the housework.

Not all of it, mind you. The researchers at the Australian National University worked out that, on average, women spend an extra two and a half hours a day on housework compared to men, Monday to Friday, and that's what they want employers to factor in when calculating women's pay. So when Caroline returned home from work at, say, 4 p.m., she wouldn't be able to hand me a mop and an apron until 6.30 p.m.

'That's sexist,' said Caroline, when I told her about this 'feminist' proposal. 'It's saying that women should accept that domestic chores are basi-

cally their responsibility. But what if I don't want to be paid to do the housework? If employers are going to be forced to do this, it should be up to a couple to decide which of them is going to work longer hours. I'll go for the 47-hour week, thank you very much. You can work for 34 and then come home and do the cleaning, washing and cooking.'

The other problem with this idea is that it might make men and women more equal — sort of — but at the expense of making women less equal. If you reduce the hours but not the pay of women across the board by a fixed amount, you'll effectively be giving them each the same pay rise expressed as a percentage of their salaries. It's like a flat tax, but in reverse. Which means that the income gap between women on different salaries will increase. The fact that it's a *regressive* benefit might not be a definitive argument against this proposal — after all, some of us quite like flat taxes — but it does suggest the left-wing feminist academics who are advocating it haven't thought it through.

This is an issue close to my heart at the moment because Caroline has slipped a disc, rendering her more or less immobile. Suddenly, I'm having to do all the housework, as well as the school run. I have tried getting the children to help with the chores, but I think they must have read about this Australian proposal because they are all demanding to be paid. Unfortunately, that would quickly put this sole trader out of business.

Toby Young is associate editor of The Spectator.

MICHAEL HEATH



Spectator Sport

Let's not fret about brilliant Belgians

Roger Alton

Here's a question: name some famous Belgians. Well there's Kevin De Bruyne, Vincent Kompany, and Eden Hazard. And if that's not enough, there's Romelu Lukaku and Dries Mertens; not forgetting Toby Alderweireld and Thomas Vermaelen. Or Mousa Dembele, Thibaut Courtois, and Marouane Fellaini. If all goes well England will still be in with a chance of making the last 16 of the World Cup when they meet the mighty Belgians — not a line you see very often — in their final group match in exactly two weeks' time.

England have, arguably, only one star of similar status: Harry Kane. But I'm less convinced than I was a few weeks ago that England are bound to lose this match in Kaliningrad. The Belgians are brilliant as individuals, but we don't know how they will work as a team. Will they dissolve into internal bickering like the French in South Africa? And the World Cup can be harsh on strong-on-paper teams that are trying to break through — think of the luckless Dutch, or Spain's many



This is an England team that seems at ease with itself and the world

failures before their 2010 triumph.

But it's not just that: it's more that misgivings about Gareth Southgate have surrendered to what may prove foolish optimism, but I hope not. This is an England team that seems at ease with itself and the world. Amazing what can be achieved once you're shot of Wayne Rooney and John Terry.

The French Open final was much tighter than the score suggests. What a great backhand Dominic Thiem has. A Slam will soon be his — but not yet: Rafa Nadal's game is just brutal. And that is the wonder of his success on clay, a surface that was once the canvas of the tennis artists: the Rosewalls, the Santanas, the Nastases. Nadal has turned it into a killing field.

Impossible for anyone who has ever slurped on a pint of heavy not to enjoy unrated Scotland's massively deserved victory in the 50-over runfest in Edinburgh while England's best player was sitting on the sidelines in the TMS commentary team. It's a great pity Jimmy Anderson wasn't asked to pull on his size 12s. He couldn't have performed worse than England's toothless pace attack. Jimmy has become a skilled commentator: dispassionate, expert and not pumping an agenda. He is also very funny, as anyone who has listened to Greg James's delightful cricket pod-

cast, Tailenders, will know. Jimmy would make you laugh reading out the index from *Jane's Fighting Ships*.

Still on English cricket, here's a thought for Trevor Bayliss. Now that Jos Buttler is the success that so many of us knew he could be all along, why not make him captain and solve a heap of problems? Joe Root is clearly uncomfortable as skipper and his batting seems to have dipped several gears. Give the lad a break and let Jos do what he was always cut out for. And don't send that other young star, Dom Bess, back to the Quantocks any time soon. It's my feeling that, like Steve Smith, he could morph from being a bowling all-rounder to a very good batsman who bowls.

