#MeToo has made sex fun again *Cosmo Landesman* / **In praise of David Dimbleby** *Andrew Marr*

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THE SPECTATOR

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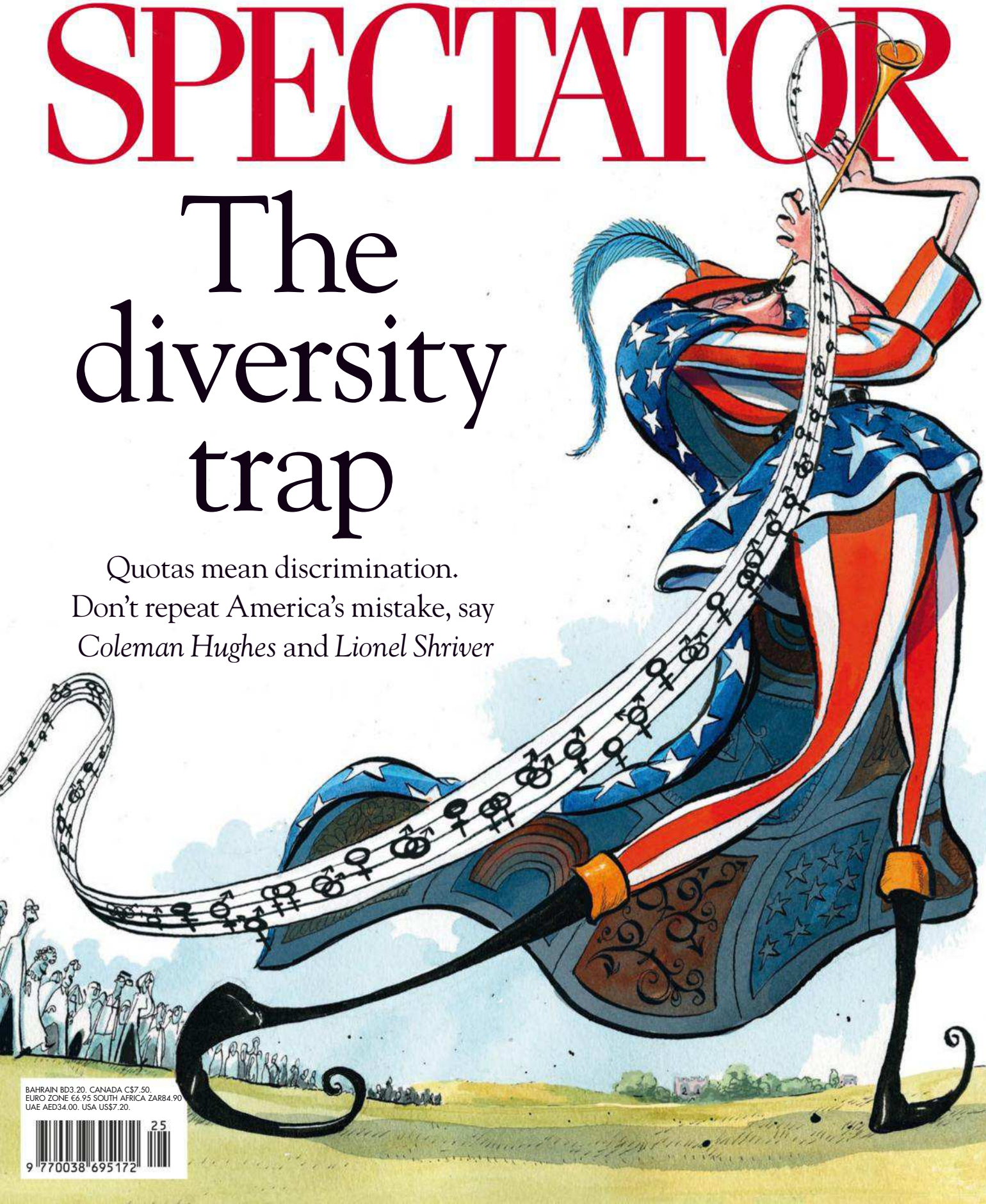
The diversity trap

Quotas mean discrimination. Don't repeat America's mistake, say *Coleman Hughes* and *Lionel Shriver*



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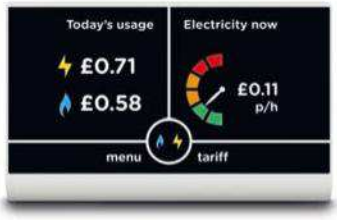

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Refugee lives matter

The photographs of children in cages at US migration centres, apparently separated from the parents with whom they illegally entered the country, do not reflect well on the Trump administration. Talking tough on migration helped the President to win the election but there is a difference between building a wall and carrying out a policy which appears to use cruelty as a shock tactic.

Yet there is a policy towards migrants that is ultimately far crueller, and which is being pursued beneath our noses in Europe. That is to tempt migrants into unseaworthy boats to cross the Mediterranean.

Last year, according to the International Organisation for Migration, 3,116 people died attempting to reach European countries from North Africa by sea, in addition to 5,143 deaths in 2016. However demeaning the treatment meted out to Mexicans caught after a failed dash across the US border, it is not killing them.

European governments cannot claim they bear no responsibility for these deaths. Migrants are taking the risks because, in the vast majority of cases, their journeys are successful — and if they land, they probably get to stay. This is due to EU policy on migration.

For every life lost in the Mediterranean in 2016, there were 50 successful landings: a death rate of just 2 per cent. The Britons and Irish who emigrated to America in search of a better life faced far higher chances of dying yet were not deterred. If there is a 98 per cent chance of being able to start a new life on a more prosperous continent, it ought to be no surprise that so many take this risk.

The Italians have now had enough — of the deaths, and the logistics of handling the 690,000 who have landed on Italy's shores over the past few years. Two weeks ago, Italy's new government refused to allow a charity-run ship carrying 630 migrants to dock in its ports. A new government, a coalition between the Five Star Movement and the Northern League, was elected in part on a promise to stop Italy being used as Africa's gateway to Europe. Under EU rules, migrants should be granted asylum in the first country they land — a policy that has placed a heavy burden on Italy and Greece.

It is to David Cameron's credit that he recognised the most humane solution to the migrant crisis some years ago, at the height of the Syrian war: spend significant sums of money to help refugees in camps near the most affected areas, and take asylum seekers directly from their camps. His position was that Britain ought to play no part — directly or indirectly — in the booming business of people trafficking. As soon as a country grants residency to those who arrive at its shores, it becomes the unwitting partner of people traffickers. Norway has followed the British example, spending money on foreign aid and also on deportations. It regards this as a humane compromise, helping where it can, but refusing to facilitate an industry that smuggles human beings.

Migrants are taking risks because, in the vast majority of cases, their journeys are successful

Angela Merkel took the opposite approach, admitting 1.4 million refugees and causing political mayhem in Germany. That move may yet finish her career. Spain could go the same way, having accepted almost a third of all those who crossed the Mediterranean this year so far. We can expect the people traffickers who were kicked out of the Aegean Sea two years ago now to target the Strait of Gibraltar. Last weekend, the Spanish maritime rescue service saved 986 people from smuggling boats. It also recovered four bodies.

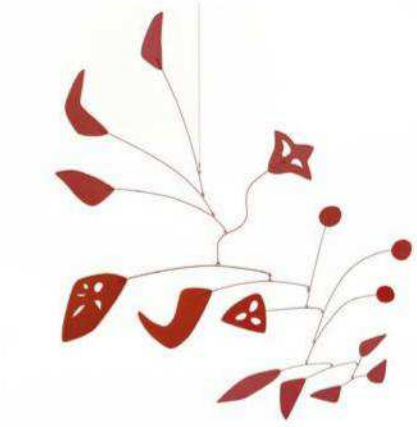
Pedro Sánchez, the new Prime Minister of Spain, has said he has an 'obligation to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe'. Quite so. But has the policy of accepting smuggled people not already led to catastrophe? This week, a group called United Against Refugee Deaths published a list of 34,361 people, whose deaths it blamed on the 'restrictive policies of Fortress Europe'. Anyone seriously concerned about those deaths should ask if they are caused by the opposite: a system that makes the journey viable by accepting those who complete it.

When Australia faced a similar refugee crisis at the start of this century, its government responded by adopting a policy of turning back boats. The death toll then collapsed. When this policy was reversed, seven years later, more than 50,000 people arrived in such boats, of whom 1,000 perished. It was a revulsion against these deaths that led the Australian government to recognise that accepting the boats, while well-intentioned, also caused deaths.

Earlier this year, the Social Democrats in Denmark — generally thought of as one of Europe's most liberal countries — proposed sending asylum applicants to be processed in an overseas centre. So rather than travelling to Europe to claim asylum, would-be refugees would be able to make their applications at centres in North Africa. If successful, they would be taken to Europe in safety. The option of evading the authorities, and slipping into an underworld, would be taken off the table.

We can only hope that European policy might progress in the right direction: moving the asylum system closer to the refugees and being tougher on migrants who arrive on European shores. A humane asylum system need not involve caging children but it should reduce the incentive for migrants to undertake deadly journeys.

Rubenesque, p9



The mobile man, p40

Can you hear him? p26

THE WEEK

BOOKS & ARTS

BOOKS

ARTS

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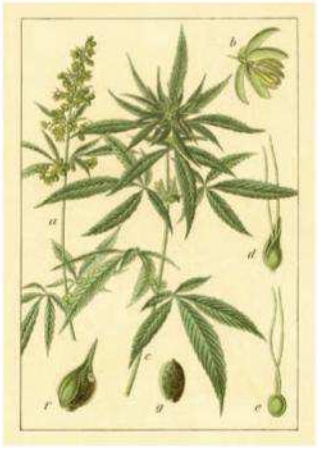
Make sex great again, p18



Keep off the grass, p25

Playing with fire, p34

LIFE

LIFE

AND FINALLY . . .

I would never suggest that a middle manager stopping off to have a knee trembler with a trucker on his way home to his wife Margery is doing anything other than exploring a valid part of his sexuality
Melissa Kite, p55

Weak but stable: if Theresa May were a wine, you would pour it down the sink
Bruce Anderson, p62

We British get a second-rate health service for the price of a third-rate one
Matthew Parris, p22

CONTRIBUTORS

Coleman Hughes is an undergraduate at Columbia University, whose writing has been featured in *Quillette* and the *Columbia Daily Spectator*. He warns on p14 about the dangers of affirmative action.

Simon Barnes writes a wildlife column for the *Sunday Times*. His most recent book is *Ten Million Aliens: A Journey Through the Entire Animal Kingdom.* On p26 he discusses the beauty of birdsong.

Henry Jeffreys, who reviews Steven Spurrier's memoir of a life in wine on p32, is wine columnist for *The Lady* and author of *Empire of Booze: British History Through The Bottom of a Glass.*

Jonathan Steinberg, who writes about Germans' experience of Nazism on p34, is a Professor Emeritus in history at the University of Pennsylvania and the author of *Why Switzerland?*.

Lucy Mangan is the author of *Bookworm: A Memoir of Childhood Reading*. She reviews Sally Bayley's bibliomemoir on p35.

PORTRAIT OF THE WEEK

Home

Theresa May, the Prime Minister, said that spending on NHS England would increase by £20 billion a year by 2023. Some of the money would come from economic growth and a 'Brexit dividend', but more would come from taxes to be announced by the Chancellor at the next budget. Paul Johnson, the director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, said that the divorce settlement with the EU and Britain's commitments to replace EU funding had already accounted for 'all of our EU contributions' for the next few years. The government said the use of medicinal cannabis was to be reviewed. The announcement followed publicity for Charlotte Caldwell, whose son Billy has severe epilepsy, treated by cannabis oil, new supplies of which were confiscated when she tried to bring them into Britain from Canada. Lord Hague, a former leader of the Conservative party, wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* that the war on cannabis as a recreational drug had been 'irreversibly lost' and so a change of policy was needed. Three young men believed to have been spraying graffiti next to a railway line near Loughborough Junction in south London were killed by a train.

Dominic Grieve, a former Conservative attorney-general, said: 'We could collapse the government.' He and his allies had been persuaded not to vote against the government over the European Union Withdrawal Bill by a promise backed by Mrs May that their concerns would be met in a government amendment when the Bill returned to the Lords last week. But the malcontents found the terms of the amendment did not meet their ambition for Parliament to have a 'meaningful vote' on whatever deal might be agreed with the EU. An amendment tabled by Viscount Hailsham was passed in the Lords by 354 votes to 235. Lord Hailsham, showing some emotion, declared: 'I don't believe in Brexit. I think it's a national calamity.' He added: 'This is the high court of Parliament, and we are not party hacks.' So the Bill went back to the Commons. But Lord Lamont suggested it was all an unnecessary fuss; in the event of there being no deal, he said, 'obviously it would come to Parliament, obviously it would be a major event. Do we really have to write it down with all these complicated provisions?'

The Mackintosh building of the Glasgow School of Art, badly damaged by fire in 2014, was destroyed by a new fire that also burnt down the O2 ABC music venue, which had opened as a diorama in 1875. Rolls-Royce is to cut 4,600 jobs, mostly from middle management. Debenhams warned that its annual profits would be between £35 million and £40 million, not the £50.3 million previously estimated. Zara Tindall gave birth to a daughter weighing 9lb 3oz, the Queen's seventh great-grandchild and 19th in line to the throne.

Abroad

Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, rejected a plan by Horst Seehofer, the interior minister, to turn away migrants at the German border if they have registered elsewhere in the EU; Mr Seehofer leads the Bavarian Christian Social Union, which holds the governing alliance together. An Afghan and three Bulgarians were each sentenced to 25 years in prison by a court in Hungary over the suffocation of 71 migrants from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Iran, whose decomposing bodies were found in a sealed lorry. Canada legalised the recreational use of cannabis.

Americans saw photographs and heard a recording of migrant children held in camps behind wire netting after being separated from their parents on their arrest; US immigration officials said that 2,342 children had been separated from 2,206 parents between 5 May and 9 June. The United States withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council, calling it a 'cesspool of political bias'. Inaki Urdangarin, the husband of King Felipe of Spain's sister Cristina, began a six-year sentence for embezzlement. Michel Barnier, the EU chief negotiator on Brexit, insisted that the European Arrest Warrant system could no longer apply to Britain after it leaves the EU. A baby boy born on a train in Paris was awarded a free ticket for the RATP network until he is 25.

Forces loyal to the government of Yemen, backed by the UAE, took the airport of the port city of Hudaydah, held by Houthi rebels. Kim Jong-un, the ruler of North Korea, met Xi Jinping, the ruler of China, in Beijing. In South Korea, 22,000 mattresses emitting radioactive radon gas were impounded. CSH

THE SPECTATOR

ECONOMIC DISRUPTOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS

In partnership with

Julius Bär

The path to growth – and the exit

In the third of our series on 'The Lifecycle of an Entrepreneur', Martin Vander Weyer asks how successful start-ups attract capital for growth — and how founders can enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Maybe it's a sandwich chain, or a price comparison website, or a bioscience breakthrough: but the start-up was your baby, and you've worked night and day to prove its potential. Now it needs capital to go to the next level — and you need liquidity for family needs, as well as a plan for long-term exit. Who do you turn to, and what questions should you ask?

Earlier in this series, Julian Cooper of Julius Baer told us that entrepreneurs need to think well ahead — and 'meet the right people, the right lawyers, the right potential investors'. Simon Ward is a lawyer with Farrer & Co who acts for businesses backed by venture capital and private equity. 'Entrepreneurs need to address "below the line" issues at an early stage: how to turn an owner-managed venture into a professional, risk-aware business that looks seriously investable. That could involve appointing a financial controller and experienced non-executive directors, securing key customer contracts and intellectual property, and reducing dependence on the founders, lest they move on — or, God forbid, get run over by a bus.' He also notes that the founders themselves need tax and inheritance planning, which is of course where a wealth manager such as Julius Baer comes in.

Martin Vander Weyer

Likewise Steve Barnett at the law firm Shoosmiths, with long experience advising investors and companies in the technology sector, talks about 'getting organised ahead of time, with a clear head'. He also explains the crucial difference between bringing in venture capital and going to the private equity market. 'VCs are likely to come in at an earlier, more speculative stage and take a minority interest: of course they want a return on their money but they also want to work collaboratively with founders, to see them carry their ideas through to success.'

Private equity comes in later — and it's a sector that doesn't always have a good press, because when applied to mature companies, it's usually a matter of stripping costs to squeeze higher returns. But for investments of, say, £5 million to £50 million in entrepreneurial ventures, it's more about injecting growth capital and offering founders an exit path.

Shani Zindel is a member of the investment team at Livingbridge, a mid-market private equity player that's aiming to invest £1 billion in high-growth firms over the next five years. 'If you're selling to private equity, you're no longer going to be in control,' she warns. 'You might stay on or you might part company but the relationship is always the key, and you need your own due diligence on that. These are the people who are going to take your business forward — so you need to feel they're the right choice.'

But if the chemistry works, 'I love that moment… when we know this is a business and management team we really want to be involved with, and the management team reach the same conclusion... A new partnership is born.'

Entries have closed for our Economic Disruptor of the Year Awards and we've got a galaxy of exciting stories of innovation from which to choose the shortlist. Watch this space!

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DIARY

Andrew Marr

At Chequers last week to interview the Prime Minister, I hear some sad news of Churchill's mouse. The story goes that the rather fine painting there by Rubens and Frans Snyders, illustrating Aesop's fable of the lion and the mouse, was 'touched up' by Winston himself. During the war, staring at the painting, Churchill decided that the mouse was hard to see properly. Never a man for whom self-doubt was a crippling disability, he promptly picked up his paints and improved the rodent. That, at least, was the story put about by Harold Wilson. As I was waiting for Mrs May and her NHS figures, I was told the painting had long since gone away for restoration and had come back 'with that awful rat cleaned off'. Very sad — though Chequers also has a good original Churchill, a Constable and much else.

May's NHS announcement was described by the *Mail on Sunday* as a 'gamble'. This is probably right, though not because of the row over a non-existent Brexit dividend to pay for it. The problem will be the sound of water gushing once more from the Treasury, into a major department. This leaves Philip Hammond and the Prime Minister with a dilemma. If for the NHS, why not for social care? Then there is the crisis in defence spending, with Trump urging us to increase our contribution to Nato, and Putin giving us good reasons to do exactly that. English schools are also desperate for extra cash; as are local authorities. Having conceded to Jeremy Hunt, a possible successor as Tory leader, Mrs May will have a harder time with other jostling members of her cabinet. Hammond is pushing back hard but the sound of water in a desert is intoxicating.

After any major interview, I turn with great interest to discover from Twitter whether I am currently a sinister Marxist undermining the Tories; a foam-flecked believer in the hardest of hard Brexits; or a mildly outdated Blairite propagandist. Maybe, I'm all three. Or, just possibly, I ask the questions, rather than taking responsibility for the answers. Our job at the BBC is not to denounce, lampoon, deride or sneer at elected politicians but to ask them, politely, direct and relevant questions — pause — and let the viewers decide. The number of viewers watching the show suggests the majority understand this. But there's no doubt that the vote to leave the EU has made many people in certain parts of British public life almost uncontrollably angry. That's going to be a problem for the lucky soul who eventually takes over from the great David Dimbleby on *Question Time*. I've shared late nights with him during elections and heard the babble of frantic voices coming into his earpiece as he sails on imperturbably. Whoever succeeds him should remember: Dimbles made it look easy. That doesn't mean it *is* easy.

I have been saying goodbye to around 60 oil paintings I've made over the past year, and which are now up in Liverpool for 'Angels and Open Windows', which will be my fourth show. I agree with Churchill that painting is one of the most important things you can do in utter silence. I've had shows in London and Cambridge too, but for me there is something special about Liverpool. It's a great painting city, with a great art tradition, yet not part of the money-crazed metropolitan art scene. The people who came to my last show there were blunt, direct, friendly and bought a satisfying number of pictures. This one, as well, will be at the Corke Gallery in Sefton Park, from 5 July onwards. All readers cordially welcome.

The past week has also seen the start of filming for a TV series about social change. I've been in Folkestone to tell a story about Diana Dors, whose biographer memorably called her a 'hurricane in mink'. She was born Diana Fluck but changed her surname because, as she explained, she dreamed of having her name up in lights… and was worried about what might happen if one of the bulbs went out. We filmed in Margate, too, which to my shame I'd never visited before. I'd vaguely, lazily, assumed it would be rundown, tatty, slightly sad. Instead I found a buzzing seaside town with a beautiful beach, salt-water lido, the Turner contemporary art gallery — whose rooms are a delight — the iconic Dreamland fun park, and lots of chic shops, pubs and restaurants. So much for the decline of the British seaside.

I'm still in an ecstatic euphoria of relief after the successful zapping, by cryoablation (essentially, freezing) of a cancerous tumour on my right kidney. Once, getting rid of this would have meant a 14in scar and many months off work. I was in hospital for one night, and since the demise of the tumour, haven't had to take so much as an aspirin for pain relief. Fingers and toes crossed, of course, for the future but for now — yippee for modern medicine.

It's Brexit business as usual

The cabinet's trip to Chequers next month will be a tense affair. Things always are when Brexit is the only item on the agenda.

This week's cabinet meeting, convened to discuss the new NHS funding settlement, offered a preview of some of the arguments to come. Greg Clark, the Business Secretary, and David Gauke, a Treasury man now installed as Lord Chancellor, argued that the public finances need a soft Brexit. Intriguingly, no one pushed back against that point.

In part, this was because Boris Johnson — the most bullish of the cabinet Brexiteers — was not there. One senior Downing Street source tells me that the silence of the other Brexiteers shows that, 'Not many of the other leavers are as blasé as he is about disruption. They understand the fiscal arithmetic that if we take a hit to growth, it becomes very difficult to find more money for defence and everything else.'

Johnson is in combative mood, however. He believes there is an urgent need for a last-ditch effort to change the government's whole approach to the negotiations. He has told friends that he fears that Britain is going to end up 'not in Europe but run by Europe'.

The Foreign Secretary had hoped to enlist Michael Gove in this effort to push for a change of approach. Despite their spectacular falling out over the Tory leadership, the pair have — at times — coordinated on Brexit since Gove's return to the cabinet. They met at a mutual friend's London townhouse to discuss the issue at the beginning of this month. But the discussion ended up highlighting how far apart the two men are on tactics. Gove feels that a radically more robust negotiating strategy would require a credible threat of no deal. But he fears that this is effectively off the table because of a lack of preparation. So he reckons that the best thing now is to get out in March 2019 and then try to fix things. Boris thinks that the Brexiteers must launch one last effort to bend the government to their will.

Disappointed by Gove's pessimism — or realism, according to taste — Johnson is forging a closer relationship with Brexit Secretary David Davis, who is also increasingly frustrated with the government's approach. Johnson and Davis are sure to be the most volatile elements of the Chequers meeting, the purpose of which is to sign off on the white paper that will be Britain's offer to the EU on the future relationship.

Allies of Davis expect him to have a freer hand on discussing Britain's future relationship with Europe than he has on the withdrawal agreement. That's because Olly Robbins — Theresa May's lead civil servant on Brexit who has usurped much of Davis's role as the chief negotiator — is focused so heavily on the withdrawal agreement.

But Johnson and Davis will be furious if they are told at Chequers that with negotiating time running short, the UK will have to make further concessions to make sure that the EU doesn't reject Britain's offer out of hand. It is worth remembering that the Brexiteers have already swallowed a standstill transition, a £39 billion divorce bill and several other concessions to get the type of Brexit they wanted. If they are now told that those compromises weren't enough, they'll be angry.

Cabinet Brexiteers are concerned that even the 30 March date for leaving might be in danger

Cabinet Brexiteers are concerned that even the 30 March date for leaving might be in danger. One tells me that the UK is 'likely to face at some point soon a huge amount of pressure to extend Article 50'. That seems surprising: why would the EU want to do that? But this minister explains the EU's aim would be to extend Article 50 further without guaranteeing the UK the transition phase the government so desperately wants. Brussels would then use this period to extract more concessions.

What's certain is that the Brexit talks are behind schedule. One influential figure at the Department for Exiting the European Union admits that the UK is 'not going to get much out of June', a reference to the EU Council meeting at the end of this month. Even those in No. 10 normally optimistic about how the process is going now accept that the withdrawal agreement is unlikely to have been finalised by October.

'Are you sure this isn't Russian money?'

One Davis ally tells me that talk about extending the withdrawal date deadline is 'black ops by the EU' and warns that any attempt to delay the UK's departure would lead to the fall of the government. However, if the EU proposes a brief extension to Article 50, and threatens the transition process if the offer is turned down, the government's failure to prepare for 'no deal' would make it very difficult for the UK to refuse.

All of this presages a dramatic autumn in British politics as Brexit combines with the spending review, which will determine how much money departments will have over the next few years. One imagines Philip Hammond will be quick to echo Clark and Gauke's argument that the public finances need a soft Brexit. But even without this aggravating factor, the spending round is bound to be fractious. The size of the NHS increase means that things will have to be exceptionally tight everywhere else; the Treasury's starting point is no more money, in real terms, for any other department. One ally of the Chancellor tells me that the Treasury will try to use the NHS settlement as a 'baton to beat the other departments with'.

With money so tight, some Tories are — inevitably — eyeing up the foreign aid budget, now worth more than £13 billion. So it's striking that Penny Mordaunt, the International Development Secretary, told cabinet this week that the 0.7 per cent target for aid spending is not sustainable in its current form. It is known that the UK is trying to get the definition of what counts as foreign aid changed and that Mordaunt wants the Treasury's own accounting rules tweaked. Her comments, though, still took cabinet colleagues aback. But as one laments, it would take primary legislation to abandon the 0.7 per cent commitment.

At Chequers, the cabinet will be trying to find a position that minimises short-term economic disruption while still making Brexit worth doing. That won't be easy. But it will be nothing like as hard as getting the EU to engage constructively on the whole question of the future relationship.

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THE SPECTATOR'S NOTES

Charles Moore

Seen from almost any point of view, the government's decision to increase spending on the NHS is disgusting. It is cynical in its timing to coincide with the Health Service's 70th birthday in England; weak in its refusal to tie the increase to any improvements; mendacious in its claimed link between the increase and a Brexit dividend; evasive in its refusal to present this as a straightforward tax rise; constitutionally improper in its efforts to 'take the issue out of politics' by trying to agree it for many years ahead; and, as always, for those who still think the NHS is 'the envy of the world' (have they actually *asked* the world?), 'too little, too late'. Not a week goes by without my meeting someone who has suffered from a hospital-acquired infection, a confusion or cancellation of appointment dates, or a five-hour wait in A&E; or an old person who has been misunderstood, misinformed or otherwise neglected. I would say that old people in particular now fear the NHS more than they love it. On its website, the NHS itself invites us to 'recognise and thank the extraordinary NHS staff — the everyday heroes — who are there to guide, support and care for us, day in, day out'. Of course, since the Health Service employs 1.4 million, it has a great many staff who deserve thanking. But their kindness and professionalism exist despite the NHS, not because of it. In Britain, we still think the alternative to the NHS is a private-sector free-for-all, with the weakest losing out. Actually, no Western country, not even the United States, has such a thing; but nor does any Western country have our over-centralised, producer-driven, demoralised and anti-innovative mess. You would not put your dog through what people go through in the NHS and, indeed, nobody does. When our dog got hit by a train a couple of years ago, the vet ambulance came to rescue her with incredible speed, and a different vet gave her a seven-hour operation which saved her life. If she had had to go and wait in A&E, she would have died.

Upskirting is such a pretty word: it sounds like a charming village in Yorkshire, or an olde worlde custom, like swan-upping. Actually, it is nasty, and not as new as people claim. Fragonard depicts it in 'The Swing' (though

obviously the young man had no camera). Margaret Thatcher, who was most reluctant to wear trousers, nevertheless did so when she knew she would have to climb a ladder, because she did not trust the photographers. Upskirting has been the *raison d'etre* of the *Sunday Sport* ever since it was founded in 1986. In 1993, the *Mirror* published close-up pictures, taken by a concealed camera, of Diana, Princess of Wales, when working out in a gym. It paid the gym-owner, who had set up the camera, more than £100,000. Mail Online has for many years been pretty much an upskirter's paradise, except that it usually dispenses with the skirts. The problem has spread, however, because of technology. Upskirting is the pervert's equivalent of the selfie — easily executed, easily disseminated and half-assumed by its perpetrators to be their human right. I don't think poor Sir Christopher Chope understood all these things when he made his lone objection to the Voyeurism (Offences) Bill in Parliament last Friday. He was merely doing the backbencher's job of trying to stop the government taking control of private members' bills for its own political or presentational purposes. There is a question here for my own trade. A great many social media activities — including trolling and upskirting — are democratisations of habits which used to be Fleet Street's exclusive property. Does our outrage at them reflect our anger at losing our monopoly?

The issue in the Chope case is the readiness of parliamentary colleagues on his own benches going public to condemn him. None, he says, consulted him first to hear his side of the story. The supposed justification for their behaviour is the 'optics' of Sir Christopher's line on upskirting. But what about the optics of a party whose MPs' first instinct is to condemn one another?

The departure of David Dimbleby from *Question Time* is certainly sad from the point of view of the panellist. He was, in recent years, one's sole protector. Calm, humorous, very slightly bored (but too polite to show it), David reminded one by his mere presence that there is a world of sane and civilised people outside the studio. He cheered me in adversity, rather as I once felt when I discovered Château Latour for £12 in an otherwise unremarkable hotel in Blackpool during a party conference. I also got no sense of his politics. Because he is rich, successful and on the BBC, I assume he must be mildly left-wing; but he has never given me any evidence to confirm or refute this theory. In the entire time I have done the programme — more than 30 years, starting under the great Robin Day — the left in the studio has been noisier, and usually more numerous, than the right. The difference between then and now lies in the left's degree of organisation. Nowadays, you can tell as soon as you go on if there is a coordinated left-wing claque in the room (about 50 per cent of the time, there is). They tend to sit together, have common points ready and make the same sound of righteous shock at anything 'unacceptable'. It would be interesting to see whether this planned intimidation would still work if the BBC made everyone present give up all mobile devices at the door. A programme called *Question Time* does need an audience which wants to listen to the answers.

Obviously, one mocks little President Macron for telling a teenager to call him 'Monsieur le Président'. How long before the French will have to say 'Vive l'Empereur!'? But I do have a sneaking sympathy for the man one must not call 'Manu'. The presumption of modern culture that everyone is on first-name terms makes people confused because they come to believe they really are friends with 'Harry and Meghan', or whoever it may be. The famous people thus addressed are also unhappy, because they cannot remember who they do and don't know, and because they feel that people are trying to own them. Full, formal modes of address provide a 'Noli me tangere' which preserves sanity on both sides. Look at the Queen. Who dares call her Lilibet?

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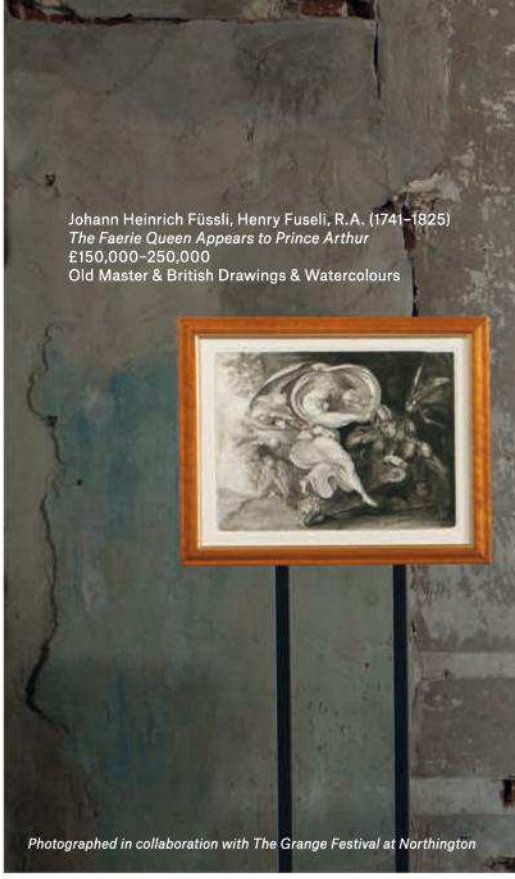

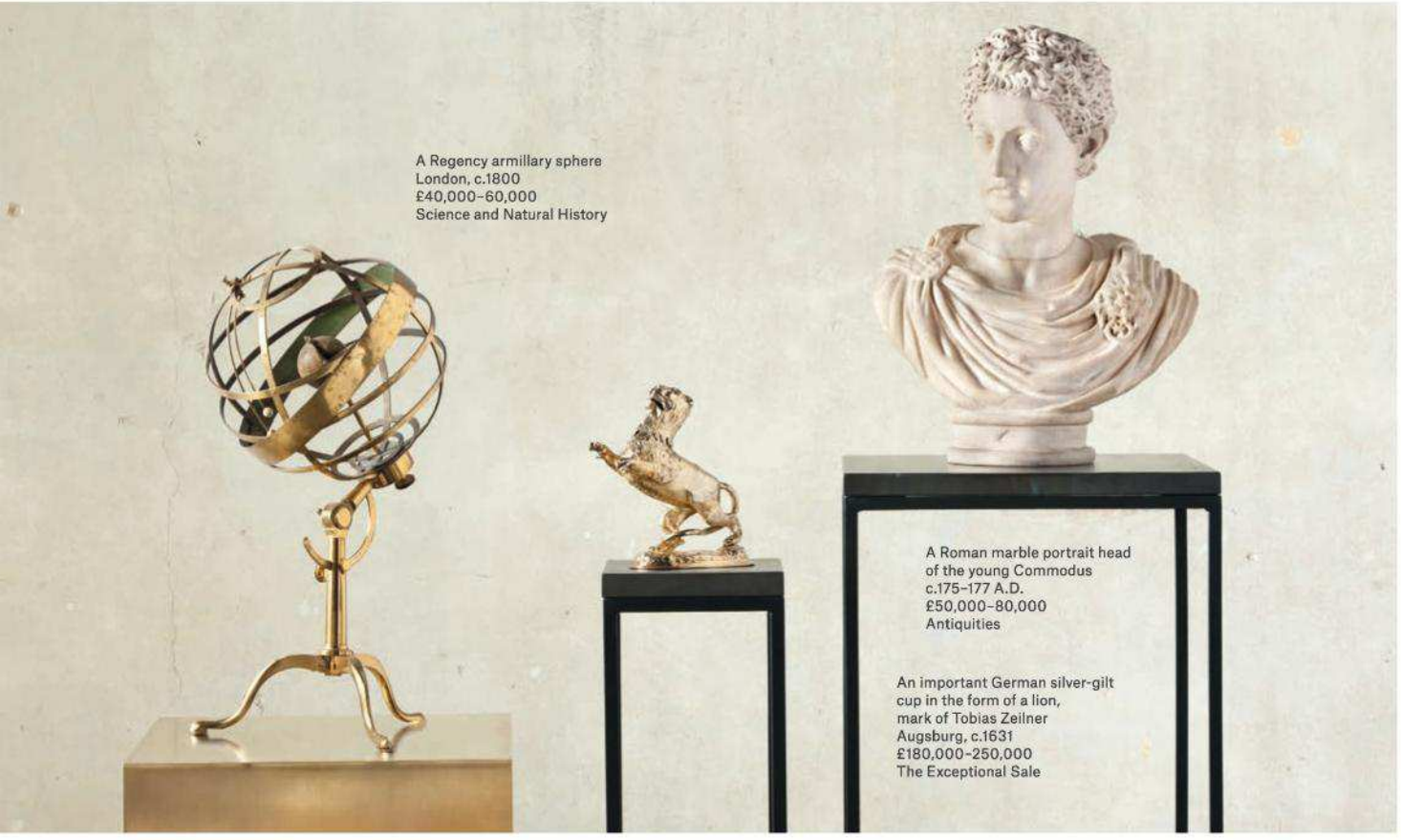

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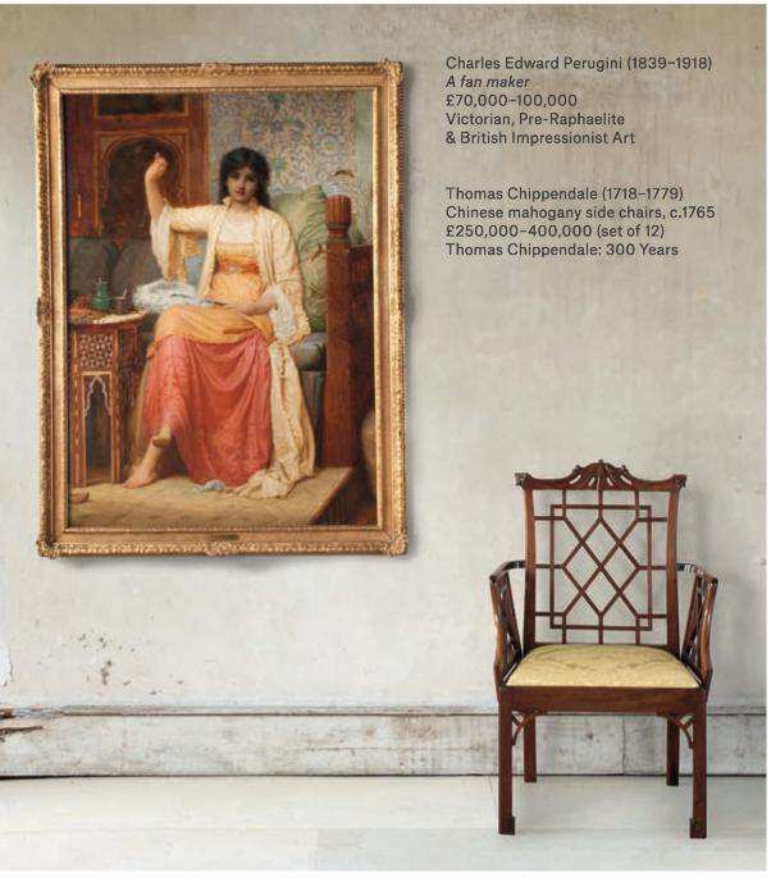

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CHRISTIE'S

The diversity trap

Britain is succumbing to the same madness as America

COLEMAN HUGHES

Britain seems to be following America down a dangerous path. There's your politician David Lammy accusing Oxford and Cambridge of racial bias — and refusing to listen when they point out they simply accept whoever gets top grades. Then there's the author Lionel Shriver, pilloried because she dared to suggest (in this magazine) that privileging identity quotas over talent might be a mistake. It seems the UK is succumbing to the same madness over diversity and quotas that has plagued the US for half a century. The hope is that quotas lead to a fairer, more tolerant society, but the reality is very different.

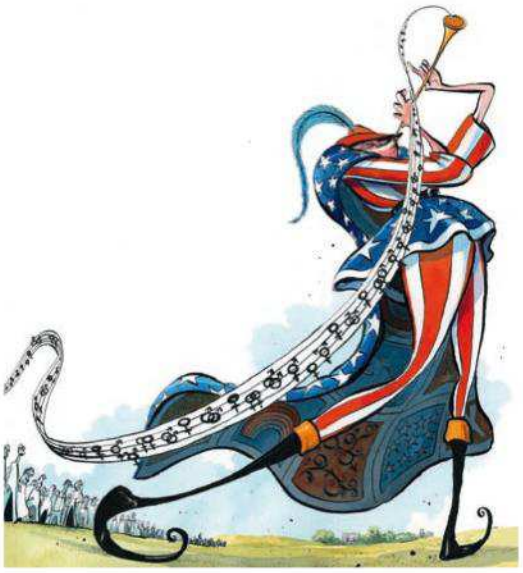
Across the Atlantic, American institutions have enshrined diversity and inclusion as their guiding principles. From university admissions to life-or-death professions such as air-traffic control, we have sanctified diversity so completely that many treat the idea of choosing applicants based on merit as if it were tantamount to nailing a 'whites only' sign to the door.

Despite its seeming popularity, affirmative action has always presented a problem for even its most ardent supporters: it is a racist policy. There is no other way to describe it. Almost ten years ago, a Princeton study found that racial bias had already crept in: Asians and whites had to score far higher on their SAT exams — 450 and 310 more points respectively, from a total of 1,600 — to have the same odds of being admitted into elite universities as black students. As a black American, I don't use the term 'racist' lightly. But intentionally making it harder for people of a specific race to enter a certain sphere of society is the definition of racial discrimination.

That this is racist would be a banal observation if not for the fact that supporters of affirmative action see anti-racism as central to their identities. How do they resolve the cognitive dissonance of simultaneously supporting and condemning racism? By heeding the legal cliché: deny, deny, deny. For instance, an article last year in the *Harvard Crimson* entitled 'Welcome to the Harvard Black Community' mocks the idea that 'black students are gifted spots through affirmative action' outright. But that is precisely what occurs. Nor is racial discrimination an unfortunate and small side effect of the policy, as is sometimes implied. Racial discrimination *is* the policy.

Many lessons have emerged from America's adventures in diversity and inclusion — lessons the UK ought to learn sooner rather than later.

The first is that preferential policies will be sold as if they are unanimously supported by historically marginalised groups, even when the facts indicate otherwise. For instance, a 2016 Gallup poll found that 57 per cent of blacks agreed that race or ethnicity 'should not be a factor at all' in the college admissions process. Back in 2001, a similar poll conducted for the *Washington Post* found 86 per cent of blacks agreed that decisions about hiring and admissions 'should be based strictly on merit and qualifications other than race/ethnicity,' even if the goal of a preferential policy would be to 'give minorities more opportunity'. Such poll results are decidedly inconvenient for proponents of affirmative action, who prefer to paint the practice as hugely popular among blacks, the better to tar their critics as racists.



How many women writers actually want to be held to a lower standard so that Penguin Random House can achieve a perfect 50-50 gender split? What percentage of Muslims ask to be treated this way? How many people with disabilities desire this? The lesson from America is clear: never assume that the answer is 'all' or even 'most'.

Of course, even if every member of a group did favour a policy, that wouldn't mean that the practice is wise. Which brings me to the second lesson: do not assume that preferential policies are good for the groups said to benefit from them. In the US, the consequences of affirmative action for blacks have been unclear. For every study that finds a benefit, another discovers an unintended negative consequence. On the one hand, it seems obvious that placing someone in a more elite college or a higher-paying job would be good for them. Yet preferential policies often throw minorities into academic environments for which they are underprepared; they cause the people penalised by such policies to resent those who benefit from them; and they send a signal to minority youths that they will never be expected to compete on a level playing field.

Moreover, there's no reason to believe that proponents of affirmative action care whether or not the policy works. Nearly all of the data needed to adjudicate the wisdom of the policy has been kept secret for decades. The latest data suppression scandal comes from Harvard University, which found in a 2013 internal report that its admissions process was biased against Asian-Americans. It estimated that if it were to consider only academic credentials, then the proportion of Asian-American students admitted would more than double — from 19 to 43 per cent.

In the midst of a recent discrimination lawsuit, plaintiffs have unearthed evidence that Harvard consistently rated Asian-American applicants low on personality traits such as 'courage' and 'kindness', driving down their odds of being admitted. According to the *New York Times*, Harvard 'fought furiously' to keep this a secret.

Another minor scandal occurred more than a decade ago when two Harvard professors found that over half of its black students were not the intended beneficiar-

ies of affirmative action — i.e., they were not the descendants of American slaves but the children of recent immigrants to the US. Since then, university administrators have blocked inquiries into the demographic make-up of black students at elite schools, sending a clear message: do not ask how we admit students, where they are from, and whether they thrive after they get here. In other words, do not ask for any data that bears on the questions of how, or if, affirmative action works. Proponents of affirmative action do not behave like adults instituting a wise policy by ethical means, but like adolescents guarding a dirty secret.

The third lesson is that appeasing diversity advocates is a poor strategy. If you begrudgingly submit to some preferential policy, reasoning that diversity advocates will be satisfied once it is implemented, then you have the logic of progressive activism

Racial discrimination is not an unfortunate side effect at Harvard – it is the policy

backwards. As a space gets more diverse, diversity advocacy does not decrease; it increases. Consider universities. Why do we see the most energetic demands for diversity and sensitivity in precisely the places that are already the most diverse and sensitive? Because diversity demands do not vary with the level of societal prejudice, but with the level of societal guilt. Where white guilt is endemic, demands to redress racism will be strongest, regardless of how much racism actually exists. Where colonial guilt is endemic, demands to redress xenophobia will be strongest, regardless of how much xenophobia actually exists. Diversity advocates do not go where they are most needed, but where they are most powerful.

If American institutions continue to worship the false gods of diversity and inclusion, then we will never get past race. Indeed, progressives have hijacked America's public conversation on race so thoroughly that the phrase 'getting past race' now sounds like a quaint platitude from a bygone era — even to those, like myself, who believe it is the only goal worth pursuing. Martin Luther King spoke of a dream that his four children 'will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character'. That dream is becoming ever more distant, as the 'diversity' agenda reboots racial discrimination for the 21st century. British institutions should learn from the past 50 years of America's history so as not to repeat our mistakes.

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST
Coleman Hughes, Lionel Shriver and Ash Sarkar on Britain's diversity trap.

Don't fight racism with racism

LIONEL SHRIVER

Dear 2016 WriteNow mentees,

Thanks so much for your open letter to me. It seems only good manners for me to write back.

You're rightly proud of having been admitted to a challenging programme at Penguin Random House that mentors gifted young minority authors and helps to cultivate their talents. My own publisher, HarperCollins, runs a similar programme, which enjoys my full support. Such proactive outreach is exactly the approach I endorse for helping to vary the voices on our bookshelves. That is why my column of a fortnight ago said not one discouraging word about WriteNow. Indeed, I made no reference to your programme whatsoever.

Apologies to *Spectator* readers, any number of whom have contacted me to express their agreement with my real point, and none of whom seemed confused about that point, or ashamed of themselves for concurring with some bigoted screed. To most of them, this column will seem a tortured rehashing of what was perfectly clear the first time. But we live in a dour and censorious age. Perhaps in future it will prove necessary to write every column twice, the original with wit, playfulness and brio. Then I'll draft a pedantic, leadenly prosaic rendition without any jokes.

To recap: I took specific exception to PRH's declared intention to have both its staff and list of authors mirror the UK population by 2025 in regard to race, ethnicity, class, disability, sexuality and gender. (As for the last, the company may have to sack a raft of women, who are over-represented in editorial.) These demographic proportions are statistically ascertainable. So while PRH may claim that the planned reconfiguration of its workforce and catalogue over the next seven years is an 'aspiration', the aspiration is to pursue numerical quotas.

I do not like diversity quotas, in publishing or anywhere else. They can tempt HR departments to value hitting arithmetic targets over hiring competent workers and tempt editors to value category-bulking authors over the most exceptional writers from any background. To the degree that PRH genuinely aims to ply its wares amongst minority communities with historically few readers, brilliant. That is thinking like a publishing company, whose driving purpose should be expanding its market and selling more books. Nevertheless, the manifestation of a narrow, rigid version of

You want to be selected because you're talented, right? Not because you improved a PR statistic

diversity, rather than strong book sales and literary excellence, can too easily become an end in itself. With the relinquishment of judgment abundantly on merit, quality could suffer.

Hitherto, the UK has not extensively employed positive discrimination, which may still seem innocently benevolent in Britain. But, as Coleman Hughes explains opposite, the US has rigorously pursued what we call affirmative action, especially in education, for nearly 50 years. The American experience is cautionary.

Combating injustice with more injustice, and racism with more racism, is philosophically contradictory and pragmatically ham-fisted. In the US, affirmative action has entrenched racial divisions and pitted minorities against one another.

These finger-on-the-scale policies have often benefited the economically well-off who happen to tick a racial box. Intrinsically paternalistic, affirmative action has stigmatised and demoralised the very populations it was designed to help. (You observed how hard WriteNow was to get into, and what stringent standards you had to meet. You want to have been selected because you're especially talented, right? Not because you improved a PR statistic.) Though brought in to compensate for historical prejudice, this redress has >

no endpoint. It is never over. Bring in affirmative action, and you're stuck with it.

Although still defended by most progressives, affirmative action policies have embittered not only America's white citizenry, but also our large East Asian community, many of whose children have been actively discriminated against in college admissions because they work too hard, excel too much, score too highly on standardised tests, and make too many sacrifices of ordinary teenage pleasures in the interest of career advancement. These applicants have not only been roundly punished, but insulted as well — for the only way that colleges have been able to keep admission numbers down among, say, diligent Chinese and Koreans is, as Coleman Hughes points out, to give East Asians systematically low marks on 'personality'. So maybe they're smart, but they're not nice or interesting people. That racist enough for you?

The suit lodged recently against Harvard University by aggrieved Asian applicants is likely to land in the US Supreme Court,

When language no longer serves to communicate, what we writers do for a living is worse than pointless

and I wish them success. Mind, the last time affirmative action came under the gavel in DC, the decision hinged on whether the University of Texas was employing quotas — exactly what I object to PRH installing, explicitly or implicitly. Across the board, elite American universities have been accepting roughly the same proportions of each racial category for decades, regardless of variations in rates of application. By stealth, these schools are pursuing quotas, which is unconstitutional, and that's why college admissions offices are more secretive than the CIA.

The gist, then, is I don't want to see the UK go down this unfair, anti-meritocratic and culturally destructive road, in either education or commerce. But that's not how you interpreted my last column, is it? And your imputations to that piece were mild in comparison to the shriller hysteria I'm told can be found online. The leap is Olympian: Shriver thinks only white people can write. Shriver wants to protect publishing from the barbarians. Shriver thinks diversity necessarily translates into rubbish books. Shriver is a literary white supremacist.

That column wasn't hard to understand, and I can't imagine your reading comprehension scores are quite that low. So we're dealing with what I can only call malicious misinterpretation. No writer can defend against wilful misreading. On the contrary, a text entails a contract between authors and readers: authors will endeavour to deliver their message as clearly as possible; in exchange, readers will meet writers halfway, and make an effort — for reading is an effort, which is why it's a decreasingly popular medium in an impatient age — to correctly digest this message, even if in the end some of that audience may still disagree with it.

Outrage being the left's contemporary drug of choice, addiction levels seem to have got so high that it's not enough to get indignant about what's actually out there; it's now necessary to make enraging stories up. But I have a hard enough time sticking up for what I actually believe, and actually put in print, without defending against all the things I don't believe, and didn't put in print. I'm afraid this is a textbook instance of what's becoming all too common: an internet mob effectively rewrites your views, the better to attack them. But a world in which you have said, not what you said, but what other people say you said, is a world in which savvy people stop writing and shut up. After all, this column — it won't make any difference, will it? The verdict is in.

Tell you what. This is what I don't hope for you: that you all have long literary careers, weathering many a struggle, setback and disappointment along the way, and finally establish yourselves as authors to be reckoned with — only to discover that when you write the word 'red' your readers picture aquamarine, and when you write 'carrot' your readers conjure a tractor. The result is something between cynicism and bewilderment. As *Spectator* readers may recall, one of my earlier columns described the discouraging experience of having your prose so twisted by its audience that you lose faith in the tools of your trade. In a polarised and broadly illiterate digital universe, full of predators gorging on animosity who are determined to read whatever they wish to, words cease to function. All nuance out the window, the language no longer serves to communicate, and what we writers do for a living is worse than pointless. When others can overwrite our work with whatever they feel like, using our text like a blank screen on which to project their personal power-point presentations, at best tearing scraps of our prose out of context to construct their own gaudy collages, writing anything at all, much less putting truly controversial ideas into the public sphere, becomes too perilous to be worth the risk.

At least you mentees and I do share the same ambition: that in due course, after enough open-mindedness, mutual curiosity and steady incremental progress, occupations like ours are naturally and effortlessly populated by folks from a wide range of backgrounds. We only differ on how we get there. I wouldn't do it with quotas. Because diversity doesn't lower standards. Quotas do.

Wishing you the best of luck in a damnably difficult job,

Lionel Shriver.

Arboreal

Not a trough of adders or a box of hornets
but a tree full of birds was your emblem
of the poet – home for wandering voices

that have no household gods, no roof, no door.
Or if a door an always open door.
Just as Machado valued Virgil not

for his Eclogues, Georgics or Aeniad
but because he's host and haven to
a ghost-guesthood, a close-packed company

of singers, without botching or mangling their notes.
Orchestration – if that weren't such a dud word.
So think of the bird whose head is full of tree,

who sits on the bare branch, guardian of green,
hearing the dim hum of buds in the xylem,
wind rattling her cage of wet, black boughs.

— Jamie McKendrick

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Bringing sexy back

Forbidden flirting is more exciting

COSMO LANDESMAN

Sexual intercourse, Philip Larkin famously wrote, began in 1963. And listening to contemporary commentators, you'd think that it came to an end in 2017 with the birth of the #MeToo movement. For these voices of doom, the end of the erotic is nigh; Britain is on the brink of sexual apocalypse.

The recent news that Netflix has banned flirtation from film sets — along with lingering hugs, requests for phone numbers and extensive touching — is for these commentators just the latest example of #MeToo sexual correctness gone mad. They fear we are witnessing the making of a bland new world where the rules and regulations governing social relations between the sexes will become so oppressive that the very sexiness of sex itself will be snuffed out.

I understand and sympathise with the prophets of doom because, until recently, I was one of them. Men like me — old-fashioned romantics who enjoyed flirtation and the art of seduction (conducted, of course, with old-world courtesy and consideration) — were finished. In a world where flirtation is forbidden and where to invite a work colleague for a cocktail is now condemned as coercion by other means, I was a dodo. As Sarah Vine put it recently: 'Such men are becoming increasingly unacceptable in this #MeToo world of ours. So vehement is the backlash against anything resembling traditional masculinity, it's hard to see a future for them.'

Yes, I had seen that future and it was sexless. It was time to bin my boxes of Viagra, chuck out the multi-coloured condoms, hang up my handcuffs and bid a tearful farewell to my old faithful friend Mr Penis Ring. The game was up and the good times were over; the warriors of the #MeToo movement had won the battle for hearts, minds and genitalia.

But then I began to think about the Netflix ban on looking at work colleagues for more than five seconds — and I suddenly realised that you can wink and smile at someone in less than five seconds. Putting a time limit on looking doesn't end flirtation; on the contrary it compresses it into a supercharged sexual moment. The fleeting glance is always more suggestive — and welcome — than the fixated gaze. So maybe we've got it all wrong; maybe the #MeToo movement will actually be the saviour of sex. Why? Because in a world where flirtation is banned, sex regains its exciting edge; its frisson of the forbidden. Put simply: repression is the Viagra our bored, burnt-out, freewheeling, anything-goes, sex-fatigued culture needs to get its mojo working again.

For the past four decades we have been conned by the liberal establishment of writers, psychoanalysts and sex therapists into thinking that repression is the enemy of the erotic. If you want to see just how untrue that is, look at the platonic affair of Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard's characters in David Lean's 1945 masterpiece *Brief Encounter*. The only thing naked in that film is the raw and repressed desire they have for each other. Or to put it another way: repression in the 1940s gave us Elizabeth Taylor and Ava Gardner; liberation in the Noughties gave us Kim Kardashian and Katie Price.

In a world where flirtation is banned, sex regains its exciting edge

Liberal tolerance and sexual pluralism are great in theory; in practice they're more problematic. How can you walk on the wild side when all is permissible? Tolerance can take out the grit and guts of sex as much as intolerance.

The sexual revolution of the 1970s was the best and worst thing that ever happened to sex. Back then, sexual radicals assumed that if we defied the repressive moral commandments of what they called the 'Western Judeo-Christian tradition' and trashed the taboos of bourgeois society, then we'd all be freer and happier when it came to sex; and happy sex meant happy people.

But the intoxication of freedom and experimentation inevitably wears off. The sexual permissiveness and 'free love' that began in the 1960s ended not in a better world, but in the dead-end decadence of the 1970s: glam rock, gender bending and breaking every sexual taboo in the book.

And that grew boring too. People wanted rules and restrictions. Novelty always leads back to normality. Just look at the sexual trajectory of David Bowie's life: Mr Gender-Bending-Bisexual himself ended up a happily married hetero. And so did Lou Reed, the man who invited us all to take a walk on that wild side.

People who worry the #MeToo sex of the future will be bland and boring have forgotten just how bland and boring sex had become even before the birth of the new rules. At the time, the feminist maverick Camille Paglia described the period immediately preceding #MeToo as an age 'of sexual boredom and inertia, complaint and dissatisfaction, which is one of the main reasons young men have gone over to pornography'.

And look at how respectable middle-class society turned to S&M — at least the fantasy of it — to titillate their jaded sexual palates. How else can you explain the whole *Fifty Shades of Grey* phenomenon? After three films and more than 125 million copies sold worldwide, S&M is now about as transgressive as a vicar's tea party.

But that could change, thanks to the #MeToo movement. Not long ago a *New York Times* headline asked, 'How Does Submissive Sex Work in the Age of #MeToo?' Actually, I would say, it's going to work pretty damn well! The author of the piece, Hayley Phelan, wondered if her joy in being dominated by men made her 'a traitor to #MeToo and what it stands for'. Of course it does; but how exciting is that! The bedroom is where all the messy contradictions of our lives can safely be played out.

And because of the #MeToo movement, sex will be pushed out of the public realm and put back into the bedroom where it belongs. Of course a lot of #MeToo rules are silly and excessive — but so are the freedoms offered by enlightened liberal orthodoxies. It's a question of getting the balance right. I'm optimistic that we're heading for a new golden age where sex has regained its sexiness. It's going to be a dirty, thrilling and fun ride. Now where did I put those cuffs?

SPECTATOR.CO.UK/PODCAST

Cosmo Landesman and Katie Glass on #MeToo and dating.

ROD LIDDLE

VAR is rapidly becoming a farce

Flies, millions of them, vast swarms of them, spawned in the filthy Volga river: mutant flies, probably. Gathering in clouds around each player on the pitch (one crawled into a Tunisian's ear), the footballers suddenly resembling 22 Simon Schamas, flapping their hands about in outrage. Bitey Russian flies. As a trope for this tournament, and indeed the city formerly known as Stalingrad, it couldn't much be bettered — an image of pestilence and death. But then the animal kingdom has become quite adept at providing meaningful commentary on England World Cup games. Eight years ago in Cape Town, a pigeon roosted by the opposition goal and did not have to shift its position once during the whole of the first half. It was entirely untroubled by England's forward line.

That was the soul-destroying nil-all draw with Algeria — England always struggle when the Arabs are in town. The only country in this World Cup which we have played and never, ever beaten, despite being given two chances to do so, is Saudi Arabia, the worst team in the tournament. This time it was the Tunisians, who began time-wasting in the 12th minute and spent the rest of the game diving, wrestling, cheating and packing 11 men in their own penalty area, aided in this endeavour by a Colombian match official who was perhaps the worst I have seen at a major tournament.

They had just one shot anywhere near the target — and that a dubious penalty. England were — a couple of the gobbier rude boys excepted — intermittently excellent and did that unheard-of thing, won; even if victory was secured in archetypal English fashion by a header from a set piece in the second minute of injury time. They had started well but the flies got to them and you could see the confidence and imagination draining away as the game progressed.

The rest of the world was cheering for Tunisia, just as the rest of the world also cheered for Iceland in their unexpected draw with Argentina. Iceland are also foul and make Tunisia look like Cruyff's Holland in their agricultural hoofing and complete lack of ambition. But we all cheer the underdog, no matter how unjust their cause might be. It is in the nature of football that 11 well-marshalled sacks of potatoes can often thwart the most talented of teams, which is why we have cup 'upsets' every year without fail.