No more international cricket for the great A.B. de Villiers, more's the pity. Was there ever a better all-round sportsman? He was shortlisted for South Africa's junior hockey and football teams, captain of his country's rugby juniors and also holds six school swimming records and the fastest 100 metres time in junior athletics. He was U19 national badminton champion, and a member of SA's junior Davis Cup tennis team. He holds the record for the world's fastest one-day 50, 100 and 150. He scored 47 international centuries and 109 50s. And wouldn't you know it, his golf handicap is scratch. Beat that, someone.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED



Q. Is there a tactful way to ask people with whom you've been interacting on an almost daily basis over two or more years, what their names are? This couple are neighbours and our dogs play together in the park each week. I wasn't listening when they first introduced themselves and now I've got no way of finding out, as I don't know any of the other neighbours. Twice in the park friends have come along and introduced themselves to the couple, but they have never

volunteered their own names other than saying 'We're Tommy's parents.' (Tommy being their dog.) What should I do? — Name and address withheld

A. Use this as an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. Buy a will-writing kit from WHSmith and ask the couple to witness it.

Q. Some years ago my mother revisited a house in Oban where she had lived. She contacted the owner to say she and my father would be passing through and could they possibly drop in? He'd said yes. When they arrived, the new owner invited them to sit down and have a cup of tea but explained his wife had been called away urgently. My mother asked to use the loo and went upstairs. Realising that the host had taken my father out to

look at the garden, my mother took the opportunity to tiptoe around the bedrooms and have a snoop. Not satisfied with simply looking into the master bedroom, she even opened the wardrobe door. Inside she found the man's wife hiding. It was deeply embarrassing and even after all these years we are wondering what witty remark she could have used to defuse the situation? — C.M., Edinburgh

A. Other than saying 'Et tu?', the conventional response when two people are confronted by each other in an embarrassing situation e.g. two men (or women these days) in a brothel, the protocol is to pretend it hasn't happened. Best simply to close the wardrobe door, go back downstairs and carry on with the cup of tea — and then leave normally.

Q. We have an old friend who we adore, but he has a famously dusty wallet and it annoys my husband that he never leaves anything for our cleaner after he has stayed the night. He's just been to stay again and after he left we found a pile of coins lying next to the relaxator chair where he had been sunbathing. My husband swapped these for a £20 note and left it in his room for our cleaner. How do we stand morally? Was this theft? — A.H., Basingstoke, Hants

A. Morally, you should have communicated with your friend that you had found the money but asked would he like you to swap the coins for a note and leave them in his room for the cleaner? That would have put him nicely on the spot and cleared up the matter once and for all.

Food

A culinary wasteland

Tanya Gold



The Allis is a restaurant inside the new Soho House at White City — it is called White City House — and it is every bit as ghastly as it sounds. I do not really object to Soho House's attempt to colonise the entire planet and furnish it with purple velvet armchairs, which are now being replicated in people's homes, leaving us in a sort of velvet fun palace you cannot escape, while silently crying. It also feels like a poor model for capitalism, even late capitalism. I quite like the one in Dean Street — if you can ignore the people, that is, which you can because they don't lift their eyes from their MacBooks to your hideous face. But the BBC HQ in White City — shabby and charismatic, like a half-eaten brick doughnut — is not an abandoned warehouse to be pounced on with wallpaper and silks and repopulated by adults who like ball-pits. It was an important part of post-war British cultural history — I delivered my letter to *Jim'll Fix It* here in 1983, and smirked at David Cameron when he was in opposition, before he became David Cameron,

Perhaps the London Underground will soon be a Soho House?

here — and my God, it — and even he — deserved better than this.

It was ever a wasteland. It still is. But it used to be a nicer wasteland. It used to have self-awareness; it knew how awful it was, and that made it loveable. And so, in the hierarchy of wastelands — and this column will soon visit Battersea Power Station and its restaurants, or 'outlets' to review another wasteland, ideally the wasteland's wasteland — it has fallen. It has been cleaned up. The courtyard is shiny, tidy, a rebuke. Where are the badly dressed social democrats? There are shivering young trees and glinting new windows. The view is of the repulsive Westfield, or as I call it, Little Dubai, and its empty promises of bliss delivered by the accumulation of handbags. The letters BBC have gone from the facade and left only a ghostly imprint of dirt, as at the old *Telegraph* building on Fleet Street, and that is the thing I like most.