Brazil and Argentina have both failed to beat lumpen but muscular opposition so far in this World Cup, and France and England did so only by the skin of their teeth. (Germany losing to Mexico was a different kettle of fish. The Mexicans seem to have at last woken from their decades-long siesta.) And I suppose you cannot blame the Tunisians for doing a passable imitation of Marshal Zhukov's troops and hunkering down for aeons, waiting for the flies of summer to disperse and General Winter to finally arrive. But all for nothing. Carthage fell, just as it did in the Third Punic War — in injury time, Gary, what a great result for this talented Roman side, now can they go all the way?

VAR doesn't remove human error — it expands it

It has been a moderately exciting World Cup so far — and one which is in danger of being ruined by football's latest act of immense hubris, something called VAR. This is the Video Assistant Referee — and it is rapidly becoming a farce, as Luddites like me suggested it would from the word go. The actual referee wears an earpiece wired up to a small room in some grim Moscow Lubyanka, where four other referees are watching the action from 33 different camera angles. All dressed in full referee kit, just for a laugh. This is an attempt to make football, which has grown far too big for its lightweight slip-on boots, pristine and beyond the realm of human error. A mistake. Football is all about human error, and a dingbat of a referee, such as the idiotic Colombian, is all part of the panoply of what is an intensely human affair.

'Can you bite my nails? I'm a vegetarian.'

Before the World Cup, my views were in a small minority. The majority view was: if we have the technology, why not use it? Not any more. So far VAR has resulted in the opening games being festooned with penalties and the real injustices not being punished at all. There is a non sequitur at work, too. You are not removing human error: you are expanding it. Anyone who watches *Match of the Day* will know that Lineker and his three pundits can never agree on whether a card should be red or yellow, whether it was a penalty or a fair challenge — and that's with a similar range of camera angles and slow motion and six hours to debate the issue.

But football thinks of itself as too important to allow for the judgment of a single individual, and too much money is involved. And so we have this charade which I suspect most people now wished hadn't happened at all. Hell, in the first days of football there was no referee at all because it was considered impossible for a gentleman player to cheat or foul. But then we let in the riff-raff — first the lower classes, then the foreigners.

But as I say, it's a game in which human frailty matters as much as human brilliance. No side has looked quite the finished article at this World Cup — certainly not France or Brazil or Germany. The best football has come from Belgium (third favourites) and Spain, with honourable mentions to Mexico, England, Portugal and Russia. It will be a European team which takes the title, I suspect. Germany tend to grow into tournaments. Spain will be there and thereabouts. And England, once the flies have been banished? The semi-finals are not impossible.

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

BAROMETER

Well oiled

The government last week ordered a review into the medical use of cannabis. Some cannabis oil available on the internet:
— Hemp oil for pain relief. 'Great peppermint flavour. Promotes overall health and wellness when combined with a regular workout routine and diet.' $24.97
— Ultra hemp 500 oil drops. 'Helps with anxiety, chronic pain, sleep, mood, skin and hair. Boosts immunity, sharpens brain function and helps with sleep.' $36.98
— Heaven's Bounty ultra refined premium hemp oil. 'Better sleep, healthy skin and smooth hair… no earthy aftertaste.' $39.99

Track trespassers

Three graffiti artists were killed by a train in south London. Where did people most trespass on railways in 2016?

London	**1,455**
North West	**1,142**
Yorkshire and Humberside	**931**
Scotland	**710**
West Midlands	**588**
South West	**553**
Wales	**524**

Source: British Transport Police

Healthy numbers

How much did we spend (per capita in US$) on healthcare in 2016 compared with other G7 countries?

US	**9,892**
Germany	**5,550**
Canada	**4,752**
France	**4,600**
Japan	**4,519**
UK	**4,192**
Italy	**3,391**

Source: OECD

In the long run

David Dimbleby announced his retirement as *Question Time* presenter after 25 years. He might be nearly 80 but he is wet behind the ears compared with some presenters. Some others who have stayed the course:
— John Humphrys has notched up 31 years as a presenter of the *Today* programme.
— Ken Bruce is often mentioned as Britain's longest-serving radio presenter although he managed only 18 years in the same slot, presenting Radio 2's mid-morning show between 1992 and 2010.
— In December, Nicholas Parsons, 94, reached the 50th anniversary of the first recording of *Just a Minute*, although the show runs in series rather than every week.
— For a weekly programme, Stan Ambrose can still claim the record. He presented *Folkscene* on BBC Radio Merseyside from 1967 for 49 years until his death two years ago aged 86.

Britain's collusion

Is the government sucking up to Trump over the Mueller inquiry?

PAUL WOOD

Washington, DC

When the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu visited London in 1978, the British government did some serious sucking up. Ceausescu was an egomaniac and possibly crazy. When he went hunting outside Bucharest, his bodyguards shot game with machine guns so he could be photographed at the end of the day with a shoulder-high pile of dead animals. He was also said to be a germophobe, sterilising his hand with pure alcohol if it touched a door handle. The French president telephoned the Queen to warn her that when the Ceausescus came to the Élysée, lamps, vases, ashtrays and bathroom taps went missing from their rooms. But Ceausescu got a state visit to Britain, with a knighthood (later revoked) and a stay in Buckingham Palace.

Western governments are now trying to appease another germophobe with a reputation for narcissistic excess. The US is not Romania, the stories about Donald J. Trump focus on his cheating at golf, not hunting, and if the great developer removes any bathroom taps, it will be to replace them with something gold-plated. Even so, America's allies worry that President Trump will get out of bed one morning and do something crazy: abolish Nato, declare war on Canada, give Alaska back to the Russians.

So how might Britain be sucking up to Trump? A Labour MP, Ben Bradshaw, thinks that the government has not always done all it can to assist the Mueller inquiry into whether Trump's campaign colluded with Russia. Bradshaw was the minister in charge of the Secret Intelligence Service, known as MI6, and has doggedly pursued allegations about Russian meddling in other people's elections. 'I'm told that Mueller's team were over here late last year and they weren't happy with the level of cooperation they were getting,' he said. Another source, with links to the 'intelligence community', said this was continuing, even after the Skripal poisoning.

These claims — of a decision to go slow with Mueller, driven by expediency — have not been confirmed, but if true, the government may have miscalculated. Britain is trying to get a free-trade deal with the US as we leave the EU. And Theresa May was the first world leader through the door of the Oval Office to see the new president. But whatever promises she wrung from Trump will depend on a follow–through and focus he has not shown. This is a president who could not get his own healthcare bill past a Republican Congress.

'Seen from the inside, the chaos is a hundred times worse than you can imagine,' said one former senior White House official. There seems even less chance of a special deal for Britain after this month's disastrous G7 meeting. 'We're like the piggy bank that everybody's robbing,' the President said. Britain will have to pay a 25 per cent steel tariff just like the rest of the EU and Canada. There was a testy phone call about this with Justin Trudeau, the Canadian Prime Minster. 'Didn't you guys burn down the White House?' Trump is supposed to have said. The President had better not learn this was the British Redcoats or he might begin to suspect a pattern. This is because of the extraordinary

Reports say the head of GCHQ flew to the US to hand deliver this incendiary material to the CIA

number of British connections to what Trump has described as a conspiracy to destroy his presidency: the Russia investigation.

The most important 'British connection' is, of course, Christopher Steele, the former MI6 officer whose 'dossier' is the road map for the US inquiry. After he wrote it, Steele asked the retired head of MI6 Sir Richard Dearlove what he should do and was advised that the US authorities had to be told. Dearlove's partner in a forum for intelligence professionals at Cambridge University was Professor Stefan Halper, apparently a long-standing CIA 'asset'. Halper was used by the FBI to get close to George Papadopoulos, an aide on the Trump campaign. Papadopoulos was drinking in a Kensington wine bar with the Australian High Commissioner and told him that Russia had supplied 'dirt' on Hillary Clinton. Hearing about the conversation, the then director of the FBI, James Comey, began a counter-intelligence investigation with the CIA.

That is the cover story, anyway: a US intelligence official told me there were 'many gathering clouds' in the summer of 2016. Among them might be GCHQ's intercepts of Trump's associates talking to Russians. Some — credible — reports say the head of GCHQ flew to the US to hand-deliver this incendiary material to the CIA director. Later, Steele's dossier was passed, in its entirety, to Comey, thanks to a former British ambassa-

dor to Moscow, Sir Andrew Wood.

Then there's Cambridge Analytica. The (now shuttered) British company did the Trump campaign's data. Its speciality was 'microtargeting': individual messages tailored to individual voters, delivered by email, Facebook and Twitter. The US intelligence agencies believe that Russian internet 'troll factories' were also pushing out pro-Trump propaganda on social media: sometimes fake news, sometimes real news, such as the hacked contents of Clinton's emails. The question is whether this was done in coordination with the Trump campaign. An American lawyer I know told me that he was approached by a Cambridge Analytica employee after the election. They had had the Clinton emails more than a month before they were published by WikiLeaks: 'What should I do?' Take this to Mueller, the lawyer replied.

There is another (alleged) British connection: the US media reports that former Ukip leader Nigel Farage is a 'person of interest' to the Mueller team because he is both friendly with Trump and visited the WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange. Farage has vehemently denied he was helping Assange communicate with Trump's people and has insisted he has 'no connections to Russia'.

After President Trump's shock election victory, I'm told that Steele briefed his old colleagues in the British intelligence apparatus. His material was taken seriously and then handled at an 'appropriately senior level' within the government. But once the dossier was leaked and published in January 2017, he appeared to have been sidelined by the government, his friends say, 'for political reasons'.

Those who know him say that he still appears bruised by his treatment. Nevertheless, when he subsequently spoke to Mueller's team, the meeting — in the UK — was set up 'through official channels'. Mueller has so many British leads to follow, there must have been many requests to the authorities here. Ministers, including the Prime Minster, have been coy about how much help he is getting. Perhaps it is a case of appearing to go slow with Mueller, rather than actually failing to cooperate.

Banks's opaque finances have led some to ask whether the source of the Leave.EU money is Russia

Ministers have also been careful to say that so far there is no evidence of Russian interference in British politics. Steele and others believe evidence of this will emerge. The self-styled 'bad boy of Brexit' Arron Banks is being investigated by the Electoral Commission, which wants to know the source of £2.3 million given to Leave.EU, along with at least £6 million in loans to the organisation on 'non-commercial terms'. This was the biggest single political donation in British history. Banks has a successful insurance business but his opaque finances have led some to ask whether the ultimate source of the Leave.EU money could be Russia. The *Sunday Times* asked him why he'd met the Russian ambassador three times during the referendum campaign. His response was that they were looking for a conspiracy in 'two boozy lunches and a cup of tea': 'Bite me.' He was similarly dismissive of MPs last week, when they asked if he had ties to the Kremlin.

The 'Western intelligence community' — a nebulous group encompassing Steele, his associates, the US intelligence agencies and many experts in Britain — believe the Kremlin is directing operations to try to shake public faith in democracy across Europe and the US. They think Russia has the same aim as the Soviet Union once did: to break up Nato and the EU, and dominate a continent of weak nations. They view Russia as a criminal state, where the state and the mafia are two faces of the same predatory beast. If that is right, then for the government the choice over whether to back Mueller — and the rule of law — should be no choice at all.

Paul Wood is a BBC correspondent.

MATTHEW PARRIS

Lost in the NHS maze

Next month the National Health Service turns 70. The institution is greatly loved, and not for nothing. The fear of ill-health runs deep in most of us and is ineradicable; but the fear of not being able to afford treatment, which must haunt most of the world's population, has been abolished in Britain — and for that inestimable benefit we have the NHS to thank.

It is, of course, possible to overrate the quality of this country's health care. Many do. All things considered, and in a world of first-, second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-rate medical provision, I'd say we British get a second-rate health service for the price of a third-rate one. However, funds are not unlimited, and second-rate isn't bad. The consensus is that our health service is patchy on preventative care and early diagnosis, but when it comes to the treatment of serious illness or injury (which is what people fear most), performs pretty well.

I've reached an age when visiting friends in hospital has become a fairly regular occurrence, so I'm getting to know the insides of the handful of hospitals in my English region pretty well. My experiences as a visitor, and friends' experiences as patients, all chime: they echo what so many people report about NHS hospitals everywhere.

There's no reason to think our local hospitals in the Midlands are particular offenders: they're impressive, their facilities are second to none and they're making conspicuous efforts to be bright and welcoming places. But the complaints you hear, and the problems I've repeatedly experienced, are so very similar, so consistent and so widely reported, that we shouldn't dismiss as 'anecdotal' what almost everyone reports.

'I just got completely lost, and was wandering around with nobody to ask.'

'Nobody tells you what's going on.'

'The left hand doesn't seem to know what the right hand is doing. You rarely see the same person twice, and the next person doesn't seem to know what the last person did, and you have to start all over again.'

'The different bits of the hospital don't know what the other bits are doing and you can't find anyone who knows all the aspects of your case.'

'There's no desk where a receptionist could make enquiries and coordinate. Nobody seems to know anything about you.'

'They tell you to wait "over here" or "over there" or "in that corridor", but they don't say for what or for how long or who's going to see you, and scores of other people are waiting, and it's a bit like a play by Samuel Beckett, and everyone's hoping they're in the right queue and someone will call their name.'

'You can't get through to anyone on the phone, and my GP's receptionist told me they can't either, and what happens in the hospital isn't anything to do with them.'

'They said someone from the hospital would phone me after a week, but nobody did, and I wondered whether I should bother them, but when I did I couldn't get through to anyone who could tell me anything.'

At the Northern General Hospital in Sheffield, I became lost for an hour. The place resembles a small town

An example. A friend had suffered a fracture, had an operation, did not see a consultant or doctor when she came round from the anaesthetic, was discharged by a nice nurse and given appointments to return in a week for a check with the doctor and a physiotherapist.

She had work in London so took an expensive early rush-hour train back to be there on time. But when she arrived they told her the regular doctors were on holiday and just one locum was on duty so there would be a delay of maybe a couple of hours.

She asked politely why nobody had been able to text her, pointed out she had an appointment with the physio for after she'd seen the doctor, and asked if anyone had told the physio. Nobody had. Nobody even knew she had a physio appointment. Or which physio.

She began to feel she'd slipped through the cracks between different departments, and ceased to exist. Staff were polite but nowhere could she locate a single human intelligence able to access her records and make a cross-departmental plan. She's an educated middle-class woman, so by persistence got things sorted; but she wonders how more helpless people manage.

It's often said that the advantage of a monolith like our NHS is that there can be a single portal through which the citizen can access all he or she needs; and it's true that all the constituent parts of a modern health service are gathered impressively on a single site called a general hospital. But the experience of visiting for treatment, or to see a sick friend, is of stepping into a *Through the Looking-Glass* world in which all the answers to your questions are confusing, everybody seems to be moving purposefully around, but nobody can help you or explain who could. At the Northern General Hospital in Sheffield, I recently became lost for an hour. The place resembles a small town but with no street numbers, and woe betide anyone who isn't quite sure where they're going.

At another hospital, when hoping to visit a friend recently, I found that the general reception is unstaffed at weekends: there was just a big counter with nobody behind it and the lights switched off, as nurses and trolleys and people in lab coats whizzed around. You end up stopping hospital porters in the corridor and asking, for instance, which ward an old lady who has suffered a stroke is likely to be in. A railway station has a stationmaster's office. A department store has a floor-manager. Shouldn't a large hospital have a customer services manager? Patient-hospital advisory committees exist, I'm told, but they're mostly talking-shops.

The great boast of our National Health Service has always been that it is 'free at the point of use'. Excellent. All we need now at your average English hospital is to be able to *find* the point of use.

'I had the full English.'

Why cross the Atlantic in seven hours,
when you can sail it in seven days?

CUNARD

QUEEN MARY 2

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The straight dope

Legalising cannabis won't help Billy Caldwell

ROSS CLARK

Was there ever a more fatuous contribution to a political debate than Lord Hague following up the case of 12-year-old Billy Caldwell — the boy whose mother says he needs cannabis oil to control his epilepsy — with a demand for recreational cannabis to be legalised? But the former foreign secretary has done us a favour of sorts. He has inadvertently explained why Billy Caldwell has become such a cause célèbre over the past few days: the drug-legalisation lobby has cottoned on to his huge propaganda potential.

The reason why cannabis oil is not licensed for use as a treatment for epilepsy in Britain has nothing to do with the prohibition of cannabis as a recreational drug. Opiates are banned as recreational drugs but that does not prevent their routine use as a painkiller in controlled doses. Moreover, there is a cannabis-derived medicine, Sativex, which is licensed in Britain for pain relief in patients with multiple sclerosis. Cannabis oil is not licensed as a treatment for epilepsy for a more fundamental reason: there is not, as yet, good scientific evidence for its efficacy.

Science has been a remarkable missing element from the Caldwell case — remarkable because on any other subject we never hear the end of the phrase 'evidence-based policymaking'. All we have had in this case — from the *Today* programme to the House of Commons — is anecdotal evidence from the mother of Billy Caldwell and the parents of other epilepsy-sufferers who claim that cannabis oil has worked wonders on their children. This has all been one-sided because the doctors treating the children are not going to speak to me or any other reporter who rings them up for their side of the story, for reasons of patient confidentiality.

Yet anecdotal evidence seems to have been swallowed whole by Jeremy Hunt, who told the *Today* programme on Monday: 'I don't think anyone can say that we are getting the law right on this', Sajid Javid, who seems to have won a reported row with Theresa May and on Tuesday appointed Chief Medical Officer Sally Davies to conduct a review of the licensing of cannabis as a drug, and Diane Abbott, who on Monday committed Labour to legalising the use of cannabis oil for medical purposes.

But regulators — at least when not under the control of Diane Abbott — don't license medicines on the basis of anecdote. If they did, the NHS would be merrily handing out all kinds of herbal remedies and other stuff bought on the internet which someone, somewhere swears blind has cured their condition. It is a fundamental principle that drugs undergo randomised controlled trials in which their efficacy is tested against a placebo, with neither patient nor doctor aware whether they are actually taking an active drug. This is vital because of the placebo effect, whereby people will report an improvement in their condition precipitated merely by the thought they are taking a drug.

Opiates are banned as recreational drugs but that does not prevent their routine use as a painkiller

There have been a few randomised control trials which show that an ingredient of cannabis can reduce the incidence of fits in epilepsy-sufferers who have proved resistant to other drugs. But it isn't Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the principal psychoactive ingredient of cannabis and which has been touted as the magical ingredient which perked up Billy Caldwell from his hospital bed. It is Cannabidiol (CBD), which has no psychoactive effect. A study published in the *Lancet* in 2016 found that sufferers from two kinds of epilepsy, Dravet syndrome and Lennox-Gastaut syndrome, saw seizures fall by just over a third when given CBD. A 2017 paper in the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that sufferers of Dravet syndrome saw the average number of monthly seizures fall from 12.4 to 5.9 when given CBD — compared with an average drop from 14.9 to 14.1 for a control group who were given a placebo. It is no miracle drug: the *Lancet* study also reported serious adverse side effects in 30 per cent of patients. Nevertheless, the evidence is such that the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is poised to license it as a medicine over the next few weeks, a decision that is likely to be replicated in Europe.

'Yeah, cool, whatever...'

And THC? There is no randomised controlled trial which shows it is effective in treating epilepsy. Moreover, what research has been undertaken points in two directions: with some of it suggesting that THC is an anti-convulsant and some suggesting it can increase seizures. As for the theory that what works for epilepsy patients is some kind of magical 'synergy' found in natural cannabis but not in the individual ingredients, that is alchemy, not science.

So is Billy Caldwell's mum fooling herself that cannabis oil is making her son better? I asked Gary Stephens, professor of pharmacology at the University of Reading, who has studied the potential of cannabis-derived medicines for treating epilepsy, for his view. The trouble with cannabis oil, he says, is knowing exactly what it contains. Buy a bottle off the internet and there is no knowing the relative concentrations of CBD, THC or anything else. Nor is one bottle likely to be like another. There is no knowing what negative side effects are going to result. But if Billy Caldwell's condition really has been improved by the concoction he has been taking, the scientific evidence would point to it far more likely being CBD than THC.

But that is not, of course, what the drug-legalisation lobby wants to hear. The narrative it wants to spin is that a demented prohibitionist policy practised by the UK government is killing kids as well as taking the fun out of rock festivals. They have had plenty of help in this from Lord Hague, Diane Abbott and many others who have tried to jump on the Caldwell case without bothering much with the science which points to legalising not dope, but simply CBD.

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Anarchy in the US

Peace with his enemy Kim Jong-un on the one hand, conflict with his European allies on the other: what sense can one make of President Trump? The ancients would have understood him all too well.

The 5th c BC Greek historian Thucydides, seeing how anarchic city-state rivalry made any state liable to be attacked by any other, argued that it was fear that drove relationships. As a result, states were constantly on military alert and ready, too, to take instant aggressive action if necessary. They also feared a reputation for weakness, which simply invited attack. ('All men,' said the Greek statesman Demosthenes, 'should be dealt with according to the power at their disposal.')

This succinctly explains the Kim Jong-un-Trump standoff. Only fear could have driven Kim's nuclear programme, while his displays of aggression were an attempt to show he could not be cowed. Trump replied in kind, resulting in a possible agreement. Good: but in the anarchic Greek world, few of the approximately 250 treaties we know of went the distance. Are Kim and Trump any more principled?

When it comes to Trump's activities in Europe, an analogy with Rome and its allies suggests itself. The Romans' military might made them formidable foes, but it was their unique ability to build up long-lasting alliances by turning enemies into friends — learned during their subjugation of Italy — that gave them the massive resources needed to control an empire of some 50 million people. But in the 2nd c BC, for example, when they mastered Greece, then withdrew their troops back to Italy, they created a power vacuum that others were happy to fill. Result: Rome had to go back there and start all over again.

With his tariff wars in Europe and attacks on Nato, Trump is in danger of making the same mistake, as if allies are of no consequence. Presumably, by seeing the world as an anarchic playground for the powerful, as the Kims and Putins do, he thinks he will get results. If so, anarchy is the new diplomacy. Perhaps it always was, under the surface. — *Peter Jones*

The joy of bird-listening

The focus is often too much on sight

SIMON BARNES

Here's a rum thing: you can tell the quality of a piece of land with your eyes closed. Your ears alone will tell you if it's any good or not. And this, as it happens, was good land.

I was attempting to explain this concept to a group of disparate individuals, among them land-owners, gamekeepers, shoot-owners, farm workers, solicitors, an official from the National Farming Union, an RSPB warden, someone from Norfolk Wildlife Trust, a local councillor and a person who sells agricultural equipment.

So I delegated the explanation to a goldcrest. This is the smallest bird in the northern hemisphere and weighs about a quarter of an ounce. It was pelting down a shower of sweet golden notes from the top of a conifer. Higher, thinner than you can believe possible: now have you got it? Singing… now!

We were on the Raveningham Estate in Norfolk, managed by Jake Fiennes who believes that profitable farming can take place alongside seriously effective landscape-scale conservation; and he asked me to co-lead this walk with Peter Cowdrey, composer and founder of Planet Birdsong. It was an unlikely gathering for a bird walk. Some had never looked at a bird through binoculars in their lives, and few had deliberately listened to one. Now they could all listen to the voice of the land.

That goldcrest had become two, and two became three — and suddenly the entire wood was singing its heart out: we were close to double figures if not past it for goldcrests, all these tiny birds singing at the tops of their thin and tiny voices and scattering the woodland floor with song.

They feed between the pine-fronds in conifers, tiny birds subsisting on even tinier scraps of life. They wear a dashing Mohican haircut, and the crest shines pure gold when it catches the light. But they are hard birds to see, loving the forest canopy: if you want to find them, you need your ears.

Anyone who ever believed that farming and wildlife were by definition incompatible had every argument rebuffed in a few seconds of music. Though, alas, not everybody got it. It's a sad fact that as we grow older, we tend to lose the higher notes. What children hear with ease, older people struggle even to notice.

It's possible that the goldcrest — and its relative, the firecrest — are under-recorded. Many of the people who do bird surveying for the British Trust for Ornithology are retired, and some can no longer hear goldcrests.

But there were plenty of more easily accessible birds: the laid-back whistling of blackbird, the strident repetitions of song thrush, the wild skirling mistle thrush and the referee's whistle of nuthatch. And using these simple mnemonics, I had the not inconsiderable joy of seeing faces light up. Bloody hell! He's right! Got that one…

Many, perhaps most, of the people on the walk were birdsong agnostics. Few had witnessed people identifying birds without needing to see them — and it was almost like pulling them from a top hat. Willow warbler, got that? That lisping descent down the scale, sweetest thing you'll ever hear.

Perhaps even the most hard-nosed found something of value: the idea that land itself can be understood by ear. After all, Peter and I could — blindfolded if necessary — tell them things they didn't know about any piece of land they loved. Birds sing to claim a mate and a piece of land: land that will feed their chicks. The number and the variety of the singers in any one place tells you how good that land is at supplying protein. How rich it is. How alive it is.

We walked on, leaving the wood and moving on to farmland, with the great hedges that Jake loves and rich pools. Reed warbler: rhythmic, formal, ordered. And — quite incidentally — his song tells us that this is a great pond with a great patch of reeds.

No birding occasion is complete without a list, so Peter did the job and worked out that between eight and ten in the morning we had identified 41 species of bird and seen only 20 of them. Sometimes we set too much store on sight. We live in a world of noise and would go mad if we failed to shut it out: the rumble of the subway trains, the rattle of the taxis and the madding music they play at us in every bar and restaurant and even when we're trying to buy a loaf of bread in the Co-op. So we get used to shutting our hearts to birdsong, relegating it to the background, ambient noise.

It was a pleasure, that fine morning, to brings birdsong back into the foreground; to see these unlikely people standing still as the goldcrest choir poured out the best of themselves from the woodland canopy, telling us this land was all right.

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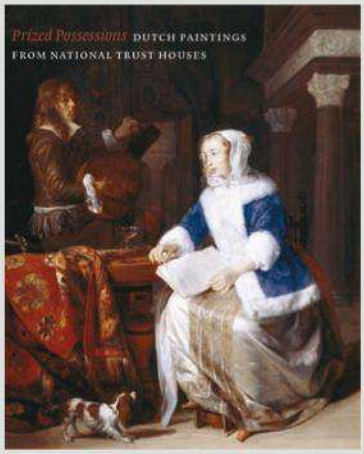

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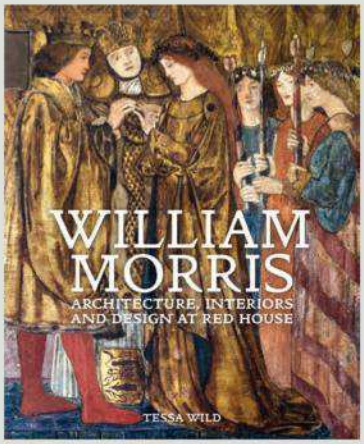

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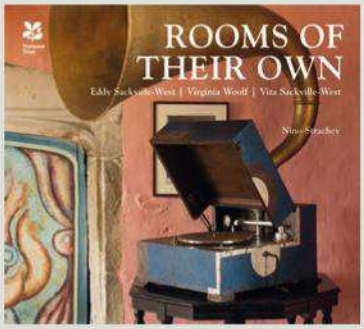

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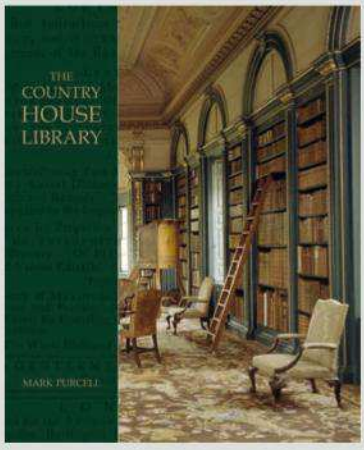

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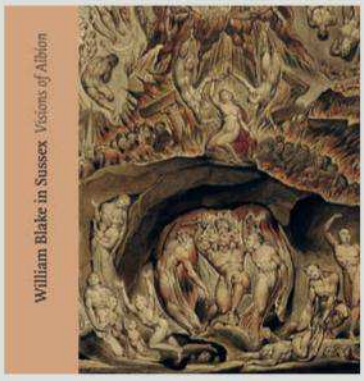

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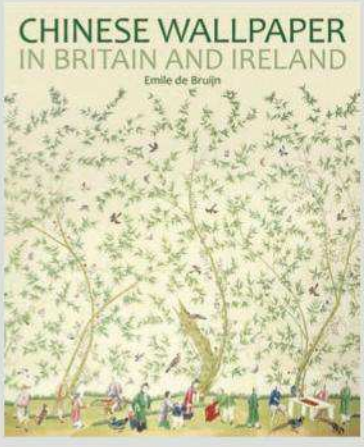

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Song of myself

Sir: As a disabled writer, I thoroughly despise the idea of being the beneficiary of a publisher's tokenistic diversity initiative ('When diversity means uniformity', 9 June). If I'm going to achieve success, I'm going to do so on merit alone. In spite of the added challenges I face as a man on the autism spectrum, the notion that I might be treated differently from any other writer is an affront not merely to my dignity but to everyone else's.

Lionel Shriver is absolutely justified in her condemnation of what appears to be a thinly veiled attempt by Penguin Random House to enforce equity dogma in the publishing domain. It's important to note that equity is not the same as equality of opportunity. In fact, it inevitably means the unequal, disparate treatment of individuals based on their category membership in order to ensure equality of outcome. Potentially restricting the high achievements of some to ensure the representation of others who happen to be from minority backgrounds is not only deeply unjust, but also an insanity that will end up stifling creativity in the publishing industry. It's a terrible precedent to set.
Thomas Clements
Bishop's Stortford, Herts

The heart of the matter

Sir: The CEO of Penguin Random House, Tom Weldon, says (Letters, 16 June) that his 'diversity' goals are needed because 'some authors face more barriers than others in getting published'. Coming after his assertion that talent is the first and foremost consideration for a publisher, the most obvious barrier is surely a lack of it. Rather like a penguin itself, no other publishing yardstick can fly.
Nigel Ash
Devon

His dark materials

Sir: Helen Jackson's criticism of Rod Liddle for habitually 'putting [his] hatred on display' (Letters, 16 June) seems unduly harsh. For one thing, however biting his columns may be, they are unfailingly funny. Second, whatever his target — the ineffable self-righteousness of the #MeToo movement, Labour anti-Semitism or the simple stupidity of the proposed badger cull (a 'Hard Brocksit', as he memorably puts it), he has an enviable knack for being able to hit it. I never finish his column without having both laughed and groaned aloud.
Gordon Bonnyman
Frant, East Sussex

The custom of the country

Sir: Rod Liddle laments the absence of right-wing festivals, and deplores the leftist self-congratulation of Glastonbury-style events ('The stupidity of good intentions', 16 June). But if by 'right-wing festivals' he means non-political gatherings of people celebrating place, tradition, home and belonging — which is largely what is at stake in the confrontation between right and left — then they exist all around us. One of the most important occurs here three times a week during the hunting season and from that and similar sources spring all the game fairs, hound shows, hunt balls and other assemblies of the people whom Rod Liddle disparages, in the rare articles when he lapses, as leftists do, into class resentment. He could even attend the Peterborough Festival of Hunting, which occurs each July. Despite his opposition, he and his family would be entirely welcome — welcome extended to the opposition being the principal matter, in my experience, that distinguishes the right from the left. He would also encounter a festival that leaves no litter, and is attended by people who, thanks to the Countryside Alliance, are now actively trying to rid the countryside of plastic.
Roger Scruton
Brinkworth, Wilts

Girl, 20

Sir: Reading James Delingpole on driving lessons with his daughter ('Girl is teaching me the art of walking on eggshells', 16 June) reminded me of my dad's catchphrase as I drove at a timid 20 mph around Oxfordshire. 'And... accelerate,' he'd say on straight stretches, in calmest satnav tones. I passed my test on the ninth attempt. In life, as on the road, the advice holds. Retake the test. Go for promotion. Ask for a raise. And... accelerate.
Laura Freeman
London, W2

This sporting life

Sir: Vic Richardson (grandfather of the Chappell brothers) and C.B. Fry surely rival A.B. de Villiers as the best all-round sportsman (Spectator Sport, 16 June). Besides captaining the Australian cricket team and the South Australia Australian rules football team, Richardson represented Australia at baseball and South Australia at golf as well as winning South Australia's tennis title. Fry captained England six times at cricket and scored 94 first-class centuries. He played football for Southampton and was capped by England in 1901. In addition to making three appearances for the Barbarians, Fry also set the British record for the long jump in 1892.
David Bennett,
Hove, East Sussex

Money

Sir: There is an upside to Stewart Dakers's paean of resentment against urban incomers ('Another country', 2 June). While there's no doubt that young low-earners may be priced out of the housing market, the decay of villages and towns is reversed by the high-quality renovation of properties. Without this influx many builders, decorators, electricians and handymen would be out of a job — not to mention the army of cleaners and gardeners. Furthermore, many of the wealthy contribute disproportionately to local fundraising. Not all bad, then.
Dr Andrew Bamji
Rye, East Sussex

WRITE TO US
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The myth and menace of cryptocurrencies

'So, Professor Shin, tell us what you really think about cryptocurrencies.' I'm guessing that's the brief the Bank for International Settlements (the Basel-based central bank of central banks) gave economist Hyun-Song Shin to write a chapter for its annual report, published this week. His response delivers a serious kicking to the whole befuddled concept of 'permissionless' online currencies that 'promise to replace trust in long-standing institutions such as commercial and central banks'.

For a start, he argues, Bitcoin and its ilk are an environmental disaster because their systems consume enough electricity to power Switzerland. More importantly, their potential to replace state-backed money, is limited by three factors: scale (crypto computing could not possibly cope with the volume of transactions in a real economy), wild instability (whereas central banks can usually stabilise the value of state money by 'elasticising' supply) and a 'fragile foundation of trust' (the finality of crypto payments is unguaranteed, and there's a lot of weird stuff going on out there).

Shin's short paper is as clear an analysis of the crypto menace as you'll find. It also nails the point that the blockchain or 'distributed ledger' technology which facilitates crypto transactions may well turn out to be the payment system of the future, but that doesn't mean currencies managed by central banks have somehow become outdated or unsound. It just means something useful might one day emerge as the by-product of a craze that's partly driven by speculative greed and partly by dopesmoker-libertarian contempt for the state — and is almost certainly riddled with fraud. My view remains that no sensible citizen should dabble in this dark arena, and I sense Professor Shin agrees with me.

Horlicks to the rescue

Whatever happened to Horlicks? Patented in Chicago in 1883 by British-born brothers William and James Horlick, the malted milk drink was manufactured in Slough from 1908 and came to be thought of as a British product — but disappeared from most of our kitchens half a century ago. It lingered only as a figure of speech, as in foreign secretary Jack Straw's 2003 description of Downing Street's dossier on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as 'a complete Horlicks'. Meanwhile the product itself found a huge market elsewhere — in India, where it had first arrived in British troop rations during the war.

Under the ownership of Beecham, now part of GlaxoSmithKline, Horlicks became one of India's most popular beverages, especially for children. But having closed the Slough factory last year, GSK has put the brand itself up for sale to raise cash for its £9 billion buyout of a minority stake held by Novartis in a healthcare products joint venture. Coca-Cola, Kraft Heinz and Nestlé have been named as potential buyers of Horlicks; £3 billion is evidently a price worth paying for a foothold in the high-growth Indian marketplace.

If Horlicks is passing out of UK ownership, then at least the repositioning enables GSK, our biggest pharma group, to play to other strengths. But the story is also a reminder that one of our few non-EU overseas trade advantages is India's love of retro British brands. Let's face it, we'll always struggle to compete in global technology; but in unperished 1950s consumer goods, we still have markets to conquer.

Audit warning

Arthur Andersen, formerly one of the world's 'big five' accountancy practices, was so tainted by its role as auditor to the fraudulent Enron Corporation that it went out of business even though the US Supreme Court eventually reversed a criminal conviction against the firm for obstruction of justice. That was the sharpest possible reminder to the audit profession — habitually inclined, we may suspect, to smugness, not to mention cosiness with corporate clients — of the consequence of slippage in professional standards.

But memories fade, so it's good to have a warning from the profession's UK watchdog, the Financial Reporting Council, to the remaining 'big four'. They are PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte, EY and particularly KPMG, which — though there's no suggestion of criminality — is accused of 'unacceptable deterioration' in its work, having come under investigation for its audits at the collapsed outsourcing group Carillion as well as at Rolls-Royce during the time of its alleged bribery scandals, and having been fined £3.2 million for 'misconduct' relating to the insurance claims handler Quindell.

Auditors don't just need coloured pens: as the FRC says, they need consistently high levels of 'challenge and scepticism' towards clients whose accounts might otherwise mislead. And they need to remember the fate of Arthur Andersen.

Tops and bottoms

Brian Marber, the loquacious doyen of London's 'chartists', has died aged 84. Chartists (or 'technical analysts'), forecast share movements by following what buyers and sellers are thinking, rather than by monitoring company performance. For them, shapes perceived in price graphs — 'head and shoulders', say, or 'double bottoms' — are signals that may be opaque to the rest of us but often turn out to be right, as Marber pointed out in *The Spectator* in November 2007, because they offer a way of tracking investors' collective perceptions of future value. I commissioned Brian at a moment when the FTSE100 was enjoying a brief rally above 6,300, having absorbed the shock of Northern Rock's collapse a couple of months earlier. For the record, his forecast in that article was a bear market with a downside of 4,850, though actually it fell close to 3,500 before rising again. That recalls a maxim Marber learned as a fund manager at Rothschild: 'Tops and bottoms are for fools' — to which he liked to add 'and liars'.

BOOKS

Manners maketh the Englishman

Philip Hensher describes how our notions of civility and consideration slipped almost imperceptibly into a sense of superiority and a mission to civilise the world

In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England
by Keith Thomas
Yale, £25, pp. 457

In the gap between what we feel ourselves to be and what we imagine we might in different circumstances become, lies civility. Keith Thomas's marvellous new book addresses the subject of ideal behaviour. It shows the way that early modern England formed notions of civilisation and proper conduct, in contrast to what was termed 'the Other'. These alternative people were labelled 'barbarians' or 'savages' when found abroad or on the Celtic fringe. If the unacceptable was found within England, rural or impoverished, they would be called 'clowns' or 'clodhoppers'.

The fact that these barbarians or clodhoppers might have their own notions of proper behaviour, according to which the English ruling classes might in turn be considered utter brutes, only slowly dawned. In 1615 an English traveller in Turkey noticed with astonishment that Turks withdrew to urinate, rather than piss against the nearest wall, and always washed their hands afterwards. Civilisation can be a matter of assertion.

Although this is, clearly, a single subject, it has a number of different aspects. All relate to how the English thought of themselves, and the behaviour that they somehow both embodied and ought to aspire to. Manners come into it, and the rules of engagement in war. There are notions of class engagement, both upwards and downwards. In a God-fearing age, everybody could look upwards, and George III advised the Duke of Clarence, later William IV, to 'obey your superiors, be polite to your equals, and show good nature to your inferiors'. There are theories of racial hierarchy and of the different standing of different cultures, forming a theoretical justification of the existence of the British Empire. There are, too, the clear implications that the British examined their practice and behaviour and decided that, by extraordinary coincidence, these were exactly the things which were indispensable to a culture hoping to attain supremacy, such as through trade.

One of the things that makes Thomas's period of 1500–1800 a rich one for investigation is that in its course a good number of issues stopped being the target of legislation and official control and became a matter of personal responsibility. The action for *scandalum magnatum*, under which you could be prosecuted for verbally abusing your peers, no longer resulted in damages after 1689, and recourse to the action dwindled away. In 1604, sumptuary legislation, regulating dress and consumption, was abandoned; press censorship was reduced in 1695; and from the 17th century onwards, church courts grew increasingly reluctant to prosecute scolds, troublemakers and some sexual offenders. Though there were steady calls for the enforcement of statutes against swearing, gambling and breaking the sabbath, by the 18th century the question of behaving well and appropriately had become a matter of personal judgment.

From the 12th century to the 19th century it was considered unseemly to laugh out loud

If most stuck by the rules, others more radical in temperament deliberately broke them. Quakers caused outrage by addressing everyone equally as 'thou'. One addressed the Fourth Earl of Pembroke as 'Phil'. The famous Duchess of Newcastle insisted on bowing rather than curtseying. Later, supporters of the French revolution made a point, like Mary Wollstonecraft and Tom Poole, of ostentatiously neglecting politeness in speech.

Civility consisted, in part, of a consideration of others — kind and obliging behaviour, interesting conversation, washing and dressing decently. The notion of civility, however, slid imperceptibly into politeness, into an idea of 'polish' — the two words are synonymous for much of the period — and without many people noticing, into a sense of attained superiority. The lack of connection between elegant behaviour and moral standing has often been noticed — the philosopher R.G. Collingwood claimed that 'the most beautiful manners I have met with are in countries where men carry knives'.

Many of these rules of behaviour are absurdly arbitrary. From the 12th century to the 19th at least, it was considered unseemly to laugh out loud. Codified in published works such as Lord Chesterfield's *Letters* which were hugely popular with a reading public, the rules became steadily more complicated. A hosiery manufacturer is recorded in 1776 recommending his son to acquire 'the manners, the air, the genteel address and polite behaviour of a gentleman' in order to be a success in trade. In response to such people's ambition, by the 19th century rules of behaviour had become a maze designed to trap or to offer Byzantine indicators of status and origin to those in the know. 'There is nothing more plebeian than thin bread at dinner,' a work of 1836 advises.

These rules were largely designed both to protect existing privilege and help structure a dynamic social scene, in which people were constantly moving up and down. It was important to know not just how to behave well but how to behave well in dissipated circumstances: the rules around getting drunk go from top to bottom of society. A 17th-century preacher comments on the poor in taverns 'throwing down their money on the table' in their insistence to pay a round. This goes as far to explain the growth of self-conscious behaviour as Montesquieu's insight, elaborated by Thomas's great predecessor Norbert Elias, that 'the more people there are in a nation who need to deal with each other and not cause displeasure, the more politeness there is'.

In a world increasingly shaped by encounters with other cultures, the English started to form theories in which their own evolved behaviour resembled the pinnacle of possible civilisation. Some of these were admirable — not to kill prisoners of war, and subsequently not to enslave them. Others were less so: in the century before 1630, 75,000 people were hanged, and the cruelty of the executions, even by international contemporary standards, is beyond belief. In other examples of behaviour, the

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View of a drawing room, c.1780 by Philip Reinagle

British stood, as might be expected, roughly in the middle, less keen on cleanliness than many cultures (such as the Turks), more so than others. In 1805 a future Bishop of Calcutta, travelling, reported that 'to pass leeward of a Russian peasant is really so terrible an event that I always avoid it if possible'.

The notion of a formal distinction between civilised and uncivilised parts of the world was long in dying. Even the League of Nations, set up after the first world war, only consisted of 'civilised' nations, including (Thomas points out) Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and fascist Italy. Before that, it shaped the British attitude to the world, and underpinned the growth of the Empire. If it had some positive results, such as the outlawing of *sati* in India in 1829, they were often used to justify the imperial project. Other cultures were easily classified as savage, and persecuted without restraint.

Some standards on which this judgment was made seem very peculiar. Edmund Spenser claimed that if you 'look into all countries that live in some sort by keeping of cattle... you shall find that they are both very barbarous and uncivil, and also greatly given to war'. The role of the English was to civilise the world through trade and education — it is a point in favour of the English that they rarely thought that the people of other cultures were intrinsically less human or less able than they were. The Bell Curve theory of intelligence was a long way in the future.

But against that, they did, frighteningly often, give way to recommendations that those who did not live by agriculture and cultivation should be 'extirpated as savage and pernicious beasts'. This actually happened in Australia, and earlier underlay attitudes towards the Scots. One of the most inspiring chapters in this thrilling book explains what happened when English thinkers started to wonder about the fact that many English colonists in America who had run away to live with Indian tribes hardly ever wanted to return. Increasingly, intelligent people started to think relatively; that though the urge to behave well was a good one, there might be peoples currently considered inferior to the English whose virtues were actually superior. Where civilisation and barbarity lay was not as clear as it had once seemed.

This book is a fully realised successor to those classics by Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* and *Man and the Natural World*. In his 85th year he has produced a magnificent work, which forms a compelling framework, containing a huge body of evidence and apparently disparate ideas. The command of evidence is extraordinary, and the final result is of a huge polyphony, as different voices disagree, conflict, reinforce each other and undermine another's point of view. It is funny as well as heartbreaking, absurd as well as chilling. There is hardly a page without half a dozen extraordinary incidents, statements or facts — and the 100 pages of notes are a tour-de-force of learned command, intelligent investigation and compelling judgment. There can hardly be a more convincing statement of what civilisation means than Keith Thomas's own work.

How to infuriate the French

Henry Jeffreys

Wine — A Way of Life
by Steven Spurrier
Adelphi Press, £20,pp. 340

Fine wine rarely makes it into the public consciousness, but one event in 1976 has proved of perennial interest: the so-called Judgment of Paris. It heralded the arrival of wine from the New World, but also tapped into popular prejudice. Who can resist French wine snobs being made to look foolish? So these memoirs by Steven Spurrier, the man behind that notorious tasting, have been keenly anticipated.

It was a glass of 1908 Cockburns port that Spurrier tried at the age of 13 that sparked a lifelong interest in wine. Rather than go to university, as expected, he worked in the cellars of a wine merchant, Christopher's, in Soho. In his early twenties he inherited £250,000 (the equivalent of £5 million today) when the family gravel business was sold. This financial security enabled Spurrier to spend a year working without pay in the great merchant houses of Europe, including Joseph Drouhin in Burgundy, Hugel in Alsace and Yeatman's in Oporto. This portrait of an aristocratic trade on the verge of transformation is fascinating, and much the best part of the book.

Nowadays, Spurrier cuts a very establishment figure, but in the 1960s he found the London wine trade 'too ''old boy'' for me', as he puts it. The old boys looked askance at such modern ideas as having a fridge in the car. His inheritance enabled Spurrier to lead a swinging life, hosting parties, going to Annabel's and even meeting Jimi Hendrix. There's a splendid photo of Spurrier decked out in full Austin Powers finery on his wedding day. But for all his modern ideas, there's more than a touch of Wallace Arnold (Craig Brown's spoof clubbable Tory) about Spurrier's prose. He puts the words 'gentrification', 'trim' and 'soap opera' in inverted commas, as though they are dreadful neologisms and naturally ''phone' is always written with an apostrophe in front.

In 1970 he moved to Paris to be a tax exile and took over a wine merchant, Caves de Madeleine. Spurrier captures beautifully this now vanished world of little neighbourhood shops and bistros. But of course he couldn't resist shaking things up a bit and so organised an event where French wine grandees would blind taste some top Californian wines against the equivalents from Bordeaux and Burgundy. According to Spurrier, there was no mischievous intent — the 'Judgment' was simply an attempt to demonstrate the quality of wines coming out of California. Many involved, however, were not amused when the Americans came out top; Spurrier describes being 'physically thrown out of the Ramonet cellars by M. Ramonet's son André for having caused such an insult to the family name'.

The Judgment chapter should be the big set piece of these memoirs, but disappointingly, rather than tell his own story, Spurrier quotes at length from an American journalist, George Taber, who was there at the time. The whole book is a bit like this; Spurrier is great with a pithy one-liner but at times maddeningly uninformative. There are far too many sentences such as 'I have no real memories of my time at de Luze'; or 'there is not really much to say about our time in New York, as it was a disaster from start to finish' .

Spurrier may have a flair for self-promotion but he was a lousy businessman: '25 years later all the money had gone — lost, stolen or strayed' he writes (more than once). His little Parisian empire of the shop, a wine school and various bars and restaurants collapsed in the 1980s. The second half of the book should be inspiring: he rebuilt his life by becoming a wine writer and consultant, set up the *Decanter* world wine awards and later planted his own vineyard in Dorset, but it all blurs into a series of extravagant lunches and tastings. It would have helped if the book had been given a much tighter edit: the many typos and repeated anecdotes make Spurrier seem — unfairly — a little dotty.

He writes after the death of his mother: 'I've always been somewhat detached from my parents, as they were from me.' This detachment runs throughout the book: reading it is like talking to an interesting chap after lunch in a gentleman's club (Boodle's, not Spearmint Rhino) who nevertheless remains completely unknowable.

Stories about stories

Nicholas Lezard

The Blind Spot: An Essay on the Novel
by Javier Cercas
Maclehose Press, £20, pp. 176

Elements of Surprise: Our Mental Limits and the Satisfactions of Plot
by Vera Tobin
Harvard, £25.95, pp. 244

I wonder what your idea of a good novel is. Does it embody the attributes of solid plotting, characterisation and an impermeable membrane between invention and reality — the novel, that is, being a box from which nothing can leap out, and into which nothing, except what the author has chosen to put there, can leap in? And does it conform to the conventions laid down by the great writers of the 19th century?

That's what I assumed, during my schooldays; and the little that had filtered down to me of *Don Quixote*, which is claimed by many to be the 'first' novel, did not alert me to the fact that it was anything more than a story. As opposed to — to put it very simply indeed — a story about stories.

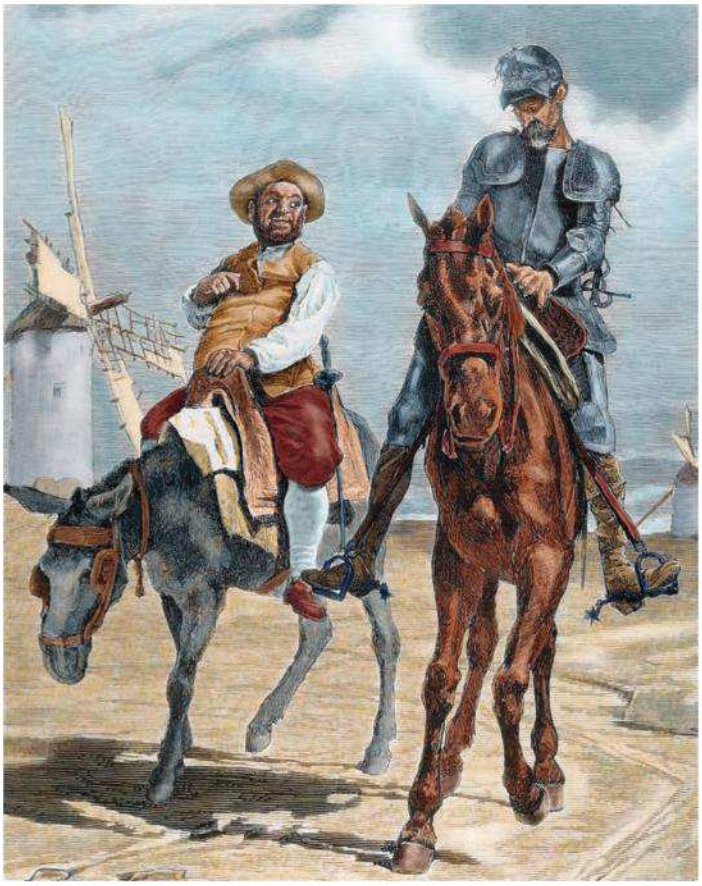
This assumption was blown to smithereens when I first came across *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman,* and I started wondering whether Laurence Sterne was mad, or I was. How, I asked myself, could something so old seem so modern? It even made *Ulysses* look conventional. (I exaggerate for effect.)

This is the question that propels the first half of Javier Cercas's charming and thoughtful essay on the novel. He cites Milan Kundera, who proposed dividing the history of the novel between its early, radical, innovative impulses (*Quixote* containing, in its way, all the possibilities of the novel form — although Cercas goes on to say that what should be called the 'first' novel is in fact an earlier Spanish work, *Lazarillo de Tormes*); its 'absolute liberty' — it could contain anything it liked, being itself a *mestizo*, bastard art form; and the 19th-century repression of these impulses. 'It spurns or remains unaware of this substantial part of its inheritance.'

There is much to cheer in Cercas's essay. There is also much to be exasperated by. It soon becomes clear that in order to follow his argument you'll need to have read more than Cervantes, or Borges, or Kafka, or Melville, or any other of the touchstones you'd expect in this kind of discourse; you should have read a lot of Javier Cercas, too. Actually, that's a bit unfair, so let me put it like this: by the end of the book, you will feel as though you have read quite a bit of Cercas's fiction.

He starts by citing, in Chapter 2 (which is also the third page of his essay), his novel *The Anatomy of a Moment*, about the abortive coup of 23 February 1981, in which a group of Francoist civil guards stormed parliament. The only deputies who didn't hide under their seats were Adolfo Suárez, a former Francoist, Manuel Gutiérrez Mellado, a former Francoist general, and Santiago Carrillo, a former leader of the anti-Franco movement during the dictatorship. Cercas uses history as the basis for a novel, or a fictive examination of the facts; not, he says, in order to make sense of the events, but to complicate them.

This is, I think, perfectly excusable. By the time you get to the end of his book, and his mention of *The Impostor* ('my latest novel'), you will find that you have a passable grounding in almost the entire fictional output of Javier Cercas. But, perhaps not without a little sigh, I forgive him: there is



GETTY IMAGES

Don Quixote is often referred to as the 'first' novel, though Javier Cercas disagrees

so much insight and perceptive good sense here ('a brilliant writer is one who creates a problem where none existed'), not to mention charm, that it is impossible to dislike this book; and it gives one faith in the continued possibilities of the novel.

It's perhaps unfair to put Professor Tobin's book in the same category. The rubric at the back of my copy encourages librarians to file it under 'Literary criticism/Psychology', and it becomes clear very quickly that it is the latter that is her job, and the former that is her enthusiasm. This isn't a bad thing, but at times I wondered whether she couldn't have pursued each of the subjects with a little more rigour.

What Tobin tries to dissect (and she quotes, in her first footnote, the line about dissecting humour being like dissecting a frog — 'the thing dies') is our pleasure in fictional surprises, in plot twists; the revelation of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, say, or, in *Watership Down*, General Woundwort and his cohorts' astonishment at realising that Bigwig is not actually the Chief Rabbit of the warren they are attacking. (Anyone who cites *Watership Down* in a serious work gets a big thumbs-up from me. It is underrated as a work of art.)

The problem with this, though, is that throughout much of the book we are never quite sure whether Tobin is explaining literature for people who don't read much — the examples she quotes are novels which are narratively conventional as opposed to postmodern or experimental — or explaining cognitive science (her academic discipline) for people who don't read too much of *that*. She cites the Sally–Anne test, which determines how infants are unable to enter

Anyone who cites Watership Down as a serious work gets a big thumbs-up from me

the minds of others, and you can see why she does so, for the purposes of her work; but even I've heard of the Sally–Anne test, and I wonder whether her citation of it is really going to help us understand how fiction works.

Too much of the time I felt I was being given a lecture on the obvious, sometimes delivered not quite as effectively as the author might have intended. 'These surprises tap into the curse of knowledge with ruthless efficiency, making them a powerful delivery system for interpretive realignment.' Or, to paraphrase: surprises can be surprising. Well, at least it's nice to know that a supposedly formally conventional novel can still trip us up.

Soaked in blood and symbolism

William Leith

A Shout in the Ruins
by Kevin Powers
Sceptre, £16.99, pp. 272

We're in Virginia, in the 1850s. A girl called Emily is tormenting her dog, Champion, and her father's teenage slave, Rawls. Seeing this, Emily's father, Bob, beats her with his belt and kicks the dog. Of Rawls, Bob says: 'Now leave him be so he can get about my business!'

A girl, a dog, a slave, and a slave-owner. The owner addresses the girl with words and violence, and abuses the dog. He helps the slave get down from the fencepost he's standing on. But he does not talk to the slave. He talks *about* the slave.

Thinking this over, Rawls looks at Emily,'sprawled out and wailing in the grass', and envies her. Her pain is temporary; his is permanent. 'Tomorrow she would leave the house, and pain would be as incomprehensible to the girl's mind as the map of a foreign country in a schoolbook. He had found no boundary to his own.'

In his first novel, *The Yellow Birds*, Kevin Powers, a veteran of the Iraq war, wrote about violence and its consequences. He can evoke pity in the manner of Wilfred Owen, although he adds something more contemporary, a new type of guilt, to the pity. This novel communicates some of the same emotions, but it's more panoramic. Here, we are taken through the American civil war and beyond, to the 1980s, when somebody who knew somebody who knew Rawls dies a sad death in a hospital bed.

Emotionally, we are with Rawls all the way. Early on, we find out that a previous owner had 'had to dock his toes' when he was a youngster to stop him running away. Later, he falls in love with Nurse, a female slave who suckles white babies. But it's hard for Rawls to see much of her because they have different owners. Soon we learn that Nurse has been sold to the notorious Lumpkin, who is actively sadistic; later she will be owned by Levallois, a 'queer Frenchman' whose nastiness is of a different order.

There is lots of gore, and the sort of casual violence that can be just as disturbing. The book is also soaked in symbolism — cracked spectacles, a river crossing, an old mansion burned to the ground. There's a scene in which two badly wounded soldiers, a blue and a grey, say a few words to each other. One of them can see his own severed arm, the fingers pointing towards him.

A Shout in the Ruins reminded me of Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*. You get a sense of sweeping sadness, and the odd dash of hope. And I think it too will be a film.

The dark side of the circus

Charlotte Hobson

The Electric Woman: A Memoir in Death-Defying Acts
by Tessa Fontaine
Sandstone Press, £8.99, pp. 244

JOEL BROUWER

The pain of scorching her own face exorcises the helplessness Fontaine feels at her mother's suffering

In 2013 Tessa Fontaine joined up with the World of Wonders, a circus sideshow that travels around the United States each year displaying sword-swallowers, human-headed spiders, snake-charmers and fire-eaters to a marvelling/cynical public. Sideshows, as Fontaine writes, 'are where people come to see public displays of their private fears', and to probe their disgust reflexes and their yearnings. Here, too, they come to tread the line between relinquishing themselves to magic and uncovering, once and for all, the trick.

Yet as Fontaine discovers in her first flame-eating lesson, the trick is simply that there is no trick. Flame-eaters get burnt; sword-swallowers die of wounds inflicted by carelessly inserted blades. If you see pain, there is pain — or did you imagine that the show people were a special breed who feel nothing when they hammer nails up their noses? The only way is to feel the pain and fear and to overcome it. 'Wow,' says her flame-eating teacher, impressed: 'You don't have many instincts for self-preservation.'

Flame-eaters get burnt; sword-swallowers die of wounds inflicted by carelessly inserted blades

Why do people do it? In Fontaine's case, it was the result of a private tragedy. Two years previously, her mother had suffered a catastrophic stroke. Two years of slow steps towards recovery followed by fits and fevers that obliterated all her progress, of the family being repeatedly summoned to her bedside to say their last words. For her daughter, this ghastly emotional rollercoaster (sorry) was exacerbated by guilt at their difficult relationship. When her stepfather decided to take her mother on a longed-for holiday to Italy, Fontaine was convinced that her mother wouldn't survive the trip. So she ran away to the circus.

The sinister side of the sideshow, to my mind, is not so much the car-crash voyeurism as the sense one has of applauding and rewarding self-harm; and it's certainly true that some very damaged people pass through the tentflaps of the World of Wonder. The circus has traditionally been a sanctuary for outsiders and misfits, but on the wall of the truck is a long list of names of those who 'can't hack it'. Physical toughness is required to survive a season on the road, with its 17-hour days of manual labour followed by shows. Yet it's the psychological toughness that singles out those who will make it. In Fontaine's case, the World of Wonder provides her with a strange, dramatised space to process her loss and to transform herself.

Joan Didion's magical thinking is here in abundance — this is a summer of plea-bargaining with the gods: If I'm brave, as brave as my mother has always been, if I do all these things I'm terrified of, then surely she'll live… The pain of scorching her own face, of setting her arms alight, exorcises the helplessness Fontaine feels at her mother's suffering. Her terror of feeling the squeeze of a boa constrictor around her neck is more bearable than the fear of her mother's death. The adrenaline surge of each performance echoes the horrible ups and downs of two years of ambulances and last words — yet here each panic ends in applause, delighted crowds and children speechless with wonder. In a way it's a sort of penance, the burden of bereavement become physical. More powerfully, however, it's a glorious, sequinned affirmation of life and vitality. The World of Wonder defies death, one show at a time.