And so above The Allis is White City House. I cannot go in there, of course, and so I can only fantasise about this Eden overlooking West-

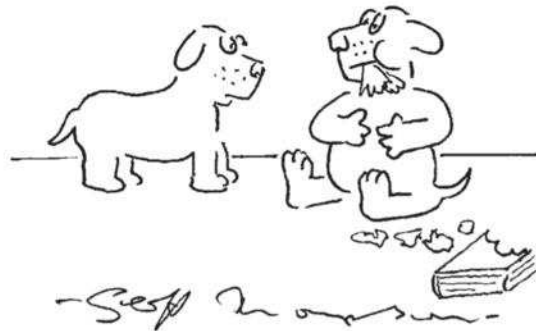
field. Swimming pool? Mountaineering? Two ball-pits and all the gold under heaven? Who knows? The rest of the doughnut is flats, probably called apartments now, and it is hard to imagine that anyone would want to live here, except Jimmy Savile and other dead people who have been on *This Is Your Life*.

The Allis feels like a hallway, because that is what it is. It is the hallway to White City House. I do not know who will join White City House in White City, because there is a railway line separating it from Notting Hill, which has its own Soho House called Electric House. Perhaps they will take the London Underground. Perhaps the London Underground will soon be a Soho House?

It is a dark, glossy, wide hallway with the ordinary mismatched furniture — and charming tat — of the professionally designed restaurant abyss. It doesn't work here — it's too tired a project, it's jaded segueing to contemptuous — and the food, served in a corner designed to resemble a library containing the books of a moron, is dull. Sausage roll, duck scotch egg, mac and cheese, and cheeseburger — it's barely above adequate and we leave shortly afterwards.

What to do with The Allis? It could have acknowledged its surroundings. It could have been called W12 8QT. The bookings number could have been 01 811 8055. Instead it let the moneybags choose the style — the style is Little Westfield — and all pretension to art, even pop art, flies away.

The Allis, White City House, London W12 7EE; tel 020 7870 0000.



'I'm on that difficult second book.'

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Activist

Rudolf Eucken had a beard and a way of tucking the ends of his bow tie under his collar that I remember Macmillan using in the 1970s. But it was in 1908, a year after Kipling, that Eucken won the Nobel prize for literature. (Anyone read a book by him?) His belief was that truth is arrived at through active striving after the spiritual life, and he called this principle *activism*.

Within a decade, Eucken's fellow Germans were concentrating on quite a different meaning of *activism*. It was the name of a movement, in neutral Sweden and among Flemish nationalists in Belgium in



particular, in favour of the Axis Powers.

Neither of these ideas of activism are invoked today by people who call themselves *activists*. Implicit in the word today is that *activism* is by its nature a good thing. The singer Nadine Shah on the wireless last weekend praised an 'activist' who left her children with their father in Britain while she went back to Syria. Nadine Shah celebrated this activism in a song with the

chorus: 'I'm a mother and a fighter, I can do both just as well.'

Activists, necessarily political, were, even before the Russian Revolution, involved in *direct action*. This ranged from strikes to sabotage. Its practitioners were known by the term *direct actioners* or the equally awkward *direct actionists*. But both terms were still in use on the 1960s in the *New Left Review* or on the lips of Pat Arrowsmith, who in 1979 stood for the Socialist Unity Party (Trotskyist) against James Callaghan.

He got 23,871 votes; she got 132, but she still made a speech when the results were declared.

In the past half century any campaigning cause claims activists. Members of Greenpeace, founded in 1971, became known as *eco-activists*, and were joined by *animal rights activists*. I've even seen reference to *Conservative Party activists*. In the past, were they called volunteers, or perhaps just members?

The activist badge might be fashionable now, but it is not brand new. 'We are no longer all Socialists, to recall Harcourt's classic gibe, but we are certainly all *activists*,' someone wrote in the periodical *Public Opinion*. That was in 1927. The urge has yet to reach me. — *Dot Wordsworth*

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