Fontaine herself (stage name: Mimi L'Amour) comes across endearingly; a squeaky-clean literature graduate, she says: 'So they've noticed how hard I'm working!' when she is given the vile jobs no one else wants. There are rather too many one-sentence paragraphs, and remarks such as 'new worlds call for new yous' and 'two women choosing to be awake in the world' for me to agree with *Publishers' Weekly*'s verdict that the book is beautifully written.

By the end of the summer, however, she has passed through a whole series of impressive initiation rites, including being eaten by a papier mâché monster and getting into a fight with another show girl. At last two climactic moments coincide: she plays the Electric Woman who lights up lightbulbs with her teeth, and her mother in her wheelchair returns from Italy in time to watch her. It's a genuinely touching denouement to this original debut. Somewhere in the US, on the back wall of a clapped-out World of Wonders truck, you'll find the ultimate accolade: 'Tessa hacked it.'

Coming of age in Nazi Germany

Jonathan Steinberg

Broken Lives: How Ordinary Germans Experienced the 20th Century
by Konrad H. Jarausch
Princeton, £27.95, pp. 464

The distinguished historian Konrad Jarausch's new book is a German narrative, told through the stories of ordinary people who lived through his chosen period. Six dozen Germans — mostly from the generation born in the 1920s — testify through their memoirs to how it was to be Christian or Jewish, working-class or upper-middle-class, a young Nazi or a young anti-Nazi. The main characters constitute, as Jarausch explains it, 'a stratified sample of individuals who represent a broad range of personal and collective experiences' seen from the bottom.

The book begins with the grandparents of this generation, and the stability of Wilhelmine Germany with its pre-1914 confidence and prosperity. War, social dis-

location and crisis follow — but, oddly, the young people born as the generation of the 1920s still seem to live in peace.

The Nazi seizure of power changes things. Teenage girls are swept away by Hitler, and record his greatness in religious terms. They join the various Nazi clubs and movements with enthusiasm. Jews begin to suffer, and they record their alienation. Then the war comes, and with it the sudden ecstasy of victories beyond belief. The greatness of the Führer has no limits.

Who are these people and how were they chosen? The central group belongs to a cohort and — as Jarausch asserts, though he offers no evidence for the claim — are in some way 'typical' of the generation he presents. How are they identified? How many in each group? None of this is entirely established. Is there any way to say with certainty what they really did, what they added to their memoirs or erased and left out? This is a particularly unsettling question when it comes to the Nazis. Jarausch quotes from diaries and postwar recollections, but there is no way to know if those who were active Nazis tell the truth in their diaries.

Teenage girls were swept away by Hitler, and recorded his greatness in religious terms

Jarausch opens his chapters about the war after 1940 with the experiences of young men. The Stalingrad horrors, the terrible atrocities committed, the brutal treatment and the spread of bestial acts, enemies murdered in horrible ways as revenge. Young soldiers whom we have met and come to know in the preceding pages have been turned, or turned themselves, into killing machines. As Jarausch observes: 'None of the memoirists admits to having been personally involved, but their texts do reveal a widespread knowledge of the project of Nazi annihilation.'

It was not just young men. Women supplied half the votes for the Nazi party and much of the public enthusiasm. Their accounts testify to Hitler's charisma. Lore Walb gushed to her diary in October 1933: 'I have seen our Führer! He stood in his car with his right arm raised, so serious, so strong and so great.' In the summer of 1943, Renate Finckh participated in the 'noble mission' of transferring conquered territory into German land. Shocked by the dirt of the settlers, who had 'medieval notions of hygiene', she started to clean up the farmstead. Only by ramming her knee into the groin of the local Nazi peasant leader did she escape being raped. She was just 13.

The tragedy of the young Jews becomes clear in the 1930s. In her private school, Gisela Grothus met the daughter of a Protestant family of Jewish extraction: 'In this manner I gained my first close school friendship with "Martchen" and often played with her.' Jarausch — whether consciously or not — sees the Jews as by nature different; not quite German, perhaps:

> The young Jew Werner Warmbrunn first befriended a 'blond, athletic... leader of the neighbourhood gang' and later admired a 'free spirit' who, as the scion of a noble Nazi family, 'cared little for what others thought of him and his actions'.

Jarausch's steady technique gives the story continuity, as he traces the experiences of these young people coping with their inclusion into Nazi life. On the other hand, as I say, there is no way of knowing how representative they are. Could not once enthusiastic Nazis have been tempted to distort their loyalty to the regime as part of postwar rehabilitation? Eva Peters seems to have kept a ledger of the pro- and anti-Nazi activities of people in her neighbourhood. But what does that mean? Were these merely private observations, without any consequences?

These witnesses also offer a vivid and detailed account of the end of the second world war, life in the four occupation zones and the options the young soldiers faced. Life gradually returns to normal in both East and West. But the witnesses no longer provide a unified account: as ordinary citizens in different states they do not share a central common experience. Once Germany is divided, once the Cold War begins, there is no coherent story.

That said, the chapter on 'communist disappointment' provides a sensitive and balanced insight into the failure of East Germany's Socialist Unity party in 1989. Jarausch quotes East German intellectuals, many of whom believed in communism as a future, but also gives voice to the hopes and enthusiasms of the supporters of reform.

> The memoirs suggest that the legal process of reunification took place over the heads of people in complex negotiations that nonetheless had major consequences for ordinary lives.

The story ends with the aged, and their memories of 'broken' lives. Jarausch recognises that he too has become one of the aged, as has your reviewer. The texts remain. But the real meaning cannot be assessed by simply presenting them.

New Eyes Each Year
(Hull University 2017)

In the City of Culture
There's an exhibition where,
Suspended by grey braces,
A beige, capacious pair
Of Philip Larkin's trousers
Is hanging in the air,
As if the Larkin essence
Were trouserless despair.

They match his gutted diaries
With only covers left
And on display in cases,
Without the poet's deft
Descriptions of his daily
Warp and woe and weft,
Fed to the library shredder
And of his words bereft.

— Duncan Forbes

Miss Marple to the rescue

Lucy Mangan

Girl with Dove: A Life Built by Books
by Sally Bayley
William Collins, £14.99, pp. 270

Girl with Dove is a memoir by Sally Bayley, a writer who teaches at Oxford University, of growing up in a squalid, dilapidated house in a Sussex seaside town. It contains her mother Ange, her aunt Di, her grandmother, an unspecified number of siblings and a variety of temporary inhabitants who joined the Zion-seeking cult that evolved around Ange and Di. There are also a few longer-lasting denizens, such as Uncle David (first encountered unconscious on the sitting room floor), the sinister Woman Upstairs, and Poor Sue, who later seems to come to some kind of Poor End.

If this all seems a little hazy, it is because — as Bayley notes — facts were thin on the ground in her house and her book is written entirely from the standpoint of the child she was, living (though often apparently starving, with her mother more preoccupied with the cultivation of her roses and provision of elocution lessons for her children than with meals) in the middle of chaos and trying to make sense of scenes and characters as they rushed past. The confusion is increased by the decision to exclude certain facts surely known even then, such as the name of her town (Worthing, probably) and her exact number of siblings. The readerly fog starts to descend early, and only increases.

The start of the chaos, if you can locate such a thing, seems to have been the disappearance of her baby brother during the long, hot summer of 1976. 'The Nappy Witch came and took David away and Mummy went to bed for a very long time… She didn't wake for years.' Who or what the Nappy Witch was — a social worker (which would suggest the family chaos was already in spate), death or a snatching — is never fully explained,

though it seems death is the most likely culprit and maternal grief and depression the major distorting forces from then on.

Bayley retreats into books in a way even the most intensely bookwormish have surely rarely managed. One of the first is *Milly-Molly-Mandy*, discovered in the local library. Bayley refers to Milly-Molly-Mandy's friend as Sweet Sue, which at first looks like a misremembering of the character Little Friend Susan. But then, as Bayley's memories of the stories metamorphose into a tale of Billy Blunt's father sweating as he catches sight of the girls' 'pale rose flesh beneath a white cotton hem', you are left unsure whether Bayley is suggesting a childhood knowledge of local perversion.

Later, characters such as Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, Jane Eyre (who else are you going to identify with when you have a madwoman upstairs in your home?) and Betsey Trotwood become as virtually living beings to her and she slips in and out of their stories and imagined thoughts in life and in the book. The voice and experiences of young Sally slide in and out of that of the Red Room's suffering inmate, various mysteries in St Mary Mead and David Copperfield's travails (unless he merges with one of the many other Davids, aside from the missing infant, that pepper the book) until the whole thing takes on a distinctly hallucinatory quality. It makes for a brilliant evocation of the porousness for children between reality and fiction; but in the absence of any factual footholds elsewhere, it makes judgment and orientation impossible.

The cult peters out, but Ange's neglect of her children (there is one abortive meeting with Bayley's — probable — father but he doesn't stay around) doesn't improve, and eventually Bayley takes herself to the doctor. There in the surgery, rather movingly, the child who habitually plays with words like spinning tops (when her mother accuses her of vanity, the word 'had sharp edges that went straight into my stomach. Vanity was a long white van you drove around full of mirrors. Before long, the van crashed because the mirrors at the back distracted you. Vanity was a crushed white van with a smashed face and a bleeding body') cannot find the words to explain her situation. 'This wasn't a room for telling stories in.'

Nevertheless, the doctor — an old acquaintance of Ange — intuits enough to get social services involved, which results in Bayley being ostracised, beaten and eventually taken away in an ambulance to a children's home. She puts herself into the care system (her family sign the paperwork without demur) and there the book ends. The back flap tells us she is the first person from the West Sussex County Council care system (whose social services are thanked) to have gone to university.

The book is beautifully written and if you can ignore the explosion of questions it detonates in your mind at every turn and just let its poetic rhythms lap over you and wear you into a slightly different shape from the one in which you began, that is probably the best way. But it left me longing for more of Bayley's recollections from a place of relative tranquillity, a greater twist of the kaleidoscope to bring those fragments of childhood into a more distinguishable pattern. Facts can provide a vital torque.

When voters lose faith

Katrina Gulliver

The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America
by Timothy Snyder
Bodley Head, £25, pp. 359

How Democracy Ends
by David Runciman
Profile, £14.99, pp. 256

If social media manipulation has influenced elections, and dark money has influenced our elected representatives, then we are already on the road to unfreedom, as Timothy Snyder, the well-known historian of Russia, argues in his new book. He sees threats to democracy in Europe and America as following the Russian model of oligarchic takeover: 'The stabilisation of massive inequality, the displacement of policy by propaganda, the shift from the politics of inevitability to the politics of eternity.'

Even as their missiles were flying in the Crimea, the Russian government officially denied involvement

Snyder focuses on the Ukrainian crisis, noting how this conflict became a theatre of cultural memory: during the Russian invasion it was once again 1941, the enemies were Nazis, and tanks were even painted with slogans such as 'For Stalin'. Leftists in the West particularly fell for Russia's version of events. Snyder shows John Pilger and Seumas Milne parroting information from Russian propaganda sites arguing that the protests in Ukraine were led by fascists, and points out how western coverage bought into the divisive narrative of 'ethnic Russians' and 'ethnic Ukrainians', based on language use. In fact many Ukrainians use both, including those who were protesting against Russia's actions. Snyder's informative timeline of events on the ground in Ukraine is vivid, and offers a much greater understanding of how this conflict emerged than we got in most English-language news coverage.

Snyder also illustrates how propaganda was used to sell the Crimean annexation to the Russian public. The campaign relied on stirring resentment against the West — along with some strange beliefs. Foreign influence was blamed for creating trouble in Ukraine, and this was connected to a particular western threat: dangerous homosexuality. Snyder explains the degree to which 'gays and Jews' are seen as the enemy in Russia's political commentary. Jews are, unfortunately, accustomed to this; but gays will be surprised to learn that the EU is run by a homosexual cabal.

Yet, even as their missiles were flying in the Crimea, the Russian government officially denied involvement, describing the conflict as a civil war. Snyder talks about this kind of 'plausible deniability', asserting that it originated with the Southern Strategy of the US Republicans in the 1970s, who pursued racist policies without being explicitly racist. While the concept is no doubt as old as human subterfuge, the term 'plausible deniability' was coined by Allen Dulles at the CIA during the Kennedy administration. He was talking about being able to deny covert operations — a far closer analogy to Russia's half-denials of actions in Ukraine than racially-tinged campaign promises about school funding.

Where Snyder is more acute is in drawing parallels between Trump and Russian oligarchs, and pointing to more people being cut out of democratic processes and political access. The wealth at the top is part of the problem: the 1 per cent have influence in ways that no ballot box could effect. He is right about democracy failing when the voters themselves have no faith in the process, and voter faith is being undermined — for instance, by the Russian meddling scandal in the US. He feels that inequality is the greatest threat to democracy's survival.

In *How Democracy Ends*, David Runciman offers a broader analysis. He talks about how ideally in a democracy, popular will can change policy direction.

Runciman praises, for instance, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* for bringing environmental issues into public consciousness in the 1960s, leading to the banning of DDT. (Whether this was a good thing in the long run is another issue; there are millions who have died from malaria since then who might not have if DDT was still in use for mosquito control.) But Carson's work did make a change. Runciman argues that such a tactic — increasing public awareness of coming catastrophe — would not work today, however. We have 'apocalypse fatigue'. Since the 1960s, a series of doomsayers have told us we would all be dead by now, thanks to overpopulation, nuclear holocaust, a new Ice Age, the Aids pandemic or global warming. Nonetheless, each of these scares (some more realistic

than others) has affected policy, just not necessarily in a democratic way.

If the issue is democracy, a better question is how trendy ideas end up capturing the elite and becoming policy, the democratic will of the people be damned. Perfect examples of this are 'green energy', mass immigration and the sugar tax. On these fronts, the end of democracy started long before Donald Trump — or perhaps it never really existed. Even in mature democratic states there has always been a 'ruling class' who claimed to know better than everyone else. Sometimes they did, but the question is, better for whom? The interests of Davos Man and Silicon Valley executives don't coincide with those of the rest of the population.

Runciman considers at length the alternatives to democracy: pragmatic authoritarianism, epistocracy (rule by those who 'know better') and liberated technology. They all have pros and cons, and Runciman sees our most likely trend as towards liberated technology, in which we end up being ruled by our machines — for better or worse. Nonetheless, he is encouraged by democracy's survival — and revival — in countries where it has been challenged by coups or dictatorships. The last two years have seen plenty of political books on the theme of 'democracy in crisis'. Refreshingly, rather than a knicker-twisting diatribe about Trump and Brexit, Runciman offers a thoughtful analysis about what popular democracy means, and its alternatives.

GETTY IMAGES

A rare photograph by Bernice Abbott of Lucia Joyce dancing in the 1920s

Trouble for Lucia

Claire Kohda Hazelton

Lucia
by Alex Pheby
Galley Beggar, £9.99, pp. 356

In 1988, James Joyce's grandson Stephen destroyed all letters he had from, to or about his aunt Lucia Joyce, the novelist's daughter. Many saw the destruction of documents pertaining to Lucia, who had spent the majority of her life in asylums and had been close to her father, as the destruction of keys to understanding her father's work. Stephen replied: 'No one was going to set their eyes on them [the letters] and re-psychoanalyse my poor aunt.'

Stephen, still alive today, appears — though with his name blacked out — in this novel, an imagining of the life and legacy of Lucia. 'A silly old cunt,' he is called by a character we are made to sympathise with. He is a villain; his destruction of Lucia's letters is an act of vandalism — the silencing of Lucia's voice.

In the absence of truth, and within the safe confines of fiction, Alex Pheby picks his way through surviving information as though through bones, and adds imagined flesh. Lucia's brother Giorgio sexually abuses her and tortures her rabbit to ensure her silence. Her father drunkenly mistakes her for her mother, his 'arousal transferred'. Her uncle is 'in her bedroom with an erection, borne of a fever dream of mermaids'. Through these violently sexual passages, a strange, constricted picture of Lucia is created — a woman defined only by the brutality of men. Concurrently, the men in Lucia's life are painted as demons, their characters made to contain all possible iterations of cruelty towards women in the 20th century.

'Do not destroy documentary evidence of the truth, since it will come back and bite you in the arse,' Pheby writes, hinting that this novel is less an attempt to reconstruct Lucia's life than an act of vengeance. This feels unfair — in particular to James Joyce who (all substantiated evidence suggests) was not abusive, and to Lucia herself. It seems like no coincidence, too, that imaginings of the relationship of Giorgio (Stephen's father) with Lucia are particularly sadistic. It is, in a sense, literary trolling.

In the final chapters, possible scenes of a joyful childhood are presented like gifts to Lucia, so that, like the woman in a defaced tomb an archaeologist tries to repair in parallel passages, she 'might at least have these as memories'. So exquisitely written are these chapters, in one of which she plays out of doors with her father, that we almost forget the questionable ethics of the novel.

These quietly moving passages are sad, however, and not for the reason most likely intended, for they remind us that at the core of this novel are a father and daughter whose relationship is being played with, speculated on and twisted for the sake of art. There is a well-known story that says that Lucia's happiness was the price her father paid for *Finnegans Wake*; while he struggled to finish it, she was sent to an asylum. There is a similar exchange in this book; Lucia's and her family's characters and privacy are sacrificed for a work of fiction.

Pheby hints that his novel is less an attempt to reconstruct Lucia's life than an act of vengeance

'Truth and beauty, perhaps they are inseparable' — the line appears in a passage on the burning of evidence. This novel criticises the destruction of truth, and therefore of beauty, but itself exists in a place — as a work of fiction — where truth cannot be found.

ARTS

‘I’ve got dementia in reverse’

At 74, Ray Davies is as sharp as ever. *Michael Hann* talks to him about America, angry groupies and being a reluctant frontman

‘I like your shirt today,’ Sir Ray Davies says to the waiter who brings his glass of water to the table outside a café in Highgate. ‘How’s your girlfriend?’ It turns out the girlfriend is no longer the girlfriend. ‘You broke up? You know, that happens. It’ll be OK. You’ll meet somebody else.’ He pauses and then says something that runs through my head for days after our interview. ‘She’ll meet somebody else.’

It’s true, of course; she will. And it’s a human thing to say: both parties to the relationship will move on. But it’s also delivered with a hint of claws. Who wants to be told, fresh from a break-up, that their ex will soon be hooking up with another partner? It seems like a very Ray Davies thing to say, given that so many of the songs he wrote for the Kinks seemed pretty and straightforward, but left scratches.

Davies speaks so softly that cats wouldn’t hear him coming. There are times I can’t make out what he’s saying, and when I play back the recording those passages are indistinct murmurs. Maybe they’re the bits where he says what he really thinks, because he’s adept at taking one question and answering another. You might think that he’s a slightly doddery, slightly forgetful old gentleman, but I don’t believe that for a second. Those kinds of chaps don’t release two albums in a little over a year (*Our Country: Americana Act II*, the second of a pair of records to accompany his 2013 autobiography, comes out on 29 June.) And as Davies himself observes when mentioning the old, unrecorded songs that are shunting unbidden across his mind as he prepares a box set of the 1968 album *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*: ‘I’ve got dementia in reverse.’

For all his reputation as one of England’s defining pop songwriters, America was Davies’s inspiration, and it is to the subject of America that he has been drawn these past few years. America came into his life from ‘listening to records. My sister lived in Canada, and she used to send early pressings of Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, before they came to the radio in England. And films, of course. It was an accumulation of everything that postwar austerity in Britain didn’t have. Britain was broke after the war, and America seemed rich, affluent. It represented freedom, to aspire to the good people wearing white hats, the bad guys wearing black hats. By the time we got there [in 1965] we found it quite different. I’d say it was more right-wing when we first toured than it is now.’

I mention how it’s still a thrill when the plane comes down to land at JFK. He says he prefers to be on the ground, then remembers sitting behind the soul singer James Brown on a flight when the landing had to be aborted. Brown sat up and hollered out, in character as the Godfather of Soul: ‘Good GOD!’

Does he still love America the way he did when he was a young man? ‘I never loved America. I was in awe of it. Shocked by it. Astounded by its versatility. Never loved it.’

Yet Davies went to live there in 1998, dismayed by Tony Blair (he couldn’t work out what Blair represented), and he ended up getting shot and nearly dying in his adopted home of New Orleans. So if he doesn’t love it, why is he drawn back to it as a subject? ‘Because it’s endless. You think you’ve discovered it, but there’s always something around the corner. You get in the car and you drive, and there’s a whole new culture. In Minnesota you’ve got the Swedish people, in Wisconsin you’ve got the German people. In the desert you get Navajo Indian. I think it’s because you’ve got the landmass to accommodate all these cultures.’

‘I’d like to have just written the songs, then given them to someone else to sing’

The Kinks’ greatest period had little to do with America, though. Having made their name in 1964 with ‘You Really Got Me’ and ‘All Day And All Of The Night’ — songs so good Davies says he felt no need to compete in the Stones/Beatles/Who pop arms race, since he’d already surpassed them — the band went to America in 1965 and were promptly banned from the country for four years, officially for not paying union dues, though Davies always suspected their bloody-mindedness was the real cause. Back home, Davies set about writing the barbed and wistful portraits of England that are the bedrock of his reputation as a writer: songs such as ‘Sunny Afternoon’, ‘Dedicated Follower Of Fashion’, ‘Waterloo Sunset’, ‘Autumn Almanac’, albums such as *Something Else by The Kinks* and *Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)*.

On returning to America in 1969, he was at last able to pursue transatlantic rock stardom. He didn’t enjoy it much. ‘I think the Kinks could have found a better frontman,’ he says. ‘I’d like to have just written the songs, then given them to someone else to sing.’

The Kinks didn’t get along very well, but we had the ability to interact musically, and for three minutes, to make a record, everything was thrown out, all the hatred would go.’

And how would an old-fashioned rock star have survived had #MeToo been around in those days? Davies sidesteps this one. ‘A world-famous groupie once threw me out because I was too kind. Then this wonderful woman came over from LA to see me. She turned up in an evening gown and I took her to a fish and chip shop. I’m not an easy date. When we went back to America in the early 1970s after the ban, if you were a gentleman to a woman you were considered uncool. Although the grotesque revelations about Weinstein were appalling.’

But that’s how power works, I suggest. People behave towards power in the way they are expected to. And rock stars represented power within their own world. He talks again about 1970s groupies, then mentions he had seen a discussion about Weinstein on *Newsnight*, with an American actress — he means Rose McGowan. He doesn’t sound awfully impressed by her. But surely it is better to talk about this than let it fester?

‘Obviously, she felt damaged and unjustly treated. All these things, it’s the cycle of life.’

As for Brexit, he will not be drawn even

© ALEX LAKE

The reluctant frontman: Ray Davies

on whether he voted in the referendum, and the thoughts he will offer could support either side. 'The next couple of years is going to be an immense period of change, not just in our country but through Europe. It's an immense change, and the generation coming through, the millennials, will feel the impact of it,' he says. 'I think it's the most significant event since the end of the second world war. I'm not a politician, but my instinct is that we're going to have to reassess our identity for ourselves.'

Sir Ray Davies has just turned 74. He still loves the view over London from Primrose Hill at five in the morning, and mentioning it sets him on a reverie. 'I still think of a girl I turned down in Paris all those years ago. She called me every name under the sun but I didn't take her back to my hotel. I remember it was five in the morning, and I said I was going. Images like that stay with me. I like New York on the Thanksgiving Day parade, which used to go past my apartment on West 72nd Street. What was really enjoyable in the 1980s was that I lived in central London, on Luxborough Street, off Marylebone High Street. I had a flat. At weekends we would go out on our bikes and cycle all round London. Loved that.'

He takes a sip of a glass of red wine, and puts it down, still almost full. His driver is here to take him back to Konk Studios, up the road in Hornsey. He has a song to record, an American newspaper to talk to. The autumn almanac of Ray Davies continues to fill up.

Our Country: Americana Act II *is released on Sony on 29 June.*

Volcano of invention: Alexander Calder at Hauser & Wirth Somerset

Exhibitions 1
Searching high and low
Craig Raine

Alexander Calder: From the Stony River to the Sky
Hauser & Wirth Somerset, until 9 September

In the Moderna Museet in Stockholm there is a sculpture by Katharina Fritsch, which references Chekhov's famous story 'Lady with a Dog'. It was part of a Jeff Koons mini-show. At the time (2014), I thought it was by Koons. The postcard disabused me. It shows a woman in unapologetic Barbara Cartland pink, with a parasol, accompanied by a white fighting Pekinese. Both are constructed entirely from shells — she mainly scallop shells, her ample bust the bulging hinge of a clam, her arms fashioned from auger shells like mini-whelks. We have seen this 'art' before in a thousand evening classes for housewives who couldn't get into the over-subscribed flower-arranging or macramé.

It is the dog that makes the sculpture remarkable: it is an exact, pitch-perfect arrangement of a very few clam shells to capture the proud carriage, the bonsai bearing, the absurd chutzpah, the top-dog self-confidence. Like Koons's balloon dog, it teleports a vulgar representation from the vernacular into the palace of art — a commoner into the royal family. It is a branch of pop art, a branch Alexander Calder might be said to have pioneered in his 'Cirque Calder' (1926–31), which took the greatest show on earth and raised its status by prodigal invention. Think of Calder's wire sword swallower slightly bent forward at the waist as he gags on the sword whose hilt fills his mouth. The piquant, puking accuracy is all in the posture. What is now accepted was, in Calder's day, slightly dubious, lacking the gravitas of great art. In his autobiography, Calder records the verdict of a patron as he patiently packed up his circus into its suitcases: 'Mrs Bernstein said, "It's a lot of work." That was her only comment.'

There is an upturned brass hand giving us the finger – what Germans call der Stinkefinger – to hold a toilet roll.

Calder was a volcano of invention, almost impossible to represent in his teeming, tumultuous entirety — especially the bespoke, customised designs for BMW cars and Boeing airplanes. The huge Calder show at Tate Modern in 2015 didn't begin to cover his remarkable output. The current selection at Hauser & Wirth Somerset is charming and modest, a taster menu of bonnes bouches. It is devoid of art snobbery and begins with a vitrine of household items touched by the Calder genius. When Calder was 40, he commissioned a birthday cake from an Italian bakery in Danbury, for himself and Malcolm Cowley (who near-as-dammit shared a birthday). The iced lettering said: FORTY, FIT, FAT, AND FARTY. Here there is an upturned brass hand giving us the finger — what Germans call *der Stinkefinger* — to hold a toilet roll. He was unafraid to be coarse.

There is a toaster like an instrument of medieval torture — the tendrils of the element wrapped round an uneven flat stone. The bread rested against a wire grill. It has

a two-point plug and a table-lamp to-fro switch. Above the machine is a wire halo with meandering circles, either to keep the toast warm or possibly to heat up waffles. It is unmistakably, undeniably sculptural — practical and a work of art that intrigues and woos the eye. There is an item allegedly for skimming the skin from pasteurised milk, shaped like a hand mirror or a table-tennis bat. The inner circle is an irregular silver spider's web, which made me wonder if it wasn't actually a fly swat. There is a pair of clogs, with leather tops and proper wooden soles edged with red, the heels painted yellow. Hard not to think of Tolstoy's bookshelf containing all his works, *War and Peace* democratically next to the boots he cobbled together in his peasant phase of simple, showy self-denial. Here, too, is a small, ravishing bird of beaten brass, Calder's version, as it were, of Yeats's golden bird, 'set upon a bough/ To sing to lords and ladies of Byzantium'. Its wings are two decorative coils. The head is another coil. There are six curved tail feathers. The claws have one backward and three forward branches:

Calder, for all his Falstaffian bulk, was an enthusiastic and nifty dancer of the polka and the samba

the lower is larger and therefore the nearer. They are the one touch of three-dimensionality. Otherwise the bird is like some magic creature pressed and flattened like a flower in the family bible but still alive and vital. I coveted it.

Calder invented the mobile (named by Marcel Duchamp) and the stabile (named by Jean Arp). They form the bulk of this show and they are notoriously difficult to describe. Calder tried and failed himself: 'The Calderberry Bush: a two-metre rod with one heavy sphere suspended from the apex of a wire. This gives quite a cantilever effect. Five thin aluminum discs project at right angles…' No wonder he gave up. You *don't* get the idea. There is a stabile maquette here called 'Ex-Octopus' (1936), baffling in its jet-black, shape-shifting loveliness. It reminded me that Calder, for all his Falstaffian bulk, was an enthusiastic and nifty dancer of the polka and the samba. 'Ex-Octopus' has all the flourish of two tempestuous tango dancers, deliciously entangled and committed to flamboyant switches of direction.

Miro was an important influence — when Calder first saw Miro's work, he wondered if it were art at all — and his influence is visible here. There is a room full of imagined animals and insects reminiscent of Miro's *Star Wars* franchise of futuristic creations from outer space. One has three legs, red, yellow and black. Its body is wooden and hollowed out. Springing out of it on wires are little lumps of black truffle. It is walking on tiptoe like one of those stilted insects that carry around a quality of convalescence.

Not everything is delicate. 'La Grande Vitesse' (1969) is an orange stabile, all rivets, bolts, panels and overlaps, like an abstract of Dürer's rhinoceros. It is encumbered, armoured — a Goliath of deliberate gracelessness, like some terrible insect exoskeleton. I thought of Claudio Abbado in a television documentary shortly after his appointment to the Berlin Philharmonic. He was rehearsing a young violinist. He told her she was playing too beautifully, that she wasn't being ugly enough. Calder, too, has the requisite fearless appetite for everything. He gave Sartre a mobile bird — 'made out of Connecticut license plates'.

Television

Hell on earth

James Delingpole

There were 1,500 punters in the audience when Eagles of Death Metal played their fatal gig at the Bataclan theatre in Paris in November 2015. By midnight, every one of those fans would either be dead, bereaved, in hospital with gunshot wounds or so traumatised that the horror would haunt the rest of their lives.

But obviously none of them knew this when they woke up on that sunny autumn morning (though it was a Friday 13th). One remembers that his first thought that day was to make sure he wore some nice trousers. Another recalls being puzzled when his father — 'a typical Chilean dad' — embraced him, asked him anxiously where he was going that night ('I'm 23!') and then said what now sounds eerily prophetic: 'No one can steal your soul.' The son replied: 'I'll be careful.'

Actually, though, whether you lived or died was entirely a matter of luck. The band had just launched into one of their up-tempo crowd-pleasers 'Kiss the Devil' when in burst four Islamic terrorists and began spraying the packed audience with their AK-47s. As reality dawned and the band fled the stage, the crowd collapsed like dominos — some because they'd been hit, the rest because it seemed like their only chance of survival.

What everyone remembers was how loud and relentless the gunfire was. And also the intense smell — 'iron blood and gunpowder' — that stuck in your throat. No one dared move, except to hug themselves closer to their loved ones and, for self-protection, to bury themselves deeper into the growing mass of dead bodies.

Then the firing stopped — and for a moment, in the silence, it seemed as though there might be hope. But then there was a click, as one of the gunmen slotted another magazine into his automatic rifle. And the slaughter was resumed.

'I'm not a believer, but if I were I know that this is what hell looks like,' said one survivor. Another likened it to Dante's Inferno. There came a point, after a while, when no one expected to get out alive. Those who tried to make a run for it were mown down near the (crowded, too narrow) exits. Those who lay on the floor were picked off, one by one, 'like rabbits', from the balcony. (Sometimes the trigger was when their mobile phones rang. 'I was lucky. Mine was on vibrate,' said a survivor.) One woman described that 'existential moment where you know death is coming for you', and the strange sense of peace this had brought her as she lay awaiting her fate.

These were some of the stories we heard from 40 eyewitnesses in *November 13: Attack on Paris*, a three-part Netflix documentary about the Islamic terror attacks in which 130 people were murdered. It was made by Gédéon and Jules Naudet, the French brothers who rose to fame in 2002 after making a similar film about the survivors of 9/11. Jules had been in New York working on a documentary about firefighters, and was with one of the first crews to arrive after the Twin

Those who lay on the floor were picked off, one by one, 'like rabbits', from the balcony

Towers were hit. Their 9/11 experience left the brothers permanently marked. It was also, perhaps, why the Paris victims were prepared to open up to them.

Much of the testimony was almost unbearably harrowing, such as that of the French restaurant proprietor whose wife had died in his arms consciously holding back her pain and fear, he realised, because to the last 'she did all she could not to scare me'; the young man — like so many of the survivors still wearing that empty, thousand-yard stare — who'd felt the hand of his wounded girlfriend, as he lay on top of her to protect her, grow cold and stiff. As Ian McEwan wrote after 9/11, quoting Larkin: 'What will survive of us is love.'

What kept you watching — apart from the fact that it was more gripping than any scripted thriller — was the desperate hope that every account you heard would somehow, against the odds, end with a whole group getting away unharmed. Too often it didn't. But there was one wonderful story about the people who escaped by punching a hole in a false ceiling and climbing on to the roof. One of their number was an overweight woman who found herself quite incapable of hauling herself up. Even though she was holding up those behind her, all expecting to die at any minute, no one grumbled or tried to push in front. They waited, putting their own lives at risk, till miraculously she made it up.

THE LISTENER

Father John Misty: God's Favourite Customer

Grade: A+

While the young bands plunder the 1980s for every last gobbet of tinny synth and hi-hat, the singer-songwriters remain happily anchored in that much more agreeable decade which came directly before. The 1970s was the era of the introspective, self-pitying, prolix, hairy and winsome singer-songwriter — both the good ones (Young, Martyn, Buckley) and the, ahem, less gifted (Taylor, Forbert, Stevens). Father John Misty, aka Joshua Tillman and once the drummer in the most boring and epicene band I have ever seen (Fleet Foxes), is all of those adjectives I mention above. On this album the production values are purloined from mid-1975, right down to the occasional spasm of glam guitar, the tasteful piano, the strummed acoustic, the strings. Listen and you'll hear early Elton John, mid-period Paul Simon, whiffs of Lou Reed and Warren Zevon. Piano snatches from Debussy, smooth production that is sometimes too smooth and brings to mind those numbing saps Gallagher & Lyle. Oh, and the usual self-flagellation of the singer-songwriter.

And yet it is unequivocally magnificent. There is not a bad track. Witty, melodically clever and beguiling, from the restrained thrash of 'Date Night' to the beautiful and funereal 'The Palace'. The lead single, the inevitably self-referencing 'Mr Tillman', has hooks where you least expect them and, get this, a whistled solo. How do you like that, Roger Whittaker? There is a bit of 1970s bombast too, in the lovely 'Disappointing Diamonds Are The Rarest Of All'. I am not entirely sure what he is on about, some of the time. But this is the best album of the year so far, by some margin.

— Rod Liddle

Radio

When the boat comes in

Kate Chisholm

There was one of those moments late on Sunday night when a voice is so arresting (either through tone, timbre, or from what's being said) that you just have to stop what you're doing and listen, really concentrate, anxious not to miss a word. Floella Benjamin was on the *Westminster Hour* on Radio 4 talking about the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury Docks with 500 passengers from the Caribbean. Nothing unusual about that; it's an anniversary that's been given a lot of coverage. But then she started talking about her own experience of coming to the UK by boat, in 1960, with her three siblings, travelling by themselves across the Atlantic to join their parents, who had gone on ahead with two of their children to find work. She was just ten and had not seen her mother for 15 months.

Perhaps because I still think of her as the bouncy, happy, enthusiastic face of *Play School* in the 1970s, what she said had extra resonance. 'It was like an adventure on the high seas,' she told us, her voice filled with excitement at the memory. 'We felt we were freed.' They had been living with foster parents who were 'rather cruel'. On arrival at Southampton she was thrilled to see her mother waiting for them by the quayside 'like an angel'. She was, though, soon confused to notice that everywhere they went people kept staring at her. From that moment, she became, she said, no longer Floella but 'a colour'. Unlike in Trinidad, people didn't identify her as a person any more.

Later in the week we heard from four 'immigrants' who in May 1977 had been at a huge rally in Handsworth Park, close to the centre of Birmingham, celebrating African Liberation Day. They were all featured on a photograph taken that day by Vanley Burke. In *Face in the Crowd* on Radio 4 (produced by Caroline Raphael), Burke talked about how his first camera, a Kodak Brownie 127, had been sent out to him in Jamaica by his mother, who had left for the UK without him in 1955 when he was just four. It was ten years before she sent for him to join her.

Rather than complaining about his experiences when he arrived in a country not yet ready to accept his difference, he felt it was important to use his camera 'to document ourselves'. He was at the rally with a much better camera and took ten rolls of the crowd that had gathered to listen to speakers from Angola and South Africa, Jamaica and the USA. He knew it was a significant day, but strangely there was no coverage in the press about what was probably the biggest gathering of black people in the UK yet to take place.

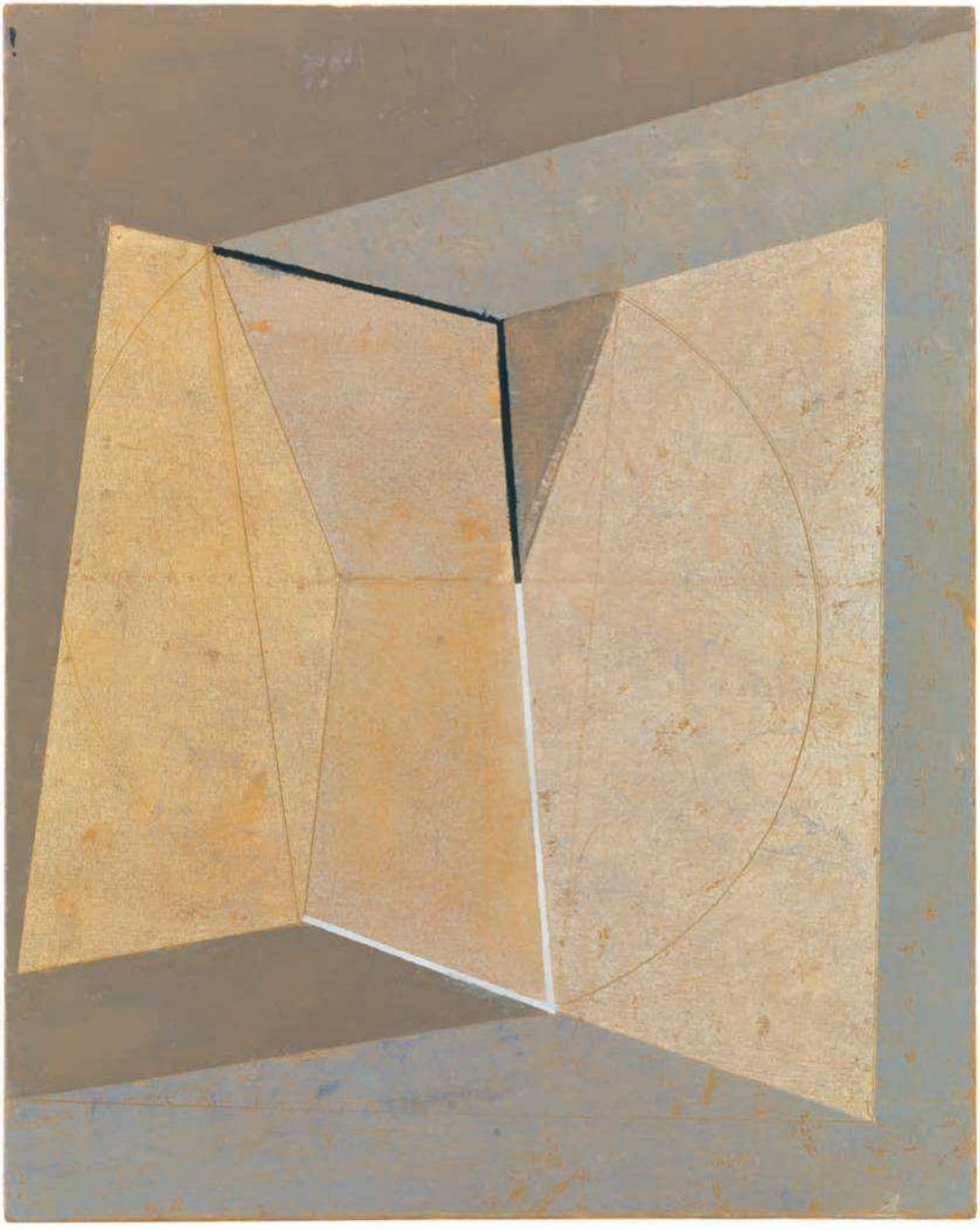
Derek Douglas, Norville Bynoe and Louisa and Rhonda Nisbett were all there as late teenagers: there's Bynoe wearing a crocheted beret to hold up his Rasta locks; Louisa and Rhonda, sisters, are both wearing headscarves. They found a voice that day, they all said, a sense of identity, which had been missing, as their parents, ultra-conservative, had not talked about where they came from or the covert racism they faced every day. They just rolled up their sleeves and worked. For their children, settling down was not so straightforward. At school they learnt nothing about African or Caribbean history, 'our history'.

There were no white people present at the rally (you can check that out by looking on the Radio 4 website), and even more surprising, no police. That's why it was not newsworthy — there was no trouble.

Saturday night's *Between the Ears* (produced by David Waters) gave us an immersive binaural experience (only with headphones) as if we were camping out in the Amazonian rainforest — birdsong, insects buzzing, the shushing of wind through the canopy and some eerily distant chanting. We were taken there by the anthropologist Laura Rival who with her nine-year-old daughter and a tape-recorder travelled into the dense forests of Ecuador in search of the Huaorani people who live as 'outcasts', too strange and remote for the other indigenous people.

'It's so hard for a westerner to understand the life of the forest,' said Rival, who had to send her daughter home after she became too ill while deciding to stay on herself. The Huaorani could identify so many sounds (they could hear an aeroplane two or three minutes before Rival), and knew exactly what was around them — deadly snakes and stingrays. 'Where there was danger,' said Rival, 'I was oblivious to it.' Days passed and nothing happened, except people having a great time together. She learnt about 'living in the present moment, with other people, and really sharing that moment with them. That quality of being a human.'

JEREMY ANNEAR



ENFOLDED, 2018 oil on canvas 75 x 60 cms 29½ x 23⅝ 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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'Prostitute and Disabled War Veteran. Two Victims of Capitalism', 1923, by Otto Dix

Exhibitions 2

The good, the bad and the ugly

Martin Gayford

Aftermath: Art in the Wake of World War One
Tate Britain, until 23 September

Some disasters could not occur in this age of instant communication. The first world war is a case in point: 9.7 million soldiers died, 19,240 British on 1 July, 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, alone. If all that had been seen on social media and rolling news threads, public opinion would have shifted immediately.

A hundred years ago, however, the sheer awfulness of what was happening took more time to sink in. *Aftermath*, an exhibition at Tate Britain, deals not so much with the art of the war itself as with the shocked and grieving era that followed the cataclysmic conflict: post-war art.

The horrors of the fighting continued to haunt artists on all sides, but not with equal force in every combatant country. In Britain the images were more softly elegiac than across the Channel. There was little appetite for even muted dreadfulness. The story of William Orpen's 'To The Unknown British Soldier In France' (1921–28) is revealing in that regard.

Orpen was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum to paint three pictures of the Paris Peace Conference. But the painter, who had seen the battlefield of the Somme as a war artist, was outraged by the way the dead and wounded seemed forgotten by the assembled diplomats. 'Why upset themselves and their pleasures by remembering the little upturned hands on the duckboards, or the bodies lying in the water in the shell-holes?'

So, after completing two group portraits of the delegates, on the third canvas he painted a coffin, draped in the Union Jack, standing in the grand halls of Versailles, and flanked — originally — by the almost naked wraiths of two dead soldiers. When this was exhibited at the RA, Orpen was vilified for 'bad taste', sacrilege even, and the Imperial

War Museum refused to accept the picture. Eventually, the artist decided to remove those spectral figures.

In retrospect it is striking how mild Orpen's protest was — even in the unmodified version. Indeed, that was generally true of British war art. Similarly C.R.W. Nevinson's 'Paths of Glory' (1917) was banned by the military censor, leading him to exhibit it with a piece of brown paper inscribed 'censored' over the image, which shows two corpses face down in the mud. But even uncensored, this is a great deal less scarring than many German responses to the carnage.

In the work of Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, Käthe Kollwitz and George Grosz the rage and grief are extreme. Mutilated survivors, of whom there were many thousands, are seen in full nose-less, eyeless, limbless detail in Beckmann's series of lithographs aptly entitled 'Hell' (1919). True, Henry Tonks — a renowned teacher of drawing and a surgeon — documented similar disfigurements in British hospitals, but his fastidiously precise pastels were intended as scientific records (and were not widely seen until quite recently).

This difference was partly art historical — British artists tended to represent the conflict as a violation of nature, through

Sorrow and pity are no guarantee of artistic success

shattered landscape; Germans saw it in terms of Bosch, Bruegel and the Dance of Death. But it was also because for them the disasters of war were unmitigated even by nominal victory.

The French response was not so evident in direct depictions of the conflict as in a change of cultural gear. In Paris the full-throttle cubism and fauvism of the pre-war years was replaced by the dreams and nightmares of surrealism — and a classical revival known as the rappel a l'ordre, or return to order.

Various artists — not only French ones — moved with this current. But such affinities do not necessarily mean that pictures by painters as different in visual wattage as Pablo Picasso and Dod Procter will get on together on a gallery wall. The result is that the latter's modest masterpiece 'Morning' (1926) is rather unfairly outshone.

All too often *Aftermath* is a jumble of the good, the bad and the indifferent. There are some outstanding things on display — by the German sculptor Ernst Barlach, for example. The underrated William Roberts and Edward Burra look strong too, but there are plenty of feeble pieces, such as Albert Birkle's 'Cross Shouldering' (1924), a maudlin exercise in mingling Christian and socialist imagery. That's the drawback of shows like this, which are fundamentally concerned with history rather than art. Sorrow and pity are no guarantee of artistic success.

Opera

Handel for hipsters

Richard Bratby

Acis and Galatea
English National Opera at Lilian Baylis House

The Dragon of Wantley
Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham

On a sward of AstroTurf somewhere off Silicon Roundabout, Mountain Media is hosting its summer party and, well, it's the sort of bash you'd pluck your own eyes out to avoid. Hipsters sprawl on dayglo beanbags. Lads wearing fairy wings strike aftershave-advert attitudes as they swig bottled lager, while girls in vintage dresses pout into smart phones through cardboard Instagram frames. Naturally, it's got its own hashtags: everything is flashed up on digital screens. The only thing that jars — though perhaps it's some new straight-outta-Hoxton trend — is that instead of a DJ there's a live band, and the music's by Handel.

Handel's English-language tragedy *Acis and Galatea* was once one of his most bankable properties. Georgian audiences couldn't get enough of nymphs and shepherds, the zombies of the early 18th century. But beyond the rustic charms of Handel's score — all warbling recorders and artlessly crafted melodies — you're left with a wisp of a story (from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) which ends with the hero turning into a fountain and whose most compelling character is a Cyclops. Confronted with the scruffy intimacy of Lilian Baylis House, director Sarah Tipple and designer Justin Nardella took their cue from Ovid and opted for complete transformation: an urban pastoral set in a world every bit as unreal as Arcadia.

So the love of the shepherd Acis (Alexander Sprague) and Galatea — sorry, @galatea_89 (Lucy Hall) — became a workplace romance, while the jealous rage of Polyphemus (Matthew Durkan) was fuelled by a social-media humiliation. Operatic voices rarely sound great in industrial spaces, still less in the round, but the cast clearly enjoyed the concept and they inhabited their characters both physically and vocally, whether through Sprague's graceful way with a phrase, Durkan's dark, rolling outbursts or the way Hall's soprano tightened with grief and then bloomed in the final scenes. Bradley Smith sang elegantly as Acis's office wing man Damon. If, under Nicholas Ansdell-Evans's direction, the nine-piece orchestra felt a bit relentless and occasionally scrappy, the thrill of hearing the ENO Chorus flood that space with sound was generous payback.

But this wasn't a show for those who like their baroque fantasies prissy. For me, the only major disappointment came after Acis's death (his co-workers captured his spasms on their iPhones), with the moment of transformation. Handel's music lifts off into blissful enchantment, and Tipple had been so inventive up to this point that I was sure she'd give us something magical and unexpected, possibly involving the inflatable unicorn visible on top of the drinks chiller (like Chekhov's pistol, you can't dangle an inflatable unicorn and then not use it). Her online solution (#rememberAcis) felt depressingly mundane. Maybe that was the point. But either way, it was a fun evening and it finished early enough for dinner — neither a given with a Handel opera.

In Birmingham there was a taste of Handel's competition, in the form of John Frederick Lampe's 1737 'burlesque opera' *The Dragon of Wantley*. Eighteenth-century theatre was incestuous. Handel's librettist John Gay had previously collaborated with Lampe's producer John Rich on *The Beggar's Opera*: a satirical skewering of Handel's Italian operas, whose success, it was said, 'made Rich gay and Gay rich'. You probably had to be there. Modern productions have reminded me of the line Ben Elton gave to Shakespeare in *Upstart Crow*: 'It just requires lengthy explanations and copious footnotes. If you do your research my stuff is actually really funny.'

Anyhow, *The Dragon of Wantley* trounced *The Beggar's Opera* at the box office, and you can still see why. I'd expected stilted dialogue and short-breathed music: what we heard was an inventive through-composed opera, complete with swaggering overture, lively ensembles, and a droll libretto by Henry Carey. 'It's basically G&S with harpsichords,' said the house manager as we went in. That's a compliment in my book, and though Lampe's music is humorous in intention, like Sullivan's it has a lyricism and freshness that's captivating on its own terms.

The plot, then. Said dragon menaces the drunken inhabitants of Wantley, South Yorkshire, and after romantic complications is dispatched not by some chivalrous Rinaldo or Ruggiero, but by a local squire who adopts the altogether more British approach of getting hammered and kicking it in the arse. The students of the University of Birmingham took this precisely as seriously as it deserved, with am-dram costumes offset by lovely, lucid singing from Emily Beech as damsel-in-distress Margery. As the dipsomaniac Moore of Moore Hall, Barney Walsh played it deadpan, with Harriet Smith as his jilted lover Mauxalinda delivering some amusing histrionics: in fact, the whole company kept it just the right side of panto, for which all credit to the director George Bandy. I know opera buffs are always saying things like this, but seriously, why isn't *The Dragon of Wantley* a cherished classic?

Theatre

Lost in transplantation

Lloyd Evans

Julie
Lyttelton Theatre, in rep until 8 September

Machinal
Almeida Theatre, until 21 July

Polly Stenham starts her overhaul of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* with the title. She gives the 'Miss' a miss and calls it *Julie*. The wonder of Strindberg is that his characters speak to us with such force, knowingness and candour that they seem to belong to our own era. Modernising the setting destroys the wonder. This is a textbook lesson in how to kill by transplantation. We're in a London mansion owned by an absent billionaire whose chauffeur, Jean, is casually seduced by a trustafarian coke fiend, Julie, on the night of her 33rd birthday. Julie's motives are lust, boredom, a need for attention and a perfunctory desire to sabotage Jean's forthcoming marriage to Kristina the cleaner, a bombshell from Brazil.

In Strindberg's original, Julie's act of rebellion is audaciously erotic and thrilling to watch. She sins three ways: against her father, against her class and against her

The heroic defiance of Strindberg's Julie is completely flattened by Stenham

duty of loyalty and patronage to the family servants. Here, Strindberg's intricate structure of prohibitions and taboos collapses and we're left with a couple of hip Londoners having a two-minute knee-trembler on the roof terrace. Beyond carnal attraction, there's nothing to keep them together, and in the real world these frenzied shaggers would know this was a one-night stand. Yet the script obliges them to make breathless plans about eloping and starting a restaurant business abroad. They sound like two overexcited teens who've just lost their virginity on a Youth Hostelling weekend.

The heroic defiance of Strindberg's Julie is completely flattened by Stenham who turns her into a talentless parasite approaching middle age. Jean is even harder to like. He's a wine snob and a love rat who has a priggish control-freak side. He wants to police Julie's social life while subtly investigating her financial position. As soon as he learns that she lacks access to daddy's cash, he cancels their elopement. The performers do their best to animate this airless and sometimes baffling script.

They're not helped by the design of the millionaire's kitchen, letterbox in shape, which looks like a luxury slaughterhouse. It's odd to choose a flattened oblong set that can only accentuate the Lyttelton's cumbersome lateral proportions. Wise designers would seek the opposite effect. The show's highlight comes with the execution of Julie's pet bird. At last, the up-to-date setting pays off because a modern kitchen is fitted with more lethal instruments than Strindberg could ever have imagined. There's a microwave, a toaster, a food blender, a washer-drier, an electric carving knife and a George Foreman two-portion grill. I won't say which Julie plumped for but it got more laughs than the dead parrot sketch.

Machinal is a morality play from 1928 by the American feminist Sophie Treadwell. Enslavement is the theme. A Young Woman trapped in a ghastly office job receives a proposal from her boss. She discusses this with her spiteful mother who envies her daughter but sees that marriage will bring them security. This 15-minute scene is a small masterpiece of poisoned love. Technically it's brilliant. The Young Woman enters her mother's kitchen intending to discuss the proposal, nothing more. A short time later she has agreed to get married and this decision has somehow evolved from a series of verbal steps that were accidental and yet predestined as well. It's one of those rare passages of drama that seems to have been written by fate rather than the human hand.

The Young Woman's husband treats her decently, even though she shudders at his approach. He expects nothing from her but obedience as she passes like a prize cow from her mother's custodianship to his own. She suffers horribly while giving birth and he comforts her in hospital. Patiently, caringly, he explains that he understands her pain, having listened to her cries from outside the maternity suite. The play is full of gruesome ironies like this. The language underlines the central motif. Everyone speaks in banalities. The near-dead and the near-meaningless clichés come spooling out of their mouths like verbal chains.

The Young Woman strays and takes a lover who unwittingly implants in her mind the means of terminating her captivity. The action ends bleakly and violently. Director Natalie Abrahami deserves prizes for her crisp, no-nonsense production. The classy design by Miriam Buether is full of ingenious ideas (although it was a mistake to disrupt the 1920s setting with anachronisms like CNN microphones and Guantanamo jumpsuits).

This is a short piece and in some ways a crude and horrible one. It's a howl of rage, a near-suicidal plea for revolution from 90 years ago. But it struck me with the force of something larger than drama, something beyond art even, something real, magnificent and exquisitely painful to observe. Like a battleship sinking under heavy fire with the crew singing their hearts out as they blast the final pointless rounds of ammunition into the sky.

Cinema

No fear

Deborah Ross

Hereditary
15, Nationwide

The Happy Prince
15, Key Cities

Hereditary is the horror film that has been described as a 'ride of pure terror' and likened to *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Shining*, to which I can say only: in its dreams. Given I'm such a wuss when it comes to anything frightening — the child-catcher from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* still scares the living daylights out of me — I'm rather thankful, but I'm perplexed as to why it received such rave reviews. Ride of pure terror? I've had more terrifying rides on the teacups at the fair. I saw it at the paying cinema with my adult son and his girlfriend, who were also bored out of their minds and could only conclude that 'all other critics are idiots'. This is as I've long suspected, but it's useful to have it confirmed.

Written and directed by Ari Aster, *Hereditary* stars an overwrought Toni Collette as Annie, whose mother, Ellen, has just died. Annie had a difficult relationship with Ellen and I initially thought

Ride of pure terror? I've had more terrifying rides on the teacups at the fair

the scene was being set for a horror spin on ambivalent motherhood, which could have been interesting, but I was wrong. Unlike, for example, *Get Out*, which was clever and made a point, this never felt anything other than pointless. Stuff certainly happens after Ellen's death. Symbols and signs appear. A book on spiritualism is discovered. Ellen's grave is desecrated. But they occur flatly, as if being ticked off some shopping list.

The film is packed with tropes and clichés: a house in the woods, dead birds, a locked room, a creepy attic. These are knowing but there are others that, one suspects, aren't knowing at all, and feed into one particular old chestnut: men are calmly sane while women are always hysterical. So Annie is the hysterical one, as is her 13-year-old daughter (Milly Shapiro), who goes all spooky and starts making clucking sounds. She also has an older son, Peter (Alex Wolff), who is not similarly afflicted — he's a typical weed-smoking teenage slacker — while their father, Steve (Gabriel Byrne), has no role to play beyond telling Annie to get a grip. Poor Steve and poor Peter, though, who don't come out of it well. But that's what happens, one

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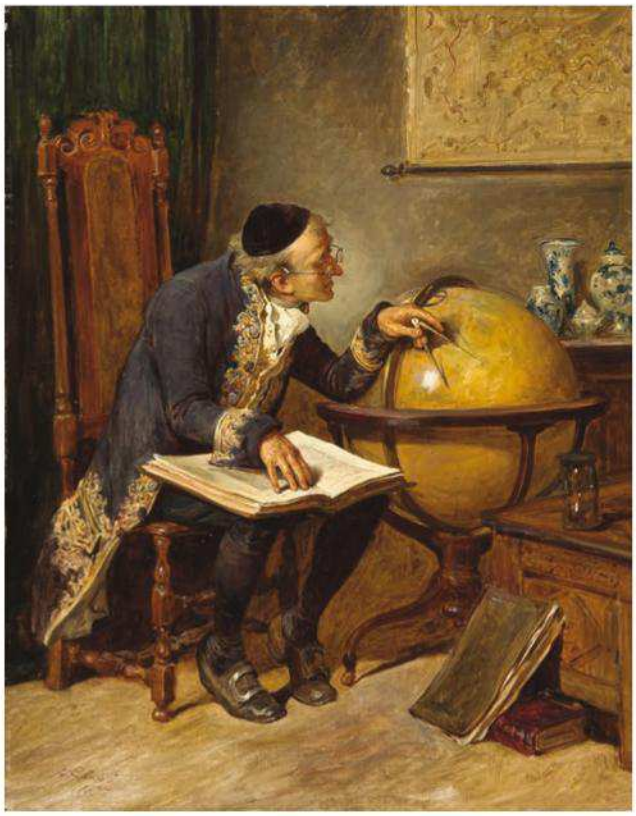

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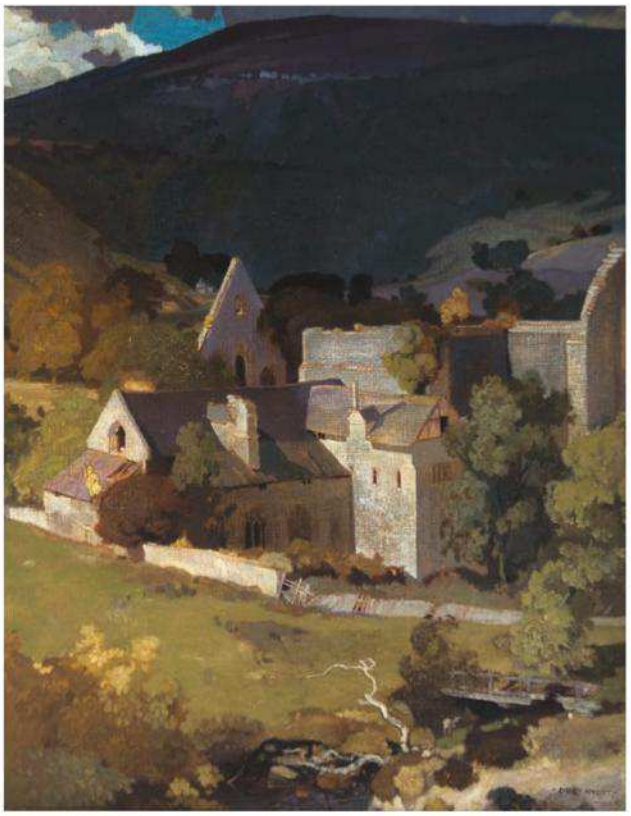

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Wilde at heart: Colin Morgan as Bosie and Rupert Everett as Oscar Wilde in The Happy Prince

must suppose, if you throw in your lot with crazy ladies.

It isn't much of a reveal — it's one minute of literal exposition right at the end — and it's not much of a build-up to that reveal, as the pacing is so poor. There are decapitated heads and incinerations and rotting corpses but it's never dramatic or exciting, and at the viewing I attended the audience laughed at the parts that were intended as the most terrifying, as it's all so silly. Plus there are plot holes aplenty, as well as psychological ones. Annie wonders why Peter is so stand-offish with her. I don't know, but might the fact that he once woke up in the middle of the night to find she'd doused him in petrol and was about to set fire to him have something do with it? Might it? One last thing, and I'll be vague here, to avoid spoiler accusations, but to those who have already seen this: why did the power have to be transferred to a male form? Why wasn't a girl good enough?

Your better bet is *The Happy Prince*, Rupert Everett's passion project about Oscar Wilde's last, wretched years. No, I didn't much wish to see Wilde being driven to his death either, but while the film is sad, it is ravishingly sad, and I just love Everett, who's said so often that his career is over that he's kind of made a career out of it. Respect.

Everett has said so often that his career is over that he's kind of made a career out of it. Respect

Everett wrote, directed, produced and stars as Wilde who, at the point that the story is taken up, has just been released from prison for gross indecency. Shunned by British society, he is forced into exile in France and Italy but, even so, he's cornered in a church one day by a group of Hoorah Henrys out for his blood, and it is so sad, but ravishingly sad, with the light in the church pouring in like melted butter.

Using vignettes and flashback, we learn about his few loyal friends, his relationship with his wife and sons, which was devoted if impossible, and how he allowed Bosie to continue to destroy him. This occasionally slips into cheap sentiment, but there are some stand-out scenes — Wilde singing 'The Boy I Love Is Up In The Gallery', for instance — and, of course, there are some terrific lines. 'I am dying beyond my means,' he will complain on his deathbed. As for Everett, he is terrific. His Wilde is not hagiographic. His Wilde is brilliant but also foolhardy, exploited but also wilfully self-destructive, funny but also pathetic. A sad film, but ravishingly so.

Music

Playing dirty?

Norman Lebrecht

A young Korean, 22 years old, won the Dublin International Piano Competition last month. Nothing unusual about that.

Koreans and Chinese, raised in a school of hard knocks and rounded off in western conservatories, are winning most prizes. A few — like the phenomenal Lauren Zhang who made child's play of Prokofiev's second piano concerto in the *BBC Young Musician of the Year* — are prodigious talents with bright futures ahead. Dublin's winner Sae Yoon Chon is probably not one of them.

His Prokofiev, an effortful shadow of Zhang's electrification, trundled along at pedestrian pace with one or two stumbles. I was therefore surprised to see that Chon won. I also noticed that he is a student of the jury chairman.

While the unsuspecting pupils remain none the wiser, this kind of outcome has become familiar at international music competitions, of which there are 300 every year. You can count on one hand those that are fair, honest and transparent. They include the BBC, the Chopin in Warsaw and, latterly, the Tchaikovsky in Moscow. You can imagine the jurors' conversations elsewhere — you vote for my pupil, I'll vote for yours. Like Fifa's World Cup ballot, this business is largely controlled by a bunch of time servers, in this case professors at major conservatories.

Imagine the following scenario. A teacher in a German Musikhochschule is offered a paid week in a sunny resort. All she has to do is listen to hopefuls for a few hours a day and pick a winner from a list of students of the professor who invited her. If she plays ball, the chairman might let one of her pupils take the fourth prize. The rewards would swiftly follow. As a teacher of an international prize-winner, our anonymous friend might then be able to double her private fees and promise all future students that they will have prizes.

There is a twinkle-eyed Russian called Zakhar Bron who, long ago and far away in Siberia, taught young Vadim Repin and Maxim Vengerov. On the back of their fame, Bron often judges competitions where his pupils come out top. His recent wins include Shanghai's Isaac Stern Competition, the Monaco Music Masters, Young Virtuosos in Bulgaria. At one point Bron announced a new competition in memory of his own teacher Boris Goldstein. Five of the six prizes in the Boris Goldstein competition went to pupils of Zakhar Bron.

Some might be suspicious. At a recent Van Cliburn competition, nine contestants were students of four music professors on the jury.

The Bonn Telekom Beethoven piano competition was won by the chairman's pupil. Likewise the Bartok Competition in Budapest. Likewise the once-vaunted Carl Flesch last week. One young pianist told me she took one look at the Dublin jury and decided not to apply, since so many of the judges had a horse in the race. In the event, 7 out of 12 Dublin semifinalists were students of jurors, and two out of the four finalists.

Where there are winners there must also be losers. I hear from kids who spent a fortune on entering competitions, only to face what looks like a rigged result. If TV viewers think they are seeing a test of art and skill, they'd be better off watching all-in wrestling. A few protests have been raised — the conductor Fabio Luisi quit this year's Paganini Competition in Genoa when professors were added to his jury — but the music business is terrified of any kind of clean-up for fear of losing its only opportunity to expose young talent to a mass audience.

Still, the tide is turning. The quinquennial Chopin competition sets the gold standard by limiting its jury to past winners. At the last event, Martha Argerich and Yundi Li, artists of very different temperament, were delighted to find they had picked the same order of winners, an unarguably good result for the Korean Seong-Jin Cho. Moscow's Tchaikovsky competition, once a cesspit of apparatchik meddling, has been sanitised by Valery Gergiev's decision to publish judges' marks directly after each online performance.

Now, the Leeds piano competition — founded in 1963 by a piano teacher whose pupil won its first prize — has banned teachers from its jury. Artistic director Paul Lewis will chair the judges this year and he has co-opted a violinist to offer relief from the sight of professors tutting away about fingerings. Contestants can now go to Leeds with a promise of fair play. Lewis believes 'it might be possible to reinvent the competition in terms of what benefits the participants.' It remains to be seen if he has broken the stranglehold of Fifa-style music professors. Fingers crossed. The future of music may depend on it.

'The exits are here, here, here…'

THE YOUTUBER

Meet your makers

Older readers will perhaps recall the once popular Sunday evening TV programme *Scrapheap Challenge*, in which oily, boilersuited blokes competed to build machines out of materials scavenged from a scrapheap.

Even older readers will recall *The Great Egg Race*, presented by Professor Heinz Wolff, in which bejumpered and bewhiskered engineers competed to build machines from materials scavenged from a BBC studio.

These days, engineers and inventors call themselves makers, live and work on YouTube, are covered in tattoos and piercings, and the best of them are women.

Laura Kampf posts videos about once a week. She makes bicycle sidecars and the sort of quirky furniture that probably seemed like a good idea at the time and goes down well in Cologne. If you want to know how to make an uncomfortable-looking chair, or a skateboard cargo rack for your bike, she's your woman. She is seriously German.

Darbin Orvar makes 'vintage style' keepsake boxes, floating shelves and minimalist shoe boxes. She's Swedish and very tidy. And she's not really called Darbin — she's called Linn.

Among the men, the best of the makers is probably Adam Savage, a special-effects designer, model maker and animator, who works on movies and presents TV shows but whose natural habitat is undoubtedly the hyper-enthusiastic straight-to-camera 'Hi, guys!' mode of his YouTube channel.

But the very best of all the YouTube makers is Simone Giertz, who calls herself 'the queen of shitty robots'. If Wallace of *Wallace and Gromit* were a 27-year-old Swedish robotics enthusiast, he'd be Giertz. She makes robot hair-drying machines, bottom-wiping machines, nose-blowing machines — Heath Robinson-type stuff. Plus, she's hilarious. And she likes to swear. Her video 'Why My Sponsors Are Leaving' is a lesson in improvisation, comic timing, yah boo sucks, and chutzpah. Alas, she has a brain tumour — I read about it in the *Daily Mail*. The lesson of Giertz's channel is that old *Great Egg Race* truth that if a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing badly. In the end, failure succeeds.

— Ian Sansom

NOTES ON …

New Jersey

By *William Cook*

When my American friends invited us to stay with them in New Jersey, my 13-year-old daughter was thrilled. She'd never been to the States before, and she couldn't wait to see Manhattan. I had to break the news to her that there were no skyscrapers where we'd be staying. Plainfield, New Jersey, is an easy commute from New York City, but it feels like a world away. Clapboard houses with star spangled banners: this is the real America. You'd never know Penn Station was just an hour away by train.

I took my daughter into NYC, and we did all the touristy things proper travel writers look down on: we went up the Empire State Building; we went for a walk in Central Park. My daughter had a great time and so did I, but our best memories were back in New Jersey. Big cities are much alike — the same coffee shops, the same chain stores. It's in small towns like Plainfield that you feel you're really exploring somewhere new.

Plainfield was founded by Quakers way back in the 17th century, but its glory days were 100 years ago when it became a summer retreat for rich New Yorkers. They built their houses in these woods, but wealth adulterates what it covets and Plainfield soon became too suburban. The rich moved on to somewhere smarter and the 'bridge and tunnel people' moved in. It's a snobby phrase for people who work in Manhattan but can't afford to live there, but it's no-nonsense folk like these who make places such as Plainfield so friendly. There's a big pot of coffee in the local convenience store. Just help yourself — no charge.

GETTY IMAGES

The real America: NJ's clapboard houses

My friend Brian took us to church, a pretty Lutheran chapel with an amazing preacher. Brian has been playing the organ there most Sundays for 30 years. Brian is Jewish, but that's no big deal — for him or the congregation. Round here, different religions tend to rub along pretty well.

Brian's daughter, Karen, drove us out to Atlantic Highlands, a seaside town with a harbour full of fishing boats. We walked up to the old lighthouse where Marconi sent his first wireless telegrams. We drove over the causeway to Sandy Hook, and wandered around the old barracks. Deserted for decades, they're sinking back into the sand. We walked along the beach, our voices drowned out by the ocean. It felt a long way away from anywhere — we were the only people there. We spent the night in Bayonne, with Karen and her boyfriend and her two daughters. We went to a Spanish restaurant and ate huge piles of tapas.

Next day my daughter went to high school, Piscataway High School near New Brunswick. These American schoolkids loved her English accent. They asked her if she still felt salty about the War of Independence ('salty' means angry or annoyed, apparently). Sure, it was a bit of fun, but for me it was a sign that the past is not a foreign country here. Americans know their history, maybe better than any other nation.

On our last day we went to Liberty Park and looked out across the Hudson towards Manhattan. The skyscrapers seemed so far away, a remote mirage on the horizon. In the morning we flew home from Newark. Brian woke us before dawn to drive us to the airport. There was a deer on the front lawn when we left.

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FLORISTS

Persian nougat, perhaps the most delicious thing I have ever eaten, turns out to be louse crap
— Rory Sutherland, p61

LIFE

High life
Taki

New York

I write this on my last day in the Bagel, and it sure is a scorcher, heat and humidity so high that the professional beggars on Fifth Avenue have moved closer to the lakes in Central Park. Heat usually calms the passions, but nowadays groupthink pundits are so busy presenting fake news as journalism you'd think this was election week in November. Here's one jerk in the *New York Times*: 'The court's decision was narrow…' The decision in question is the Supreme Court ruling that a baker could refuse a gay couple's request for a cake on religious grounds. The writer who described the result as narrow, one Adam Liptak (Lipgloss would be more appropriate), did not mention that the vote was seven to two. Talk about fake news. Perhaps nine to zero would also have been considered narrow.

Mind you, fear and loathing is the order of the day. This week, as I was having breakfast at a nearby outdoor café with two friends, a pretty girl with a large cast on her leg sat next to us. 'I represent Epstein, Epstein and Goldfarb,' I told her. 'Did a man have anything to do with your injury? We work closely with the #MeToo movement.' She said no and then moved seats. The rest of the place went quiet. It was a bit like singing the 'Horst Wessel' in the middle of Moscow in 1943. Americans are running scared shitless of the sisterhood.

Which brings me to a point I'd like to make. Did any of you see a column by Jan Moir in the *Daily Mail* last week? (Incidentally, I'm delighted that Geordie Greig got the top job at the paper. He's a gent and a terrific editor.) It's about Harvey Weinstein's accuser-in-chief Rose McGowan, and the demands that were made by her representatives before her arrival for an interview at a television station; demands that would not have been made by, say, Genghis Khan — or Charlemagne, for that matter. (No eye contact, no direct questions, no small talk…)

Well, McGowan slipped up when it came to her account of a recent tragedy, which I struggle to reconcile with other versions I've heard. McGowan tweeted footage of herself crying over the suicide of the celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain a couple of weeks ago. Bourdain's girlfriend, Asia Argento, who has also accused Weinstein of rape, had been photographed looking amorous with a French newshound. Five days after the photographs were published, Bourdain was dead. In response to suggestions that Argento's behaviour had pushed Bourdain over the edge (which is what his close friend told me), Rose penned an open letter in defence of her fellow actress in which she said that the chef had been suffering from depression and had died because he 'did not take the doctor's advice'. What is more Argento and Bourdain were in a 'free relationship', she writes. They 'loved without borders of traditional relationships'. Well, that's not how his close friends described it. Never mind. As a lawyer told me, dead men cannot be cross-examined.

Now I ask you, dear readers: if McGowan is ready to give a questionable account of Bourdain's death in her open letter to protect the sisterhood, then she is exposing that sisterhood to questions about other accounts she has given, not least when it comes to Weinstein.

In America today, a woman can make an accusation and the man instantly gets the death sentence. Due process has gone with the wind, and if Rhett Butler were around he'd be in irons for harassing Scarlett. Constantine Fitzgibbon's *When the Kissing Had to Stop* comes to mind. Not to mention Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Facebook is Big Brother, and kissing a girl today can be dangerous to your health, if not one's pocketbook. Even the Bible has a #MeToo problem. Women in the holy book are treated as objects, according to one American female academic, 'to be penetrated, traded, bought or sold'. Men are the guilty ones. Our sacred stories are now up for grabs: will our Lord Jesus turn out to be transgender, or gay? King David's reputation is already mud. He's a rapist who sent Bathsheba's hubby to the front line so that he can get her into his bed.

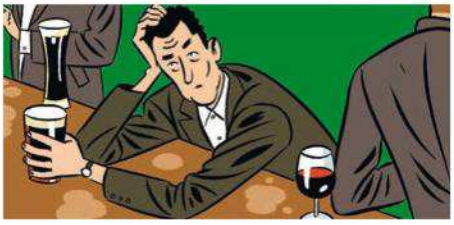
White people, too, are not very popular these days, as 58 per cent of them voted for Trump. Editors in newsrooms and TV studios across America are blinded by pure hatred of the Donald. There's a new book out that links the rise of the Nazis with anti-globalism; you get my drift don'tcha? Nazis bad, anti-globalists bad; free traders, fat cats and large multinationals good. It's as easy as ABC.

Now they're calling Trump a quisling, one who takes orders from Russia. (Paul Krugman in the *New York Times*.) The accuser predicted a depression the moment Trump was elected, but he has saved face by calling the Donald a quisling.

And Ahmad el Boutari, an Uber driver, lost his licence because he kicked out two nice lesbians for kissing in his car. They were disrespectful, he said. Well, in some parts of the world two girls kissing might not be as acceptable as two boys doing it, but where I come from it's a nice thing to see.

Finally: 'Murder, robbery, rape, adultery and incest will be openly taught and practised… the soil will be soaked with blood, and the nation black with crimes.' Is that an anti-Trump diatribe in the *New York Times*? No, it is the *Connecticut Courant*, on Thomas Jefferson's election in 1800. The Donald has a way to go to match this one.

Low life
Jeremy Clarke



Homesick for England, family and friends, I flew back, and the next day went for a long walk with my brother.

We've both had the same cancer, my brother and I, and we've both been chemically castrated. We attend the same oncology department, and we are both recovering.

(In my brother's case this is almost miraculous, given that when his cancer was first identified it was found to be spreading as rapidly as Islam in the 7th century.) And for both of us, the shock of diagnosis, and the prospect of an early death, was quickly followed by a surprising joy, which intensified during treatment, then diminished as the tumour shrank, the alarm bells died away, and the prospect of a reprieve became first an undreamed-of possibility, then a reality. Apart from the breasts,

neither of us would have missed our enlivening experience for the world.

My brother is not the sort of person to spill out his guts at the drop of a hat and neither — I hope — am I. But we see each other only rarely, and as we walked we talked non-stop about the ramifications of our disease and our castration. It was refreshing to speak as truthfully as I knew how to about a subject that is intensely personal and in many ways complicated, and I spoke candidly to my brother as though he were a comrade.

For a good part of the way, we walked beside or along a stretch of coast road that was closed to traffic after the sea rose up in a fury last winter and bit out a chunk of it. The road has been closed since then, with no sign of any reconstruction work even being considered. We joined it at a point where it runs dead straight for three miles across reed beds, with the sea on one side and a nature reserve and freshwater lake on the other.

My brother's peculiar access of joy at being diagnosed with a terminal illness hasn't yet quite petered out, and the beauty of creation still transports him. Around a bend in the abandoned road we came upon a profusion of yellow wildflowers, and poking up between them about a hundred foxgloves in their absolute pomp nodding in the stiffish sea breeze. 'Look at that!' said my brother, enraptured. He whipped out his phone and took photos from different angles.

My brother had hardly recovered from his excitement over this, when, a little way further along the path, he noticed a beetle clinging to the stem of an orchid. We crouched down and observed it more closely. The beetle was about an inch long. The head and shoulders were jet black and the grey, cape-like folded wings were patterned with vivid red spots. It seemed aware of our scrutiny yet confident that the redness of his dots would protect him. Neither of us had seen anything like it before, though it strikes me that everything that endures in that salty, wind-bashed fringe between land and sea has some weirdness in its design. Cooing with excitement, my brother, a beefy, six-foot-plus career copper, squatted and bobbed with excitement as he took close-up photographs of the beetle from every angle. (Checking in his insect book afterwards, he identified it more or less positively as a Five-spot Burnet. Me neither.)

At the far end of the broken road is a village, and the village has a pub, and the pub was open, and — 'Fancy a pint?' — in we went. We carried our pints of bitter outside and stood them on the flat top of the sea wall and rested our elbows on the sea wall as though it were a bar. We had been talking non-stop for at least two hours. As we leant on the wall and sipped our beers and gazed out to sea, I suggested that we observe that day's official one-minute silence in remembrance of the attack, one year before, on the Finsbury Park mosque.

And as we stared in silence at the sea and the sky, thinking about the attack on the Finsbury Park mosque, a little boy holding his mother's hand bent down and picked up a stone from the shore with his free hand and threw it with all his might into the water, while his mother stood and looked at the wide sea with familiarity and incomprehension. While on the promenade behind us an angry male voice was shouting the word 'peaceful' over and over again. And turning together towards the source, we saw an elderly gentleman livid with his young beagle, which, in spite of its name, was living up to its breed's reputation for blind disobedience.

Real life

Melissa Kite

Every day in every way we are paying for more and more. I realise this increasingly. Things we took for granted as free are added inexorably to the list of things we are charged for.

And now we have rural parking charges, by which I don't mean we are going to be charged for parking outside a village shop. Sleepy little One Stops have been on viciously policed meters for years now, as we all know. I mean parking outside a deserted wooded area while you walk your dog.

Very soon, there will be no such thing as a free walk, or a free picnic.

In Surrey, where I reside, Chobham Common, Newlands Corner, Ockham Common and Whitmoor Common are just a few of the reasonably deserted places where you now can't pull up in your car without a parking warden appearing to ticket you.

Wooded areas in particular have gone 'Pay by phone'.

From July, Ockham and Wisley Commons, where I walk and ride, will be £1.30 for up to an hour, £2.60 for one to two hours, £3.90 for two to three hours or £5 for three hours and over. It's £6 if you want to take your horse there in a horse box. Luckily, I can park at the field where I keep my horses, but for the rest of you, I'm afraid, a breath of fresh air costs money.

It's an interesting legal point, because access to common land should be free. Oh, I'm sure the council makes the point that it has not actually locked the common land behind a gate with a kiosk. There are no entry barriers. But as these wooded areas are on busy main roads, they know full well that there is no other way to get to them for 99 per cent of people who visit other than to drive. There are no pull-in places available other than the main one, and just to make sure they have painted all the roads for miles around with double yellow lines.

And so the overwhelming effect in all but name is that Surrey County Council has started charging people £1.30 an hour to visit the common land that it is their legal right to visit, all of which is music to the ears of the militant tendency of the conservation lobby who want to ban human beings from the countryside so the birds can have it to themselves.

Now, at first I was a good deal crosser about this than I am now, because a rumour had gone round that the parking control hours were going to stop at 9 p.m. This would mean that walkers and picnickers would be charged during daylight hours, then at nightfall the doggers could arrive in their multitudes, as they do every evening, and enjoy having sex in the bushes for free.

And as the parking money is being used for maintenance and litter collection, the

These people must go somewhere nice for sex in the undergrowth. It is their human right

walkers and picnickers would therefore be paying to clear up after the doggers, who drop condoms and drug paraphernalia. A regressive tax if ever there was one.

But, but, but… Surrey County Council has done something more sensible than that. A spokesman tells me the council is planning to make the control hours 24/7 and that it has every intention of enforcing the parking charges after dark.

There is talk of CCTV, after years of local people begging for it to no avail. A private firm will be tasked with the uncomfortable job of going into the car park after dark to fine all the miscreants. Look, I mean miscreant in the sense of violating parking charges. I would never suggest that a middle manager stopping off to have a knee trembler with a trucker on his way home to his wife Margery is doing anything other than exploring a valid part of his sexuality.

I have been much influenced in my thinking on this matter by the fact that up until now the council, the police and pretty much all the politicians in this neck of the woods have insisted there is nothing to be done about dogging, and nor should there be. These people must go somewhere nice for sex in the undergrowth. It is their human right, we have been assuming.

But then the authorities ran out of money. And everyone was forced to scratch their heads for ideas. And clearly, someone in power has realised there is money to be made from the intrepid adventurers who

pull up in their cars at night to have sex in woodland car parks.

It's going to be one hell of a job for the private firm tasked with slapping tickets on windscreens as their owners cavort in the bushes. But that's what the council has just told me they are going to do. And who am I not to believe them?

The turf
Robin Oakley

On the famed Whitsbury gallops, as corn buntings and stonechats fluttered from the fence posts, a dozen of Marcus Tregoning's team were stretching nicely. The sun reflected from the chestnut flanks of the filly Viva Bella. The handsome head of Moghram, a muscular Sir Percy colt owned by Hamdan Al Maktoum, stood out against the blue sky above the lush downland where horses have galloped since the 1880s. It called for poetry, not prose.

But at Whitsbury you are never very far away from history either. In the spacious main yard, with its thatched roof, riders used to get their orders from Sir Gordon Richards. In Major's Yard, further down the hill, is the box that Desert Orchid occupied when the spectacular grey was collecting King Georges like postage stamps for David Elsworth. We drive through the restful paddocks of the Whitsbury Manor Stud — 'it could be a little slice of Kentucky' — and we stop at St Leonard's parish church to see the grave of bookmaker William Hill, the man who bought and developed the estate when the previous owner, newspaper magnate Sir Charles Hyde, decided that Hitler would win the war and died fleeing to America.

Marcus is the right man to be training horses in this tranquil haven. An assistant for 14 years to the Turf titan Major Dick Hern, mostly after a hunting accident had confined his mentor to a wheelchair, he is a modern man imbued with the racing lore of the old days, when a few owners could fill a yard between them with the horses they had bred themselves and 15-year-olds were queuing up at Hern's door asking for jobs in two years' time. Hern's predicament gave Marcus early experience in handling powerful owners — and examples of how fickle they could be. Lady Beaverbrook, one of the first to rally to Hern by sending him ten yearlings after his accident, also sent him a cutting one day extolling the virtues of a particular potato. When she telephoned to ask if he had read it, he snapped that he didn't have time for such things: within 24 hours three lorries arrived to take her horses away. The ever-courteous Tregoning, you feel, would have returned the call and averted a crisis.

Before his accident, Dick Hern was very literally a hands-on trainer and when Marcus eventually took over from the Major after Hern's move from East Ilsley — to the new Kingwood House yard refurbished for him in Lambourn by Hamdan Al Maktoum — he, too, every night felt the legs of each one of the hundred horses then in his care, at the same time taking the opportunity to have a word with every groom. The informal, open Tregoning does not rule imperiously, as the old school did, but he soaked up valuable experience. Sprinters, he cautions, can become uncontrollable tearaways if you let them belt away, at the minimum five furlongs, from the beginning. 'You have to keep their brains under control,' and so sometimes he starts them, as the Major did with the great Dayjur, at seven furlongs instead. He doesn't run horses at Royal Ascot unless they have a serious chance of winning. 'It's not just a fun day out. If it's only a case of "it might run well" then don't go because you will be having a hard race anyway.'

Marcus Tregoning is one of only nine England-based trainers still in action to have trained a Derby winner, a feat he performed with Sir Percy in 2006. There have been other stars, such as the globe-trotting Mubtaker, who won a Group race every year he was in training. From Kingwood House Nayef won four Group Ones in a year, including the Dubai Sheema Classic, and Ekraar, claimed for a while to race in the Godolphin blue, won the Group One Gran Premio del Jockey Club in Milan on his return to Tregoning's care. It is now five years, though, since Marcus Tregoning's move from Hamdan's yard to run his own show in Whitsbury. He still trains a dozen or so for Sheikh Mohammed's brother but it doesn't look as though he is being sent as many potential stars. Although he has some discerning owners, like Kirsten Rausing, the numbers and the firepower are not yet what they were. There have been real achievements from the new base, like winning two Cambridgeshires with Bronze Angel, but this is a man who wants to be winning Group races as well as those rewarding heritage handicaps and, like a few others, Marcus is currently searching for the breakthrough horse to win him a seat back at that table.

After the wet spring it has been a slow start but Alrahaal's Beverley victory made it three winners from the last five runners, including two at Goodwood with Sir Titan. He has hopes for Dance The Dream, a big strong mare by Sir Percy. Watch out, too, for the stayer Imphal, winner of four races last season in the hands of the capable stable apprentice Tyler Saunders who has responded so well to the coaching of jockey guru John Reid.

Bridge
Janet de Botton

Ostend has been host to hundreds of bridge players representing their various countries in the European Teams Championships. The ten-day marathon across three disciplines (Open, Women and Seniors) has two functions: first, to find the gold, silver and bronze European medallists, and second, to select the top eight teams (out of 33) who will go to next year's World Championships in China. It finished on Saturday evening; Norway took gold on the last board, Israel received silver having led all day, and all three England teams qualified and will be going to China. Yippee!

The surprise teams, certainly unknown to me, were Hungary and Russia. Hungary stormed into the top eight after winning their first match and stayed there all week (leading at one point). A sensational performance but unfortunately they finished outside qualification. Russia, on the other hand, started slowly but ended up taking the bronze medal.

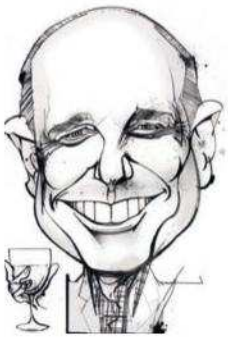
Here is Balázs Szegedi for Hungary playing against 19-year-old Giovanni Donati, Italy's new wunderkind, partnering the great Giorgio Duboin:

Dealer East **All vul**

	♠ 10 9 ♥ Q J 6 5 ♦ 6 4 ♣ 9 8 6 5 3	
♠ A J 4 3 ♥ VOID ♦ K10 9 8 7 5 3 ♣ 10 2	N W E S	♠ Q 8 6 5 ♥ K10 9 7 3 2 ♦ Q ♣ K 4
	♠ K 7 2 ♥ A 8 4 ♦ A J 2 ♣ A Q J 7	

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

Szegedi wasn't given much room in the bidding, and it looked like he had an uphill struggle ahead. Donati led ♦10 to the Queen and Ace. Declarer tried to enter dummy with a heart, West discarding ♦8, suit preference for spades. If Duboin plays any spade now the contract is toast (♠Q takes it 2 down) but he decided, after a long tank, that a heart exit would be safe. Not this time! Szegedi won in dummy, took the club finesse and cashed all his winners, keeping a beady eye on West's discards — Donati held on to two spades and two diamonds. Declarer returned to hand with ♥Ace and now threw West in with a diamond — endplaying him to make the ♠K for his 9th trick and a very elegant +600.



Readers will, I'm sure, remember the excellent Merlot-rich Sang du Sanglier from Ch. de Fayolle that we offered here with FromVineyardsDirect recently. Well, crikey, the 2016 Ch. de Fayolle Blanc (1), its sister wine, is every bit as toothsome. A blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon (just a bit) from low-yielding, naturally farmed, herbicide-free vineyards in Bergerac near Bordeaux, it's crisp, clean and refreshing. The Sauvignon gives a lively touch of citrus, grass and herbs while the Sémillon adds depth, character and a certain roundedness. A white Graves of this quality from down the road would be twice the price. £9.95 down from £10.95.

And if classic, beautifully made, artisanal Sauvignon Blanc is your thing, then you'll swoon over the 2016 Pouilly Fumé Les Aveillons (2). I'm told that FVD sourced it only a month or so ago and is struggling to hang on to stocks since it's proved to be nothing less than catnip for its canny customers. Made with fruit from 65-year-old vines by the Millet family at Domaine de La Loge, it fair screams quality and boasts a deliciously intense mineral core fleshed out with luscious yet restrained citrus and white-stone fruit flavours. £13.95 down from £14.95.

The 2017 Horizon Rosé (3) is the entry level cuvée from those paragons of rosé making, the Negrel family of Mas de Cadenet near Aix-en-Provence, whose Sainte-Victoire label we've offered here countless times to whoops of delight. This is just the ticket too and is what *la famille* Negrel knock back at home. A gloriously sexy pale, pale pink, it's a blend of Grenache and Syrah and full of citrus, herbs and a gentle dusting of spice. It's about as tempting a rosé as you'll find at a cheerfully amenable price. £9.45 down from £9.95.

The 2016 Moulin de Gassac Pinot Noir (4) from Mas de Daumas Gassac, Languedoc's leading estate, came as quite a surprise. I'd have thought it was too hot to grow Pinot Noir here. After all, the grape is a bugger to cultivate, thanks in part to its thin skin, which makes it susceptible to all manner of diseases and which renders it easily scorched in baking sun. Somehow they've pulled it off, though, and the result is a wine of real charm. It's soft, smooth, supple with slightly smoky and extremely juicy plummy, cherry fruit. Perfect for summer, it can stand half an hour in an ice bucket before drinking. £9.95 down from £10.95.

I'd never come across the 2010 Ch. Gontier (5) before and would love to know where it has been hiding because I lapped it up. A blend of 70 per cent Merlot and 30 per cent Cabernet, it comes from Blaye Côtes de Bordeaux, a hop across the river from Pauillac, and is a complete joy. 2010 was an almost perfect vintage and this is as ready as it will ever be, being soft, mellow and fruity with rich, ripe fruit and the silkiest of tannins. If you love mature claret and jibe at the crazy prices the big names charge these days, then snap this up pronto. £10.95 down from £11.95.

It's about as tempting a rosé as you'll find at a cheerfully amenable price

Finally, also from Bordeaux, the 2015 Petite Sirène de Ch. Giscours (6) made by the same winemaking team that makes mighty Ch. Giscours itself, the celebrated Margaux 3ième cru. They only make this wine in good years and 2015 was — famously — a very good year and the estate wouldn't put its name to an inexpensive claret like this if it wasn't completely up to snuff.

Richly flavoured, smooth and elegant with great concentration of dark fruit, it's a delicious mouthful and although in great shape now will almost certainly be even better in a month or so. £11.45 down from £11.95.

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

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Prices in form are per case of 12			*List price*	*Club price*	*No.*
White	1	2016 Ch. de Fayolle Blanc, 13%	~~£131.40~~	£119.40	
	2	2016 Pouilly Fumé Les Aveillons, 12.5%	~~£179.40~~	£167.40	
Rosé	3	2017 Horizon Rosé, 13%	~~£119.40~~	£113.40	
Red	4	2016 Moulin de Gassac Pinot Noir, 12%	~~£131.40~~	£119.40	
	5	2010 Ch. Gontier, 14%	~~£143.40~~	£131.40	
	6	2015 Petite Sirène de Ch. Giscours, 13%	~~£143.40~~	£137.40	
Mixed	7	Sample case, two each of the above	~~£141.40~~	£131.40	

Total

Mastercard/Visa no.

Start date Expiry date Sec. code

Issue no. Signature

Please send wine to

Name

Address

Postcode

Telephone

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Prices include VAT and delivery on the British mainland. Payment should be made either by cheque with the order, payable to FromVineyardsDirect, or by debit or credit card, details of which may be telephoned or faxed. This offer, which is subject to availability, closes on 4 August 2018.

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Chess
Altibox
Raymond Keene

Fabiano Caruana has won the elite Altibox tournament ahead of world champion Magnus Carlsen. This result might appear to give a promising boost to Caruana's prospects for his world title challenge to Carlsen, which is due to take place in London in November. Alas, that is not the case. It is true that Caruana triumphed by a narrow margin over the champion in the main event, but in their individual clash it was the Norwegian who once again gained the laurels.

This outcome further extends Carlsen's already impressive lead over Caruana in their individual tussles. Carlsen therefore remains firm favourite to retain his title at the chess summit.

Carlsen-Caruana: Norway Chess, Stavanger 2018 (see diagram 1)

Carlsen has sacrificed a pawn to gain control over the central dark squares. He has full compensation and chances are balanced. **25 ... Rc7** Caruana unwisely decides to return the pawn in the hope of gaining activity. This proves to be a misjudgement and he should have preferred a waiting game. **26 Rxc7 Qxc7 27 Qxb4 Qc1+ 28 Bd1 Ba6 29 Qd4 Be2 30 Kh2 Bxd1 31 Nxd1** Carlsen has retained the central clamp but now also has two strong passed pawns on the queenside. **31 ... Qc7+ 32 Kg1 Qc1 33 b4 e3** A desperate attempt to gain counterplay. **34 fxe3 Ne4 35 Qxd5 Nd2 36 Qf5+ Kh8 37 Qg4 f5 38 Qe2 Ne4 39 Qe1 Qa1 40 a5 Nd6 41 Qd2** Carlsen is now two clear pawns ahead and eventually won on move 77.

Anand-Caruana: Norway Chess, Stavanger 2018 (see diagram 2)

Here Anand had been relying on the move 36 g3 which would maintain equality by keeping the black queen out of f4. **36 Ra8** Anand suddenly realised that Caruana had prepared a cunning trap. After 36 g3, the reply 36 ... Qf5! wins as 37

Diagram 1

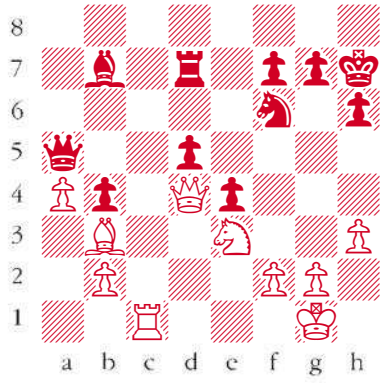
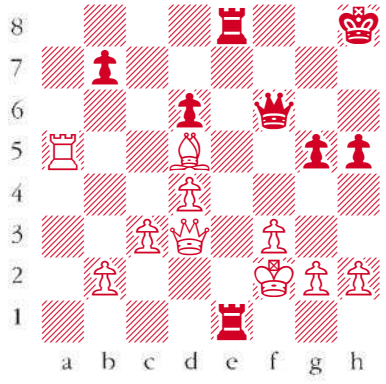


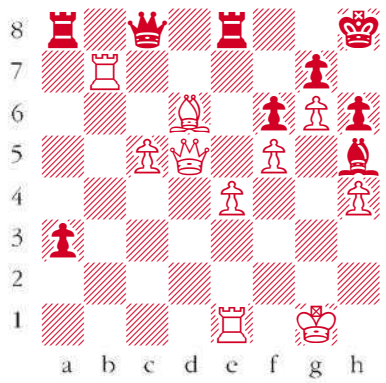
Diagram 2



Qxf5 R8e2 is mate and otherwise the black queen invades. **36 ... Qf4 37 Rxe8+ Rxe8 38 Qd1 Qxh2 39 Qd2 Qh4+ 40 Kf1 Qh1+** Now that the black major pieces are harassing the white king he will struggle to survive. **41 Kf2 Qh4+ 42 Kf1 Ra8 43 Ke2 Ra1 44 Kd3 b5 45 c4 bxc4+ 46 Kxc4 Qf4 47 Qe2** In the long run allowing the queens to remain on the board is hopeless as the white king is so exposed. Anand's only hope was to take his chances in the endgame after 47 Qxf4 gxf4 48 Be6, planning Bh3. **47 ... Qc1+ 48 Kb5 Qc8** The white king is doomed. **49 Kb6 Qb8+ 50 Kc6 Rc1+ White resigns**

PUZZLE NO. 511

White to play. This position is a variation from So-Carlsen, Norway Chess 2018. The world champion suffered a reverse in this game. How would So have concluded here? Answers to me at The Spectator by Tuesday 26 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 ... Nf3+
Last week's winner T.C. Venugopalan, Huddersfield

Competition
#MeToo lit
Lucy Vickery

In Competition No. 3053, an assignment prompted by Anthony Horowitz's reflections on creating female characters for his latest Bond novel, you were invited to provide an extract from a well-known work that might be considered sexist by today's standards and rework it for the #MeToo age.

Highlights in a thoroughly enjoyable entry included Brian Allgar's Constance Chatterley instructing Mellors in the importance of foreplay, Paul Freeman's recasting of Orwell's antihero as Weinstein Smith and Hugh King addressing the gender stereotyping in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*.

The worthy winners, printed below, earn £20 each.

'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?';
Well, frankly, Will, I'd rather you did NOT.
You'll find some fanciful poetic way
Of tarting up the message: 'Babe, you're hot!'
It will, no doubt, be finely written stuff
By one who's at the summit of his powers,
But honestly, instead of all that guff,
I'd rather have some chocolates or flowers.
When offering a 'gift' of poetry,
The writer tends to have himself in view,
And though ostensibly addressed to me,
I'm sure we'll find the subject's really you.
You'll claim your poetry's so bloody clever
That, thanks to what you wrote, I'll live for ever.
Sylvia Smith/Sonnet 18

Humbert, bit of a spent match, a fizzle. His solo, my sogyny. Hum-bert: the tastebuds having a dumb drivel through the pharynx, with a gurgle in the glottis. Hum. Bert. He was Mr. Chips, Chipper for short, standing at the dais with his egg-stained tie. He was M. Humbert in the novel. He was Ho-hum in cavalry twills. But let's face it, he was old Vladimir Nabokov, rhymes with broke off, in the actual flesh. Did he have an antecedent? Bet your life, bet your life twice over. The beaches were swarming with nymphet-aholics. Just a scrap of skin, of flesh, is all it took. You can always rely on a former swimming champion for a burst of journalese. So hey *meine Damen*, also *Herren*, have a goose at what the cherubs flapped their feathers over their eyelids for, flap, flap, flap. Have a good look at this wanker.
Bill Greenwell/Lolita

And God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and the rib, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called…'

But the woman pointed out that he had no right to determine how she was called, and suggested that it was about time he went on a gender awareness course.

And she declared strongly: 'My name shall be Woman, because women are amazing.'

And Adam saw that she was indeed amazing, and that the words she spake were true, and therefore did he ask if he might identify himself as a woman, also.

And God said: 'That is a nice idea, but don't forget we need to populate the planet. By the way, I'm gender-neutral.'
George Simmers/Genesis

That I shall prove to be the villain of my own life is certain, for I was born male. What follows must therefore be my confession, principally of how I inflicted the bondage of marriage upon Dora Spenlow, corrupting my incriminatingly pet-named child-wife sexually and psychologically in furtherance of what my Aunt, Betsey Trotwood, rightly described as the interests of millennially entrenched phallocentric patriarchy and lusts sanctioned by male hegemony. Being a man, I will, at length, seek to apportion blame for my crime upon others, principally Mr Murdstone and his sister, to the consequences of whose abuse of my Mother I find myself to have been a culpably mute witness. As my Aunt will testify, my sister Betsey Trotwood, had she but existed, would never have betrayed womankind so cruelly, nor replicated crimes against it so utterly, her autobiography being in any case worthier of attention.
Adrian Fry/David Copperfield

Come be my partner as you are,
An equal person on a par
With me, and Nature's grand display
See in your own peculiar way.

We'll coexist as separate souls
Each with our individual goals,
And, heedless of each other's views,
Interpret birdsong as we choose.

With parsnips or forget-me-nots
We'll dig and tend our personal plots
And never for the other's show
Plant produce neither cares to grow.

We'll shear no lambs in case they freeze
And wear whatever clothes we please.
If selfish needs you'd not debar,
Come be my partner as you are.
Alan Millard/'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love'

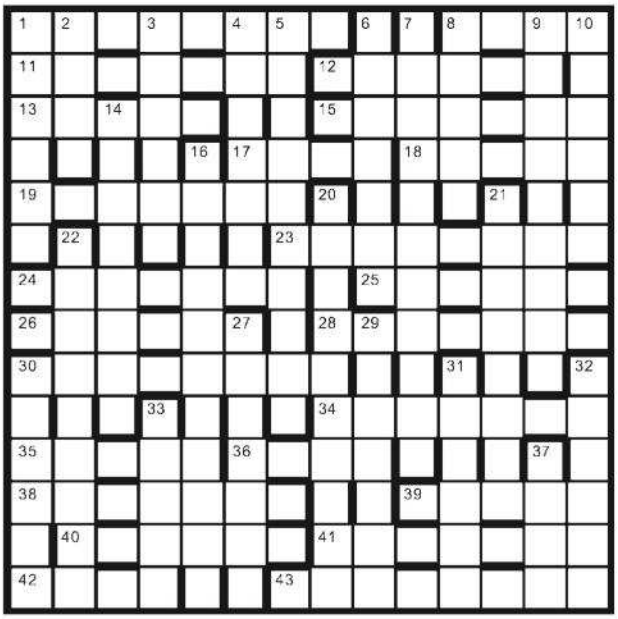
Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime,
But even though our time is short
I hope you know I'm not the sort
To rush you, and should you decide
It's not to be, then I shall bide
And wish you well, and never more
Come knocking on your bedroom door.
Robert Schechter/'To His Coy Mistress'

A casement high and triple-arched there stood,
But Porphyro knew better than to spy.
He sensed fair Madeleine disrobing, could
If he so wished, her glorious hair descry,
Watch her discard her rich attire, and by
Warm gules of moonlight through the tracery
Her unclothed breasts and privacy survey.
Instead, the vision's all in his mind's eye.
Imagined, but un-ogled at, she lay
While Porphyro, no voyeur, looked away.
D.A. Prince/'The Eve of St Agnes'

NO. 3056: CLOSED SHOP

You are invited to submit an elegy on the death of the high street. Please email entries of up to 16 lines to lucy@spectator.co.uk by midday on 4 July.

Crossword 2364: Frolicsome Threesome
by Lavatch



2/11/12 is a four-word quotation in *Chambers*. Remaining unclued lights (all appropriate to the language the quotation is in) are three sets of three words of a kind, each set suggested by one word of the quotation. One unclued light associated with the whole of 2/11/12 must be highlighted.

Across

1 A wimp inhales air, awfully tired (8)
8 Filch penny with trick (4)
13 Car-maker drops Sierra for a month (5)
15 Hiding in animal food, strike a toad (7)
17 The drink's kept cold around services (4)
18 Middle Eastern city right for silk (5)
19 Lodge again in hotel backing on river (7)
23 Setter, pop idol, playing instrument (8)
24 Prison losing a large stove (7)
26 7 shelters for Scot's taxes (6)
28 Clergyman welcomes English PM in Canada (7)
30 Trite dances plugged by unknown and French trios (8)
34 A singer unsteadily recovers (7)
36 State I'm unhappy (4)
38 Film produced in Oz (7)
39 Star game to be hugged by everyone (5)
40 Really, sword-stroke's cut face off (6, two words)
41 Figure in decorative fabric shows hidden quality (7)
43 Retiring politician in Strasbourg smashed table (8)

Down

1 Bored people wanting yard for farm machines (6)
3 Intruder with a stick meeting soldiers (6)
4 Covers popular criminal affairs (7)
5 Acts of eliciting used wrongly around setter (10)
6 Queen, in the flesh, turned up in person? (7)
7 Loves to keep herb on cooker for fruit (11, two words)
8 Old man with tree (5)
9 Ancient reptile spoilt a union with god (9)
16 Where to get money from raconteur in dramas (11)
20 Like air in Paris, with rebel moving around (10)
22 One behind schedule ruined morale etc. (9)
29 Sinner and phoney in Worcestershire town (7)
30 Tailless monkey in sauce in Japan (6)
32 A sheltered person, say, rebuilt shelter (6)
33 Old Persian, a tragic figure (5)

A first prize of £30 for the first correct solution opened on 9 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 2364, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name .....

Address .....

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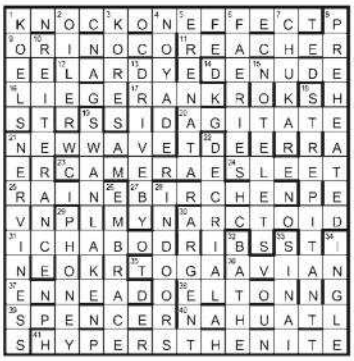


SOLUTION TO 2361: SNOOT

The unclued lights are anagrams of the names of Scottish towns. Dalry (12), Dundee (14)), Brechin (27), Kelso (1D), Peterhead (8), Inverness (21D), Gretna (30D) and Elgin (34). The title is an anagram of TOONS (Scottish towns).

First prize J.R. Evans, Caversham, Reading
Runners-up Michael Moran, Penrith, Cumbria; Don Young, Shaw, Oldham

No Sacred Cows

This junk study proves nothing about helicopter parenting

Toby Young

An academic paper by a group of child psychologists caused a stir earlier this week. 'Helicopter parenting is bad for children,' was how the *Times* reported it, and other news outlets summarised it in the same way. Here was proof, apparently, that wrapping your children in cotton wool and limiting their exposure to risk is bad for their emotional development and can lead to problems at school, as well as difficulties in later life.

A few years ago, when I was in the first flush of fatherhood, I would have leapt on this study as confirmation that my laissez-faire attitude to parenting was more effective than the more hands-on approach of my peers. Indeed, I have written columns in the past praising parents who leave children to their own devices and criticising schools for protecting them from failure. I'm a big fan of *The Dangerous Book for Boys* by Conn Iggulden and am constantly hurling my children up rock faces and telling them not to be so wet when they get stuck.

But I'm now more scientifically literate than I was and, having given this study a careful read, I've concluded that it's an example of what Richard Feynman called 'cargo cult science'. That is, it gives the appearance of being a robust piece of research, and uses lots of impressive-sounding technical lingo like 'indexed', 'subscale' and 'covariates', but it doesn't actually tell us anything. In particular, it doesn't tell us whether over-controlling parenting has a negative or positive effect on children's ability to regulate their emotions. In Feynman's words, the planes don't land.

The researchers overlook the fact that their findings could be confounded by genetics

Why do I say this? Because the researchers overlook the fact that their findings could be confounded by genetics. This is a shortcoming of much academic research in developmental psychology. A typical study examines whether there's a correlation between, say, children's reading level at the age of five and how often they're read to by their parents. If there is, the researchers conclude that there's a causal relationship between the two. But we know that children's reading levels are genetically influenced, so if the study doesn't adjust for the fact that children share their parents' genes the conclusion is worthless. To paraphrase Feynman, it's junk science because the researchers haven't considered other causes that could explain the result of their experiment.

In the case of the 'helicopter parenting' study, the researchers looked at how 422 different two-year-olds interacted with their mothers when they were asked to play together for four minutes and then tidy up after themselves. The mothers were then given a score of between 1 and 4 for each part of the experiment according to how 'over-controlling' they were, e.g., whether they constantly guided their child, created a structured environment, repeated commands, and so on. The researchers then examined the children again at the ages of five and ten to see if there was a correlation between how neurotic their mothers had been when they were toddlers and how good they were at regulating their emotions.

But the researchers made no attempt to adjust for the fact that children share their parents' genes. That's an unfortunate omission, given that we know that nearly all individual differences in measurable psychological traits are genetically influenced. One of the reasons we know this is thanks to the work of Thomas Bouchard, a psychologist at the University of Minnesota, who based his findings on studies of twins reared apart. Coincidentally, the lead author of the 'helicopter parenting' paper, Nicole Perry, is also a psychologist at Minnesota, which makes this oversight even more unforgivable. To cap it all, many of the findings of Bouchard and others have been confirmed by genome-wide association studies, so Dr Perry and her colleagues really don't have an excuse.

No, I'm afraid this is cargo cult science. We know from the work of Judith Rich Harris and the behavioural geneticist Robert Plomin, among others, that the vast majority of parents have next to no influence on how children differ from each other. (Obviously, if a parent is extremely negligent or abusive then that does have an effect.) The individual personalities of your children are largely determined by a combination of their genes and their 'non-shared environment', i.e. pure happenstance. So 'helicopter parenting' won't have any impact. Turns out my laissez-faire approach is fine after all, but not for the reasons set out in this junk study.

MICHAEL HEATH

The Wiki Man

Gastropolitics give us food for thought

Rory Sutherland

An Iranian friend of mine recently brought me some gaz from Isfahan. Commonly known as Persian nougat, gaz is perhaps the most delicious thing I have ever eaten. The only thing to avoid is learning how it is made. Pistachio nuts are mixed with 'honeydew' collected from the angebin plant of the Zagros mountains, a sticky white substance often believed to be the manna of the Bible. It sounds glorious. That is until my friend told me that honeydew is not the sap of the plant — but is exuded from the anus of an insect which feeds on it. So one of the tastiest things on the planet turns out to be louse crap.

What we know of something strangely affects how it tastes. In fact our enjoyment and appreciation of different foods is a strange mixture of fashion, scarcity bias, snobbery and mental associations: our taste buds play only a supporting role in deciding what we eat. In the early 19th century, white bread was a luxury: the kind of wholemeal loaf you now buy from a hipster for £4.80 was handed out to the poor in times of famine. In Scotland, servants demanded employment contracts which guaranteed they would not be fed salmon more than three times a week.

Enjoyment of different foods is a mixture of scarcity bias, fashion and snobbery; taste plays only a supporting role

I have always been mystified by the popularity of miso soup. Imagine if you had never come across it before, and one day a local café served you a murky-looking broth with strange bits of leaf half-floating in it. You'd send it back, wouldn't you? And yet many people — including me — are rather happy to drink miso soup *once we know it's Japanese*.

Just as fashion can make weird-tasting soups popular, it can condemn obviously delicious things to disuse. Sherry, which has to be the most undervalued alcoholic drink in existence, seems to continue to decline in popularity, for no clear reason other than snobbery. Weirder still, it seems that we don't even know what drives what we eat and drink. We would all say, I think, that we like eating ice cream in the summer to cool down, yet sunshine, not temperature, is the best predictor of ice-cream sales. And the country in Europe with the highest per-capita ice cream consumption is Finland.

Most interesting of all is research conducted into our perception of wine. On occasion, the same wine has been entered into a competition under two different labels. In one case, one was rejected in the first round while the other went on to win the overall competition. Wine tastes better when poured from a heavier bottle.

There is a growing field of research, called gastrophysics, which seeks to understand how such mechanisms work. What we now need is a corresponding field of study called gastropolitics, which investigates why people hold the tastes and opinions they do. For just as 'try this soup' and 'try this soup — it's Japanese' will elicit completely different reactions, so it goes with policy. We need to realise that people do not evaluate political ideas the way we think they do. And people's justifications for their beliefs are highly unreliable.

The organisation which most needs to invest in research into gastropolitics is the European Union. An organisation intended to promote European harmony and cooperation (which I think we can all agree is a really good idea) seems to be having absolutely the opposite effect — driving a nationalist backlash in most major countries. Something about it clearly doesn't taste right. But what?

It was said there were no rational reasons for voting to leave the EU. Maybe so. But the fact that there seemed to be no compelling emotional reasons for urging people to stay is surely an even greater failing.

Rory Sutherland is vice-chairman of Ogilvy UK.

DEAR MARY YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED

Q. Being professionals in trade, we find ourselves increasingly being asked by friends, who could well afford to use our services, how to achieve certain things. They know we depend on these skills — which have taken years to learn and perfect — for our livelihood. What do you suggest is the best way to put them in their place and, without being overtly rude, avoid these situations?
— Name and address withheld

A. Try something along these lines. Wearing an affectionate smile, respond to their opening gambit of 'Can I pick your brains…?' by saying: 'That should be the title of my autobiography! Do you know, you're the third friend to ask me that today? And I've already said to the other two, "I'd love you to, but then I'd have to help all my friends for free and I'd get into trouble with paying clients. But if you'd like, make an appointment and come into the office. We can give you mates' rates."'

Q. I am a freelancer working in the creative 'industries' as they're styled nowadays. At least half of the agents, promoters, producers etc. I try to contact refuse to reply to emails or return phone calls. I'm not alone in this: many of my colleagues are being ignored. Should I continue to pester these recalcitrants or simply give up?
— N.M., London SW1

A. You should persevere but do so using more imaginative tactics. First, don't take the discourtesy personally or let it undermine you. Those in positions of patronage are generally overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of overtures they receive. Consequently the chore of filtering is given to those lower down in the hierarchy who will block advances from potentially more talented petitioners. While it's key to get your foot in the door, internships are only available to the children of friends, and tea ladies and secretaries are anachronisms. However, one path remains open to you.

Train as a masseur and sign up with one of the 'at desk' massage teams servicing high-end creative agencies. Facetious as this may sound, you will gain clarity of focus on your best targets along with access to them. Moreover, (above board) massage skills will serve you in good stead in every aspect of your life so the training will not be wasted.

Q. Neighbours are opening their garden to the public and I want to support them. My husband is refusing to, however — he's nursing a grudge because, although their garden is ten times the size of ours, they have planted a copper beech within our field of vision. How can I break this impasse?
— Name and address withheld

A. Go to the open day and walk about grinning blandly and being supportive. If asked where your husband is, scan the acres vaguely and say, 'I don't know but I must go and find him.' Your neighbours will assume he is among the throng but that they have somehow missed him.

Drink

That woman's got me drinking

Bruce Anderson

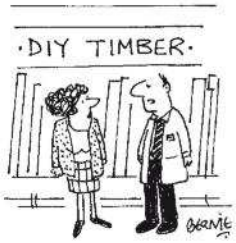
It is enough to make a man turn to drink. On a distinctly non-abstemious day, I was sitting in one of my favourite places on earth. It is not a great garden, merely a characteristically English one: roses, benign verdancy and the joyous sunshine of gentle summer. My dear friends have just finished restoring their late medieval house. It is not a great house, merely a classically English one. Chillingham Castle, the Wakefield family's seat in Northumberland, which resplends in grandeur, was described by Walter Scott as bearing the rust of the Barons' wars. This place, by contrast, is more a case of the gentle patina of manorial peace over long centuries. You feel that if you caught the house off guard, it would be smiling at its latest owners' enjoyment. History is now and England.

Lunch drew fruitfully on the kitchen garden: vegetables for the risotto primavera (also a non-Atkins day), strawberries for pudding. The main course was succulent local chicken plus morels, accompanied by a '14 Volnay Premier Cru Champans. Whether or not God was in his heaven, all was right with the world. So why was I feeling seriously ungruntled?

If Theresa May were a wine, you would pour it down the sink

The answer was easy. I had been reading the papers, which were dominated by this wretched government's latest bêtises. The Wilson administrations were thoroughly flawed, especially after 1974. But one expects an immense amount more from Tories. As the true national party, their governments should draw on healthy prejudices reinforced by patriotism and hard thinking. This lot... thinking? One goes back to Churchill's onslaught on the Baldwin government: 'Decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift.' 'No worst, there is none' wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins in one of the poems known as the terrible sonnets. With this government and PM that is never true. There is always tomorrow.

Occasionally, I have been teased for allowing this column to wander from a strictly drink-based curriculum. My reply is always that wine is a crucial part of social life and cannot be treated in isolation. But, writing as a political obsessive of many decades' standing, there are moments when it is a relief to turn to non-political topics. This is one of them.



'It's not called "upskirting", madam — it's called "architrave".'

Recently, I have tasted a few 2017 clarets while benefiting from expert testimony. There is a consensus. Though not a stellar vintage, it is a thoroughly sound one, producing traditional claret lower in alcohol than the massive jammy monsters so beloved of Robert Parker. The harmony of fruit and tannin suggests a potential for early drinking and for longevity. Comparisons have been drawn with the 1988s, another unfashionable vintage. But the 2017s are less tannic.

Alas, the prices. I did not taste any first growths, said to be worth the large sums the vineyards are charging. Grand-Puy-Lacoste was excellent as was Léoville Barton, but for me the star was Léoville Las Cases. I saw one on offer at a mere £800 a case and was about to alert a rich friend, when I realised it was a case of six bottles. We will just have to hope that sterling recovers on the coat tails of a successful Brexit, plus trouble for President Macron. Can hope live in the same universe as Theresa May?

So back to wine. Before I could advise to the contrary, a friend opened and poured a 2005 Bahans-Haut Brion (since re-christened le Clarence de Haut-Brion). It was much less locked up than I expected, but I still think that the '05s need time. So, ideally, did a 2008 Batard-Montrachet, except that its owner is terrified about oxidisation. Already superb, it will continue to strengthen.

What a contrast to this PM. Weak but stable: if she were a wine, you would pour it down the sink, not even fit for cooking. Thank God there is real wine to distract one's thoughts.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Iteration

'They should say, *irritation*, not *iteration*,' exclaimed my husband as a voice on the wireless spoke about men's fashion and the promise of 'a new iteration of softer suiting'.

Suiting in itself is a comical word when found outside the technical pages of *Tailor and Cutter*. In that respect it belongs to the same family as *trouserings*, which P.G. Wodehouse (already convinced that trousers are inherently absurd) liked to deploy. Bertie Wooster often referred to *evening-wear trouserings*. Similarly, the determinedly humorous Owen Seaman, born over an artificial-flower shop, and editor of *Punch* from 1906 to 1932, cheered up a parody of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* with lines like 'We sit in sable Trouserings and Boots.' Quite separately the verb *to trouser* came to mean stowing profit, licit or not.

Nonetheless, my husband's gripe was with *iteration*. It should, by rights, mean 'repetition' but is now a fashionable word for 'version'. I rather think this came via computing, for there is in mathematics a method by which an approximation is fed back into an operation several times to produce an increasingly accurate result. Something similar is done in computer science.

So when a new machine is marketed in computing it is called an *iteration*, rather than a model. Even the *Sun* has come out with phrases like: 'Surface Pro 6, the latest iteration in Microsoft's productivity-oriented tablets.'

Previously the best known use of *iteration* had been in *Henry IV Part I*. Prince Hal says, 'Wisdom cries out in the streets and no man regards it'; to which Falstaff replies: 'O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint.' Dr Johnson noted that the Shakespearean critic William Warburton had changed the word *iteration* to *attraction* in his edition, but he commented: 'An editor is not always to change what he does not understand.' For himself, Johnson took it as meaning 'a wicked trick of repeating and applying holy tests'. That seems right.

I'm afraid that *iteration* has now escaped from the computer shops. I saw a reference recently to 'a new iteration of Daesh'. One seems as hard to extirpate as the other.

— Dot Wordsworth

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